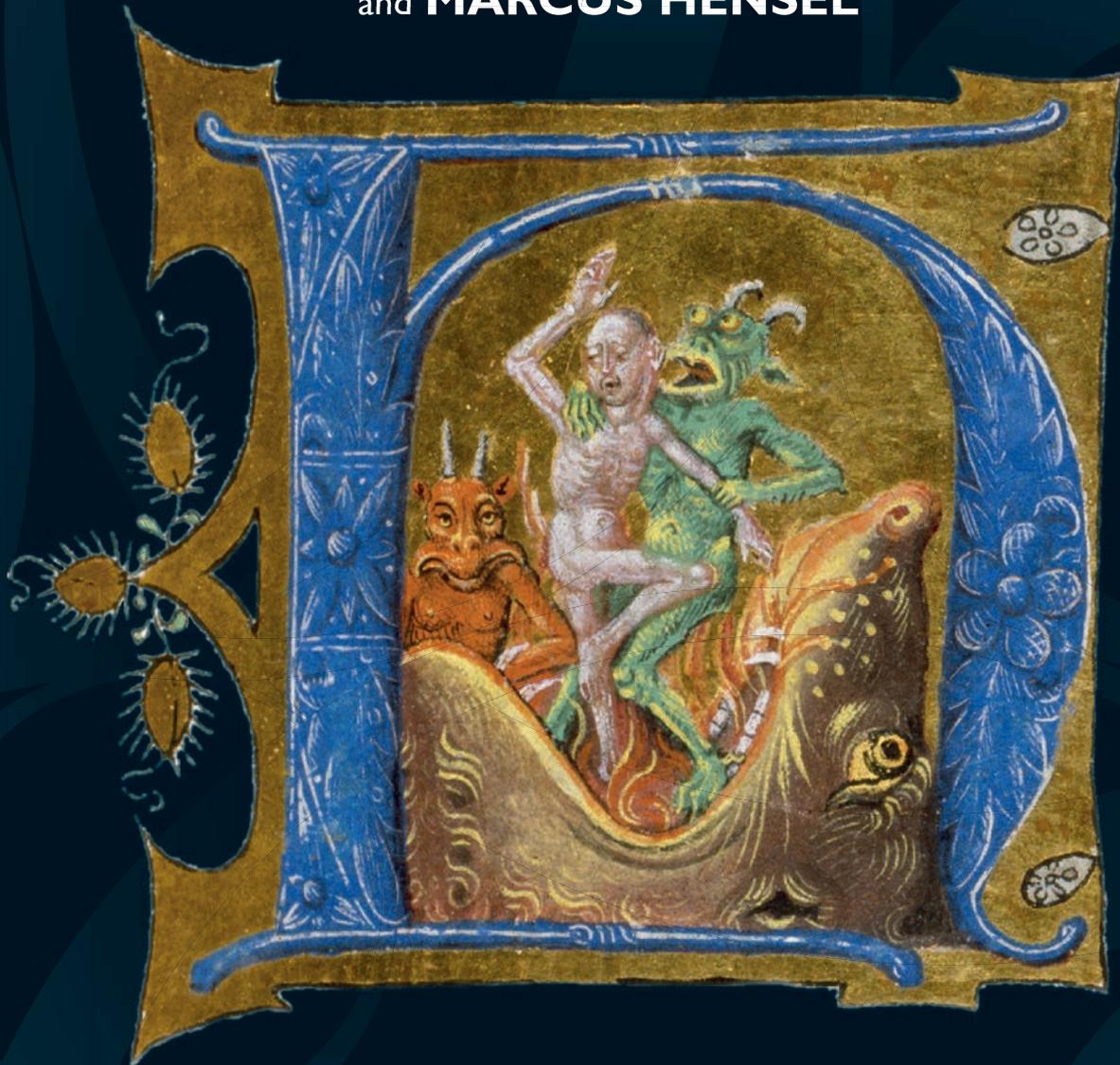


PRIMARY SOURCES ON MONSTERS

DEMONSTRARE Volume 2

Edited by **ASA SIMON MITTMAN**
and **MARCUS HENSEL**



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***DEMONSTRARE* Volume 2**

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*To Cthulhu, who presides over all humans
and monsters with equal malevolence*

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INTRODUCTION: A MARVEL OF MONSTERS

ASA SIMON MITTMAN and MARCUS HENSEL

Under the Werewolf's Skin

Gerald of Wales, a priest and writer active in Britain around 1200 CE, tells a curious tale of “some astonishing things that happened in our times.”¹ He has heard the story of another priest travelling through Ireland with only a boy as his companion. They are sitting around a campfire, beneath a tree, when a wolf approaches them. Naturally, they are afraid, but the wolf then speaks to them with a human voice, telling them to have no fear. The wolf even “added sensible words about God” to further reassure him.² The priest is, nonetheless, astonished and afraid: he and his young assistant are alone in the woods with a supernatural creature, a wolf that speaks like a man. The wolf then tells the priest his story:

We are of the kin of the people of Ossory. Thus, every seven years, by the curse of a certain saint, Abbot Natalis, two people, male and female, both in this form, are exiled from the boundaries of other people. Stripping off the form of the human completely, they put on a wolfish form. At the end of the space of seven years, if they survive, they return to their former country and nature, and two others are chosen in their place, in the same condition.³

Many werewolf narratives imply that the monstrosity is a curse, but the source of this curse is rarely spelled out in such detail. This cursed werewolf then explains that he and his wife are this cursed pair, and that she, trapped in the shape of a wolf, is dying and needs a priest to attend to her last rites. “The priest follows trembling,” but is hesitant to pro-

vide a mass and absolution for a talking wolf.⁴ Then, as Gerald tells us, “to cleanse any doubt, his foot performing as a hand, [the male wolf] pulled back the entire skin of the [female] wolf from the head to the navel and folded it back; and the clear form of an old woman appeared [...]. He immediately rolled the skin of the wolf back on, and joined it together in its prior form.”⁵ The priest then agrees—“compelled more by terror than reason,”⁶ though Gerald does not specify the precise cause of this fear—to perform the last rites for her. As Caroline Walker Bynum asks in her book on Gerald and medieval ideas about transformation, “Did the priest improperly give the Eucharist,” that is, in Catholicism, the miraculously transformed body and blood of Jesus, “to a wolf or properly comfort a dying if deformed ‘human’?”⁷

What do we take from this? There are many lessons embedded in this strange tale, but for our purposes here, the key one is this: inside *every* monster lurks a human being. Hence, werewolves “retain in (or under) wolfishness the rapaciousness or courtesy of human selves.”⁸ Peel back the fur, the scales, the spikes, the slime, and beneath the monstrous hide, there we are, always and inevitably. This is because all monsters are human creations. They exist because we create or define them as such.⁹ We therefore owe them our care and

1 Geraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, vol. 5, *Topographia Hibernica, et Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. James F. Dimock (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867), 101: “Nunc ea, quae nostris hic temporibus digna stupore contigerunt, explicemus.” Translations from Gerald are ours.

2 Geraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, 101: “verba de Deo sana subjunxit.”

3 Geraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, 102: “De quodam hominum genere sumus Ossiriensium. Unde, quolibet septennio, per imprecationem sancti cuiusdam, Natalis scilicet abbatis, duo, videlicet mas et femina, tam a formis quam finibus exulare coguntur. Formam enim humanam prorsus exuentes, induunt lupinam. Completo vero septennii spatio, si forte superstites fuerint, aliis duobus ipsorum loco simili conditione subrogatis, ad pristinam redeunt tam patriam quam naturam.”

4 Geraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, 102: “presbyter sequitur tremebundus.”

5 Geraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, 102–03: “Et ut omnem abstergeret dubietatem, pede quasi pro manu fungens, pellem totam a capite lupae retrahens, usque ad umbilicum replicavit: et statim expressa forma vetulae cuiusdam apparuit [...]. Et statim pellis, a lupo retracta, priori se formpe coaptavit.”

6 Geraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, 103: “terrore tamen magis quam ratione compulsus.”

7 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 27.

8 Bynum, 32.

9 Asa Simon Mittman, “Introduction: The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman with Peter Dendle (London: Ashgate, 2012): 1–14; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: Univer-

attention. We must not follow the model of Doctor Frankenstein, who gives life to a creature he then rejects with disgust. The Monster implores the doctor—and we would be wise to heed this admonition:

All men hate the wretched; how then must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind.¹⁰

Monsters do perform important work for us as individuals and communities, policing our boundaries, defining our norms and mores through their inversions and transgressions. Through their bodies, words, and deeds, monsters show us ourselves.

This is not a new insight. In the early fifth century, Saint Augustine, an Early Christian bishop of the North African city of Hippo, uses a series of Latin puns to characterize the nature of monsters. He says they take their name, *monstra* from *monstrare* (to show) in order *demonstrare* (to demonstrate) something that we can learn from.¹¹ While we might draw different conclusions about what lessons they teach, we agree with Augustine that we have much to learn from monsters. They are, as Julia Kristeva says in a related context, “[t]he primers of my culture.”¹² By gathering a great variety of primary sources in this volume, we hope to give the monsters their due, to do our duty towards them, to look carefully and thoughtfully at them, and, ultimately, to *see* them and understand what they strive to demonstrate for us.

On the Shoulders of Giants

When Isaac Newton famously noted that he stood “on the shoulders of giants,” what he meant was that he did not have to invent all his ideas out of nothing. Indeed, Newton borrowed this clever line used to describe how he relied on the work of others from an earlier author, perhaps the twelfth-century bishop of Chartres, France, John of Salisbury, who

city of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3–25, and volume 1 of this collection.

¹⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein, Or The Modern Prometheus*, in this volume, 179.

¹¹ Augustine, *City of God*, in volume 2 of this collection.

¹² Julia Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection,” in volume 1 of this collection.

cites Bernard of Chartres as his source; this is how scholarship works, with long chains of authors building on—and hopefully crediting!—one another’s work. In John’s (or Bernard’s) version, there are two monstrous figures, with he and his contemporaries as “dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants.”¹³ In this short phrase, these various authors both humble themselves *and* denigrate “dwarfs,” also elevating those they respect by comparing them to “giants.”

In assembling this collection, we are working to celebrate monster stories and the monsters they unleash or attempt to contain—each of which perches atop the previous creation, building the canon. We have organized the larger work into two volumes: *Classic Readings on Monster Theory* and *Primary Sources on Monsters*. The first volume is a contribution to the field of “monster theory” and the second to “monster studies.” These terms have each been in use for about twenty years, but it is really only in the last five or so that they have gained much traction. “Monster Theory” is a term that was coined by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen for his 1996 collection of essays, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, and we use it here to refer to academic sources that provide methods for considering monsters, approaches to them, ways of seeing how monsters and the monstrous function in various contexts.

Conceiving of our work as “monster theory” or “monster studies” involves adopting a fairly recent critical lens, and most of the material specifically and sustainedly dealing with monsters has been written after 1980. Indeed, one might argue that monster theory in its present form would not be possible without the advent of postmodern theory: the roots of monster theory, like the closely allied fields of postcolonial and queer theory, lie in the post-structuralism of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard. A full explanation of post-structuralism lies far beyond the scope of this chapter, but suffice it to say that this new way of thinking questioned the universality of Enlightenment ideals—the notion that the world can be understood through careful, scientific examination and rational thought, and that doing so would lead to the betterment of society—and rejected traditional centres of cultures and philosophies. The upshot of this decentring was significant: Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917)—a urinal placed on a pedestal—now had just as much claim to “art” as did Leonardo da Vinci’s fresco, *The Last Supper* (1495–1498),

¹³ Daniel D. McGarry, trans., *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 19671), 167.

and marginal groups from colonized subjects to queer cultures to monsters became valid foci for study.

Because the marginal was just that until the mid-1960s, texts that deal specifically with monsters are sparse prior. J.R.R. Tolkien's 1936 essay "***Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics***" is really the opening salvo in monster theory, with the eminent medievalist and author arguing that monsters were not something to be embarrassed about. Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1947/1965) departs from the norm by consistently interpreting monsters in a positive way.¹⁴ By placing them in the "carnavalesque" setting in which the official culture is rejected and parodied, he reads monsters as comic, gay figures—objects of laughter, which defeats fear.

1968 brought a sea change in Western thought. After the student protests in Poland and France, and the growth of Civil Rights and antiwar movements in the United States, scholars began to look at literature (and therefore monsters) differently. **John Block Friedman's** *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, published in 1983, is heir to that shift. Tracing the depiction of monstrous peoples from ancient Greece and into the early modern period, Friedman undertakes a sustained cultural examination of monsters, identifying key markers of identity used to other monsters.¹⁵ Over the course of the following decade, this approach, in which scholars analyze how monsters are constructed as inferior beings due to differences in these markers, became the dominant approach in monster theory. In his 1990 *Philosophy of Horror*, **Noël Carroll** adopts a broader scope, defining the monster in affective terms based on the emotional responses to it by characters in narratives and audiences reading them.¹⁶ He is particularly interested in disgust, based in the monster's categorical impurity, and fear, brought about by danger to the individual or community.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's introduction to *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* provided a list of seven theses on monsters, the purpose of which was to create a basis for using monsters to interpret and understand the cultures that produced them.¹⁷

¹⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

¹⁵ John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 26, and see selection in volume 1 of this collection.

¹⁶ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York: Routledge, 1990), and see selection in volume 1 of this collection.

¹⁷ Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," and see selection in volume 1 of this collection.

Though there are only seven, they cover an astonishing range: some explore the monster's body and its shattering of classification systems, and some speak to the cultural impact of a monster's very existence, but all shape the monster theory that comes after.

Cohen's essay is something of a manifesto and marks a break in the narrative arc of monster theory, because he neither seeks the meaning of a specific monster, nor uses monsters as a cog in a larger theory: bending Augustine's claim that monsters exist to *teach*, Cohen argues only that monsters *mean*. The essay, however, still relies on the work of earlier scholars. Most of his theses rely on previous thinkers: for example, the ideas in Thesis III are discussed by Foucault, Friedman, and Carroll. In that sense, Cohen stands, like Newton, on the shoulders of giants. However, he uses these earlier ideas to discover and communicate something completely new in monster theory—an articulation of heretofore unspoken, disparate ideas into a cohesive *theory*.

It is at this point that one loses the thread, so to speak. Either because the works are so recent that we cannot fully judge their impact on monster theory or because there are too many of them to maintain a coherent history, like the monster itself, the shape and direction of the field fragments, blurs, and is difficult to define.

Unlike "monster theory," "monster studies" is a more recent term, and, like all fields characterized as "studies," it is used to describe content rather than approaches to that content. We have attempted to assemble here a collection of monsters. There is no widely recognized collective noun to describe a group of monsters, but we have borrowed for the title to this introduction Siobhan Carroll's suggestion: a *marvel of monsters*. This term captures the potentially positive role of monsters that—evil or sublime—captivate us.

Classic Readings on Monster Theory

The first volume of this project is intended to introduce students to the most important and influential modern theorists of the monstrous. It is our hope that this selection of readings will provide a range of interpretive tools and strategies for students to use to grapple with monsters.

Primary Sources on Monsters

This volume is intended to introduce students to some of the most influential and indicative monster narratives from the West. These texts contain numerous intersections, with many deliberately building upon the foundations laid by others.

Together, they form a reasonably coherent set of materials, thereby allowing us to witness the consistent, multi-millennium strategies the West has articulated, weaponized, and deployed to exclude, disempower, and dehumanize a range of groups and individuals within and without its porous boundaries. The readings in volume 2 are all primary sources, which means that they are all either original, creative works or accounts written at or near the time of the events they narrate. Many of the sources we have included are works of fiction—short stories, selections from novels, and the like. Others are religious, scientific, or historical texts. Some sit at the boundaries between these genres.

We begin with what is not only the earliest monster text, but what is also among the earliest texts of any kind, and the oldest surviving substantial work of literature in any language: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, written in Sumerian around 2000 BCE. The final two works in the volume—Slender Man and the SCP (Special Containment Procedures) Foundation Wiki—were produced more than 4000 years later, and are artefacts of our own current digital age. In between, we meet Biblical giants, dangerous creations of Greek gods, the strangely popular *Wonders of the East*, werewolves, conjoined hybrid beings, ghosts, ghouls, goblins, trolls, vampires, and aliens. Monsters have been important elements of visual and textual works for the entirety of human history, and show no signs of diminishing in importance. In some periods, they are primarily generated for entertainment, whereas in others they are taken as scientific and medical facts, and in yet others are the frequent subject of religious speculation. In all cases, though, they are central to how people view themselves and their roles in the world.

We chose to include images as well as texts, unusual in a source reader like this, because many monsters are highly visual, known primarily through their appearance, and because the process of rendering things as visual that are only loosely described in a text, if described at all, raises fascinating questions. The images should not be viewed as “mere” illustrations to be glanced at, or judged based on how closely they mirror the content of the texts they accompany. Instead, they should be treated as their own “texts,” given the same level of care and consideration as the verbal texts in this collection. We have therefore provided introductions for the images in similar form to the introductions that accompany the texts, placing each in its context and providing viewing questions. Cross-references to other works in this collection are noted with **underlined, bold** text.

Destroy All Monsters: An Urgency

Deep within a large crowd, a young white man in a plain white t-shirt, with a blue bandana around his neck and a white particle mask askew on top of his head, holds a homemade sign on a pole.¹⁸ It reads in red ink, darkened here and there with black, “DESTROY ALL MONSTERS.” Above this slogan is the raised fist of Black Lives Matter, drawn in a range of colours and radiating bright orange lines. This photograph was taken on August 12, 2017 (the day before we drafted this essay) at the Unite the Right rally, which brought together neo-Nazis, white nationalists, white supremacists, the Ku Klux Klan, and other hate groups in Charlottesville, Virginia. This was purportedly the largest white supremacist rally in the United States in decades, though firm figures on attendance are difficult to obtain.

Monsters have been around as long as humans, since they define us by stalking our borders and mirroring our traits. Indeed, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has argued, in a sense humans cannot have existed prior to the monsters that define us:

Perhaps it is time to ask the question that always arises when the monster is discussed seriously... Do monsters really exist?

Surely they must, for if they do not, how could we?¹⁹

There are moments, though, when monsters seem particularly potent, prevalent, even necessary. By some measures, the world has never been more peaceful, and human life never more safe and secure.²⁰ And yet, this is not the experience most of us have. The news each day makes it seem that the world is on fire, that we are living in the most dangerous of times. This is statistically untrue, vastly so; various prehistoric burial sites indicate that 20%, 30%, even 60% of deaths were due to interpersonal violence.²¹ But since the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (which

¹⁸ The image, by Reuters photographer Joshua Roberts, is captioned “A group of counter-protesters march against members of white nationalist protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia.” It is available in Priscilla Alvarez, “A State of Emergency in Charlottesville,” *The Atlantic* (August 12, 2017) <<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/protests-nationalists-charlottesville/536661/>>.

¹⁹ Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” 20.

²⁰ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

²¹ Max Roser, “Ethnographic and Archaeological Evidence on Violent Deaths,” *Our World in Data* (2016) <<https://ourworldindata.org/ethnographic-and-archaeological-evidence-on-violent-deaths/>>.

killed perhaps 200,000 people in a matter of moments and gave birth to Godzilla and the rest of the *kaijū*²²), we have lived with a different level of existential threat.

And now, as we write this introduction, the United States is in a state of tumult, a convulsion, a paroxysm, as white supremacist groups march through our streets bearing torches and shouting Nazi-era slogans of hate (“Blood and soil!” “Jews will not replace us!”²³). The young man with the “DESTROY ALL MONSTERS” sign was one of the counter-protesters, one of the marchers who came to challenge and defy the torch-bearing mob. In hipster fashion, he seems to have taken his slogan from Ishirō Honda’s somewhat obscure eighth sequel to *Godzilla*, released in 1968, in which the monsters from previous *kaijū* films (Godzilla, Rodan, Mothra, and others) attack cities through the world under the command of scientists who are, in turn, under mind control by hostile aliens.²⁴ This slogan, then, is a fitting response to the sense that American cities are being attacked as if by an outside force, yet *this is not an alien invasion*. These marchers are American citizens, and, despite the foreign origins of many of the symbols they carry, they are part of a long-standing American history of hate groups, and—whether individuals wish it or not—are a part of the identities of and systems that benefit all white Americans.²⁵

The trouble with the counter-protester’s slogan is that, of course, we can never destroy *all* monsters. Anyone familiar with monster narratives, from Gilgamesh to Godzilla, knows that there is always a sequel, always a *Return Of*, a *Bride Of*, a *Son Of...* Always a *Godzilla Raids Again* (directed by Motoyoshi Oda, 1955). Surely, it has generally seemed that the Nazis were thoroughly and absolutely defeated, yet the Unite the

Right marchers wore and waved swastikas, gave the Nazi salute, shouted “heil” this and “heil” that. A poisonous ideology that seemed long dead shambled back to life. Of course, monster movies have long literalized this fear in a seemingly endless series of Nazi zombie movies including, among many others, *Shock Waves* (1977), *Zombie Lake* (1981), *Oasis of the Zombies* (1982), *Dead Snow* (2009), *Angry Nazi Zombies* (2012), *Outpost: Black Sun* (2012), *Nazis at the Center of the Earth* (2012), *Frankenstein’s Army* (2013), and *Dead Snow 2: Red vs. Dead* (2014).

The fascist marchers in Charlottesville and those who sympathize with them are participating in one of the oldest of human impulses, to define themselves through the exclusion of others, to puff themselves up by attempting to stomp others down, to raise their sense of self-worth through the insult of, denunciation of, and outright assault on and murder of other individuals and groups. This pernicious role is one of the central functions that monsters serve across time. Monsters are fun—tremendous, city-smashing, fire-breathing, shape-shifting, boundary-pushing, messy, sexy, crazy fun. But if, in these narratives and images, you *only* see the fun, you are missing a great deal of the importance of monsters and the power we grant them to shape our societies. As **Augustine** tells us, these monsters *demonstrate* so much we can learn from; as Cohen argues, they bear substantial meaning.

We cannot destroy all monsters, much as we might sometimes wish to. We are all one another’s monsters. This is because monsters are relative to the culture that produces them. In medieval Christian art and literature, demons are often dark-skinned; in medieval Islamic art and literature, demons are often white-skinned.²⁶ Nazis, as we have just seen, have become revenants (sometimes literally, at least on film) and crept back out of the darkness. But seventy-odd years ago, the German Nazi propaganda newspaper *Der Stürmer* published grotesquely caricatured images of Jews literally consuming “good” Germans. This noxious imagery is still alive and kicking, and was on display in Charlottesville at the Unite the Right rally. Your monster may be our friend; our friend may be your monster. This does *not* mean that all

²² William Tsutsui, “Chapter 1: The Birth of Gojira,” in *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2004), 13–42.

²³ Yair Rosenberg, “‘Jews will not replace us’: Why white supremacists go after Jews,” *The Washington Post* (August 14, 2017) <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/08/14/jews-will-not-replace-us-why-white-supremacists-go-after-jews/>>.

²⁴ He might, though, have based it on the 1970s–1980s proto-punk band from Detroit of the same name.

²⁵ See, for example, “Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy” *Southern Poverty Law Center* (April 21, 2016) <<https://www.splcenter.org/20160421/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy>>. See also Karl Steel, “Bad Heritage: The American Viking Fantasy, from the Nineteenth Century to Now,” in *Nature, Culture, Ecologies: Nature in Transcultural Contexts*, ed. Gesa Mackenthun and Stephanie Wodianska (Münster: Waxmann, 2017).

²⁶ See, for example, Geraldine Heng, “The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages I: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages,” and “The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages II: Locations of Medieval Race,” *Literature Compass* 8/5 (2011): 258–74; 275–93; and Francesca Leoni, “On the Monstrous in the Islamic Visual Tradition,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Mittman with Peter Dendle (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 151–72.

such moves are morally, ethically, practically, or rhetorically interchangeable, however.

Reading the texts in this collection carefully should reveal problematic processes you see all around you. These processes may cause you harm, or you may be unintentionally perpetuating them and the harms they cause others. The ideology of the hate groups that the sign-holding counter-protester came out to defy might be summed up by the very same slogan he brandished, though they would consider others to be the “monsters”: Jewish, Black, Hispanic, LGBTQIA, and differently abled people—and any others who do not fit their violently restrictive notions of human “purity.” Assertions of monstrosity are not merely insults, but are fundamental denials of the humanity of human beings. Darren Wilson, the police officer who shot and killed Michael Brown, sparking the massive protests in Ferguson, Missouri, dehumanized his victim, saying during grand jury proceedings, “it looks like a demon.”²⁷

Of course, we have no doubt that we are on the right side of history. This is immaterial. If we give in to the impulse to destroy one another, we fall into the divisive trap that hate groups lay. To be clear, there is no equivalency whatsoever between those who declare that certain people have no right to live freely and peacefully—or to live at all—because of their race or religion or nationality or sexuality or gender identity, or any other basic element of their human identity, and those who declare that they, that *we*, that *all people* do have these fundamental and inalienable rights. Nevertheless, hate groups tap into something (monstrously) human: all the bombs and blood of the Allied Nations could never have destroyed the Nazis because their strategy of power through demonization was already a revenant, shambling through Columbus’s governorship of Hispaniola, the Massacre at Wounded Knee, and the Kiev Pogrom of 1905. Nazism was certain to outlive Nazis as a fetid, festering, rotting corpse of an ideology. But as with Gerald’s sympathetic werewolves, beneath the skin of the entirely unsympathetic Nazi zombies are yet more humans. Whatever we think about the ethics of people on opposing sides of conflicts, whether some might claim that there were “fine people” on both sides, the point is that there are *people* on both sides, and *we* are always and inevitably the real monsters of history.

In James Cameron’s 1986 science-fiction/horror film *Aliens*, a group of marines, a corporate agent, and their guide

Ripley—Sigourney Weaver in her most iconic role—find a young girl nicknamed Newt living in the ruins of a planetary terraforming colony decimated by the film franchise’s eponymous monsters. Newt is understandably traumatized and catatonic, but eventually speaks. In a darkly parodic scene, Ripley tucks Newt in to bed, and the young child says “My mommy always said there were no monsters—no *real* ones, but there are.” Ripley, serving in the place of her mother, responds as no parents ever do: “Yes, there are, aren’t there?” The next scene, though, shows us who those *real* monsters are, when the corporate agent attempts to impregnate Newt with the alien’s offspring so as to smuggle it back to earth as a superweapon. As Jeffrey Weinstock argues, “the ostensible monster in *Alien* and its various sequels is obviously the nightmarish double-mouthed extraterrestrial designed by H. R. Giger. Just as monstrous and more insidious, however, is the corporation,” embodied in its agent, “Carter Burke (Paul Reiser at his most smarmy), a human.... The *Alien* films thus essentially have two monsters—the alien itself and the bigger monster, the monstrous corporation, that just as clearly feeds on the lives of the human characters.”²⁸ Even in a film with a monster as unrelentingly terrifying as the Xenomorph—with its razor-sharp fangs, claws, eyeless “face,” seemingly exposed vertebrae, acid for blood, and use of humans as living incubators for its deadly offspring—it is the humans who are the worst monsters.

Some of the “monsters” we have assembled in this volume are horrors, nightmare creations of unadulterated malice; others may prove more sympathetic than the humans they encounter, since it is not, in the end, horns or fangs or claws that make a being monstrous, but the purpose to which a being puts whatever tools and weapons it has. Ishirō Honda’s *Destroy All Monsters*—spoiler alert!—has an ironic twist: it is the good old monsters, led by Godzilla, who in the end save humanity. They are scorned, feared, and attacked by the world’s powers, but want only to return to their peaceful island of Monsterland. The world needs its monsters, and its monster stories. This is the impetus for our collection. Whether the monsters are deadly enemies or unlikely savours, their stories are essential to our understanding of the world, and our place within it.

²⁷ State of Missouri vs. Darren Wilson. Grand Jury Testimony, vol. 5 (16 September, 2014): 224–25. Also note that Wilson uses the pronoun “it” instead of “he,” serving to further dehumanize Brown.

²⁸ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “Invisible Monsters: Vision, Horror, and Contemporary Culture,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman with Peter Dendle (London: Ashgate, 2012): 275–89 at 283.

THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH — Selections
Translated by ANDREW GEORGE

Critical Introduction

By far the oldest text included in this volume, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* retains its ability to delight. Though its literary history dates back to the third millennium BCE, the “standard” version is written in Babylonian and dates from the latter end of the second millennium BCE (1200–1000 BCE). As such, it existed in the form of clay tablets instead of scrolls or codices—what we usually think of as books—and that tablet organization is retained in almost all modern translations.

Gilgamesh is perhaps most famous for its depiction of a worldwide flood, a depiction that predates that of the Judeo-Christian Genesis flood story. (The story, possibly apocryphal, goes that George Smith removed his waistcoat and excitedly ran through the British Museum when he translated the lines in 1872.) But what interests us here is the battle between the monster Humbaba, and Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Gilgamesh, the semi-divine ruler of Uruk, is generally thought to represent civilization. Enkidu, who grew up in the wild and in communion with nature until sleeping with a priestess of Ishtar, is generally thought to represent nature. Once Gilgamesh defeats Enkidu in battle, they become fast friends, perhaps representing a complete human being with the wild remaining an important aspect of humanity as long as it is controlled by the socialized, civilized side. Soon after their friendship begins, they set out to confront and kill Humbaba. Unlike most heroes Western readers are familiar with, both Gilgamesh and Enkidu are at times frozen in fear and express regret at undertaking their quest. This, combined with Humbaba’s emotional range (surprise, anger, panic, submission), makes for much more well-drawn characters than readers initially expect.

Reading Questions

Typically, monsters threaten either a civilization or individual, but that does not seem to be the case here. Why, then, do you think Gilgamesh insists on venturing forth to confront Humbaba? Does this affect your interpretation of Gilgamesh and Humbaba? Does it make you more sympathetic with one and less with another? Why?

Humbaba seems to have some sort of previous relationship with (or at least knowledge of) Enkidu, but has clearly never met Gilgamesh. If Gilgamesh represents civilization and

Enkidu represents nature, what might we be able to conclude about Humbaba? Does your answer to this question affect your answer to the previous question? Why or why not?

Editorial Notes

We have followed most of the editorial decisions of the translator. Therefore, bracketed words are restored words from broken tablets, italicized words have been restored from damaged tablets but with uncertain translations, and words that are both italicized and bracketed have been restored based on conjecture alone. A standard ellipsis (...) identifies a short portion of the text which cannot be deciphered, and lengthier ellipses (.....) indicate that a full line is missing. Places where we have removed sections of the text for the sake of brevity are indicated with three dashes (- - -). Our own explanatory comments have been italicized while the translator’s original editorial comments have not.

Because of the incredible history of this story, some texts contain major changes. The original translator indicated to the reader each time Humbaba was spelled “Huwawa” in supplementary texts; we have silently amended all spelling to Humbaba. Lastly, the reader will note that the narrative is pieced together from a number of different texts (indicated along with the line number). Below is the abbreviation key for those texts.

British punctuation has been silently amended to conform with American rules.

Further Reading

Dalley, Stephanie. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

George, Andrew. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. New York: Penguin, 1999.

Kristeva, Julia. “**Approaching Abjection**,” in volume 1; originally published in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, translated by Leon Roudiez, 1–31. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH

Selections

Translated by ANDREW GEORGE

B02: Vorderasiatisches Museum, VAT 12890, is a tablet containing portions of the Hittite *Gilgamesh*

Ha1: Iraq Museum, IM 52615, is a tablet found at Tell Harmal onto which a scribe copied in Old Babylonian

Ha2: Iraq Museum, IM 52760, is a tablet found at Tell Harmal onto which a scribe copied in Old Babylonian

Ish: Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, A 22007, a school exercise tablet in Old Babylonian

OB Ni: Iraq Museum, IM 58451, is a Nippur school tablet onto student copied in Old Babylonian

Roman Numeral: the specific tablet from the Standard Akkadian version

Y: "The Yale Tablet," YBC 2178, containing portions of an Old Babylonian version

Tablet II. The Taming of Enkidu

A short lacuna follows. It can be filled from the Old Babylonian Yale tablet:

He bolted the sevenfold gates of Uruk,
he convened [the assembly,] the crowd gathered round.
... in the street of Uruk-the-Town-Square,
Gilgamesh [seated himself on] his throne. Y 175

[In the street of Uruk]-the-Town-Square,
[the crowd was] sitting before him.
[Thus Gilgamesh] spoke
[to the elders of Uruk]-the-Town-Square:

"[Hear me, O elders of Uruk-the-Town]-Square! Y 180
[I would tread the path to ferocious Humbaba,]
I would see the god of whom men talk,
whose name the lands do constantly repeat.

"I will conquer him in the Forest of Cedar:
let the land learn Uruk's offshoot is mighty! Y 185
Let me start out, I will cut down the cedar,
I will establish for ever a name eternal!"

The text of Tablet II resumes:

[Then Gilgamesh spoke] II 258
[to the young men of Uruk-the-Sheepfold:]

"Hear me, O young men [of Uruk-the-Sheepfold,] II 260
O young men of Uruk, who understand [*combat!*]
Bold as I am I shall tread the distant path
[to the home of Humbaba,]
I shall face a battle I know not.

"[I shall ride] a road [I know not:]
give me your blessing as I go on my journey, II 265
[so I may see again] your faces [in safety,]
and return [glad at heart] through Uruk's gate!"

"On my return [I will celebrate] New Year [twice over,]
I will celebrate the festival twice in the year.
Let the festival take place, the merriment begin, II 270
let the drums resound before [Wild-Cow] Ninsun!"

Enkidu [offered] counsel to the elders,
and the young men of Uruk, who understood *combat*:

"Tell him not to go to the Forest of Cedar!
That is a journey which must not be made, II 275
that is a man [who must not be] looked on.
He who guards the Forest of Cedar, his [*reach*] is wide.

"This *Humbaba*, [his voice is the Deluge,]
[his speech is fire,] his breath is death!
[He hears] the forest murmur
[at sixty leagues' distance:] II 280
[who is there would venture] into his forest?"

"[Adad ranks first, and Humbaba] second:
[who is there would oppose him] among the Igigi?
[So to keep safe the cedars,]
Enlil made it his lot to terrify men; II 285
if you penetrate his forest you are seized by the tremors."

The senior advisers rose,
good counsel they offered Gilgamesh:
"You are young, Gilgamesh, borne along by emotion,
all that you talk of you don't understand. II 290

"This *Humbaba*, his voice is the Deluge,
his speech is fire, his breath is death!
He hears the forest murmur at sixty leagues' distance:
who is there would venture into his forest? II 295

"Adad ranks first, and Humbaba second:
who is there would oppose him among the Igigi?
So to keep safe the cedars,
Enlil made it his lot to terrify men."

Gilgamesh heard the words of the senior advisers, II 300
 he looked with a [laugh at] Enkidu ...:
 ["Now, my friend, how frightened I am!
 [In fear of him shall I change my mind?"]

The rest of Tablet II, perhaps twenty lines containing Gilgamesh's reply to his counsellors, is lost.

Tablet III. Preparations for the Expedition to the Forest of Cedar

[The elders of Uruk-the-Sheepfold] II end
 [spoke to Gilgamesh:]

"To Uruk's [quay come back in safety,] III 1
 do not rely, O Gilgamesh, on your strength alone,
 look long and hard, land a blow you can count on!

"Who goes in front saves his companion,
 who knows the road protects his friend.' III 5
 Let Enkidu go before you,
 he knows the journey to the Forest of Cedar.

"He is tested in battle and tried in combat,
 he shall guard his friend and keep safe his companion,
 Enkidu shall bring him safe home to his wives! III 10

(To Enkidu)
 "In our assembly we place the King in your care:
 you bring him back and replace him in ours!"
 Gilgamesh opened his mouth to speak,
 saying to Enkidu:

"Come, my friend, let us go to the Palace Sublime, III 15
 into the presence of the great Queen Ninsun.
 Ninsun is clever and wise, well versed in everything,
 she will set our feet in steps of good counsel."

Taking each other hand in hand,
 Gilgamesh and Enkidu went to the Palace Sublime. III 20
 Into the presence of the great Queen Ninsun,
 Gilgamesh rose and entered before [her.]

Said Gilgamesh to her, to [Ninsun:]
 "[I shall tread,] O Ninsun, bold as I am,
 the distant path to the home of Humbaba, III 25
 I shall face a battle I know not,

"I shall ride a road I know not:
 I beseech you, give me your blessing for my journey!
 Let me see your face again in safety,
 and return glad at heart through Uruk's gate. III 30

"On my return I will celebrate New Year twice over,
 I will celebrate the festival twice in the year.
 Let the festival take place, the merriment begin,
 let the drums resound in your presence!"

[Wild-Cow] Ninsun listened long and with sadness III 35
 to the words of Gilgamesh, her son, and Enkidu.
 Into the bath-house she went seven times,
 [she bathed] herself in water of tamarisk and soapwort.

[*She donned*] a fine dress to adorn her body,
 [*she chose a jewel*] to adorn her breast. III 40
 Having put on [*her cap*,] she donned her tiara,
 the harlots ... the ground.

She climbed the staircase and went up on the roof,
 on the roof she set up a censer to Shamash.
 Scattering incense she lifted her arms
 in appeal to the Sun God: III 45
 "Why did you afflict my son Gilgamesh
 with so restless a spirit?"

"For now you have touched him and he will tread
 the distant path to the home of Humbaba.
 He will face a battle he knows not,
 he will ride a road he knows not. III 50

"During the days of his journey there and back,
 until he reaches the Forest of Cedar,
 until he slays ferocious Humbaba,
 and annihilates from the land the Evil Thing you abhor,

"each day when [*you travel*] the circuit [*of the earth*,] III 55
 may Aya the Bride unfearing remind you:
 'Entrust him to the care of the watches of the night!'"
 At eventide ... III 58

- - -

"You opened, O [Shamash, *the gates* for] the herd to go out,
 for ... you came forth for the land.
 The uplands [*took shape*,] the heavens grew [bright,] III 65
 the beasts of the wild ... your ruddy glow.

- - -

"At the coming forth [of your light] is gathered the crowd,
 the divine Anunnaki await [your brilliance.]
 May [Aya the Bride] unfearing [remind you:]
 '[Entrust] him to [the care of the watches
 of the night!]' III 75

- - -

“Also III 80
 while Gilgamesh travels to the Forest of Cedar,
 let the days be long, let the nights be short,
 let his loins be girt, let his *stride* [be sure!]

“Let him pitch at nightfall a camp for the night,
 [let] nighttime III 85
 May Aya the Bride unfearing remind you:
 ‘The day Gilgamesh and Enkidu encounter Humbaba,

“O Shamash, rouse against Humbaba the mighty gale-winds:
 South Wind, North Wind, East Wind and West Wind,
 Blast, Counterblast, Typhoon, Hurricane and Tempest, III 90
 Devil-Wind, Frost-Wind, Gale and Tornado.

“Let rise thirteen winds and Humbaba’s face darken,
 let the weapons of Gilgamesh then reach Humbaba!
 After your very own *fires* are kindled,
 at that time, O Shamash, turn your face
 to the *suppliant*! III 95

“Your fleet-footed mules shall [bear] you [onwards.]
 A restful seat, a bed [for the night] shall be
 [what awaits] you.
 The gods, your brothers, shall bring food [to delight] you,
 Aya the Bride shall wipe your face dry
 with the fringe of her garment.”

Again Wild-Cow Ninsun made her request
 before Shamash: III 100
 “O Shamash, will not Gilgamesh ... the gods?
 Will he not share the heavens with you?
 Will he not share with the moon a sceptre and crown?

“Will he not grow wise with Ea of the Ocean Below?
 Will he not rule with Irmina the black-headed people? III 105
 Will he not dwell with Ningishzida in the Land-of-No-Return?

“Let me make him, O Shamash, ...,
 lest he ..., lest he ... in the Forest of Cedar.”

 After Wild-Cow Ninsun had charged Shamash thus, III 116

[Wild-Cow] Ninsun was clever [and wise, well versed in
 everything,]
 [the mother of] Gilgamesh
 She smothered the censer and came [down from the roof,]
 she summoned Enkidu and declared her will: III 120

“O mighty Enkidu, you are not sprung from my womb,
 but henceforth your brood will belong
 with the votaries of Gilgamesh,
 the priestesses, the hierodules and the women of the temple.”
 She put the symbols on Enkidu’s neck.

“The priestesses took in the foundling, III 125
 and the Divine Daughters brought up the foster-child.
 Enkidu, whom [I love,] I take for my son,
 Enkidu in [brotherhood,] Gilgamesh shall favour him!’

“Also
 while [you] travel [together] to the Forest of Cedar,
 let [the days be] long, let the nights be short,
 [let your loins be girt, let] your *stride* [be sure!]

*The intervening lines are either missing or extremely damaged.
 It seems that Gilgamesh and Enkidu perform rituals before
 leaving Uruk, and Gilgamesh leaves standing orders as to the
 running of the city.*

The officers stood there wishing him well,
 the young men of Uruk ran behind in a mob,
 and the officers kissed his feet:
 “To Uruk’s quay come back in safety! III 215

“Do not rely, O Gilgamesh, on your strength alone,
 look long and hard, land a blow you can count on!
 ‘Who goes in front will save his comrade,
 who knows the road shall [guard] his friend.’

“Let Enkidu go before you, III 220
 he knows the journey to the Forest of Cedar.
 He is tested in battle and [tried] in combat,
 through the mountain passes [he often has journeyed.]

“He shall [guard] his friend [and keep safe his companion,]
 [Enkidu shall bring him safe] home to his wives!

(To Enkidu)
 In our assembly [we place the King in your care:]
 you bring him back and replace [him in ours!]”

Enkidu [opened] his mouth [to speak,]
 saying [to Gilgamesh:]
 “My friend, turn back, III 230
 do not [pursue] this journey”

The rest of Tablet III, perhaps ten lines, is missing. The departure of the heroes is described in the Old Babylonian Yale tablet, though the text becomes increasingly fragmentary:

Enkidu opened his mouth, Y272
 saying to Gilgamesh:
 “Where you’ve set your mind begin the journey,
 let your heart have no fear, keep your eyes on me!

“[In the] forest I knew his lair, Y275
 [and the ways, too,] that Humbaba wanders.
 Speak [to the crowd] and send them home!

.....
 “.....[they should not] go with me,
 to you.” Y 280
 ... The crowd with happy heart,
 ... they [heard] what he had said.

The young men *made a fervent prayer* ...:
 “Go, Gilgamesh, let
 May your god go [before you!] Y 285
 May [Shamash] let you attain [your goal!]”
 Gilgamesh and Enkidu *went forth* ...

Tablet IV

[At twenty] leagues they broke bread,
 [at] thirty leagues they pitched camp:
 [fifty] leagues they travelled in the course of a day,
 by the third day [a march] of a month and a half;
 nearer they drew to Mount Lebanon.

[Facing the sun they] dug [a well,] IV 5
 [they put *fresh water* in ...]
 [Gilgamesh climbed to the top of the mountain,]
 [to the hill he poured out an offering of flour:]
 [“O mountain, bring me a dream, so I see a good sign!”]

[Enkidu made for Gilgamesh a House of the Dream God,] IV 10
 [he fixed a door in its doorway to keep out the weather.]
 [In the circle *he had drawn* he made him lie down,]
 [and *falling flat* like a net lay himself in the doorway.]

[Gilgamesh rested his chin on his knees,]
 [sleep fell upon him, that spills over people.] IV 15
 [In the middle of the night he reached his sleep’s end,]
 [he rose and spoke to his friend:]

[“My friend, did you not call me? Why have I wakened?”]
 [Did you not touch me? Why am I startled?]
 [Did a god not pass by? Why is my flesh frozen numb?] IV 20
 [My friend, I have had the first dream!]

“[The] dream that I had [was an utter confusion:]
 [in] a mountain valley
 [The mountain] fell down on top of,
 [then] we like” IV 25

[The one] born in the [wild knew how to give counsel,]
 Enkidu spoke to his friend, [gave his dream meaning:]
 “My friend, [your] dream is a good omen,
 the dream is precious [*and bodes us well.*]

“My friend, the mountain you saw
 [*could not be Humbaba:*] IV 30
 [we] shall capture Humbaba, [him] we [shall *slay,*]
 we shall [cast down] his corpse on the field of battle.
 And next morning [we shall see a good] sign
 [from the Sun God.]”

At twenty leagues they broke [bread,]
 at thirty leagues they pitched [camp:] IV 35
 fifty leagues they travelled in the course of [a day,]
 by the third day a march of [a month and] a half;
 nearer they drew to Mount [Lebanon.]

Facing the sun they dug a well,
 [they put *fresh* water [in ...]
 Gilgamesh climbed to the top [of the mountain,] IV 40
 [to the hill] he poured out an offering of flour:
 “O mountain, bring me a dream, [so I see a good sign!]”

Enkidu made for [Gilgamesh a House of the Dream God,]
 [he fixed a door in its doorway to keep out the weather.]
 [In the circle *he had drawn* he made him lie down,] IV 45
 [and *falling flat* like a net lay himself in the doorway.]

[Gilgamesh rested his chin on his knees,]
 [sleep fell upon him, that spills over people.]
 [In the middle of the night he reached his sleep’s end,]
 [he rose and spoke to his friend:] IV 50

[“My friend, did you not call me? Why have I wakened?”]
 [Did you not touch me? Why am I startled?]
 [Did a god not pass by? Why is my flesh frozen numb?]
 [My friend, I have had the second dream!”] IV 54

Gilgamesh’s relation of his second dream has not survived in
 Tablet IV, but the gap can be filled by a paraphrase of an ear-
 lier version of the epic which comes from the Hittite capital,
 Hattusa, and dates to the Middle Babylonian period:

“My second dream sur[passes] the first. B02 12’
 In my dream, my friend, a mountain ...,
 it threw me down, it held me by my feet ...
 The brightness grew more intense.

A man [*appeared,*] B02 15’
 the comeliest in the land, his beauty ...
 [From] beneath the mountain he pulled me out and ...
 He gave me water to drink and my heart grew [calm.]
 [On] the ground he set [my] feet.”

Enkidu [spoke] to him, B02 20’
 [saying] to Gilgamesh:
 “My friend, we shall ..., he is different altogether.
 Humbaba ... is not the mountain,

he is different altogether ...
Come, *cast aside* [your] fear ..." BO2 24'

The text of Tablet IV resumes:

[At twenty leagues they broke bread,
[at thirty leagues they pitched camp:] IV 80
[fifty leagues they travelled in the course of a day,
[by the third day a march of a month and a half;]
[nearer they drew to Mount Lebanon.]

[Facing the sun they dug a well,
[they put *fresh water* in] ...
[Gilgamesh climbed to the top of] the mountain, IV 85
[to the] hill [he poured out an offering of flour:]
"[O mountain], bring me a dream, so I see [a good sign!]"

[Enkidu made for [Gilgamesh a] House of the Dream God,
[he fixed] a door in its doorway to keep out the weather.
[In the circle *he had*] drawn he made him lie down, IV 90
[and *falling flat*] like a net lay himself in the doorway.

Gilgamesh rested his chin on his knees,
sleep fell upon him, that spills over people.
[In the] middle of the night he reached his sleep's end,
he rose and spoke to his friend: IV 95

"My friend, did you not call me? Why have I wakened?
Did you not touch me? Why am I startled?
Did a god not pass by? Why is my flesh frozen numb?
My friend, I have had the third dream!

"The dream that I had was an utter confusion: IV 100
heaven cried aloud, while earth did rumble.
The day grew still, darkness came forth,
there was a flash of lightning, fire broke out.

"[*The flames*] flared up, death rained down.
... and the flashes of fire went out, IV 105
[where] it had fallen turned into cinders.
[You were] born in the wild, can we take counsel?"

[Having heard the words of his friend,]
Enkidu gave the dream meaning, saying to Gilgamesh:
"[My friend,] your dream is a good omen,
fine is [*its message*]." IV 109

The rest of Enkidu's explanation of the third dream is lost,
but this lacuna in Tablet IV can be filled in part from the
Old Babylonian school tablet from Nippur:

"We draw, my friend, ever nearer the forest, OB Ni 1
the dreams are close, the battle soon.
You will see the radiant auras of the god,
of Humbaba, whom in your thoughts you fear so much.

"Locking horns like a bull you will batter him, OB Ni 5
and force his head down with your strength.
The old man you saw is your powerful god,
the one who begot you, divine Lugalbanda."

The text of Tablet IV becomes available again:

[At twenty] leagues they [broke bread,] IV 120
[at thirty] leagues they pitched [camp:]
[fifty] leagues they travelled [in the course of a day,]
by the third [day a march] of a month and a half;
nearer they drew to Mount Lebanon.

[Facing] the sun they dug [a well,] IV 125
they put [*fresh water*] in ...
Gilgamesh [climbed] to the top [of the mountain,]
to the [hill he poured] out an offering [of flour.]
"[O mountain, bring me a] dream, [so I see a good sign!]"

[Enkidu made for Gilgamesh a House
of the Dream God,] IV 130
[he fixed a door in its doorway to keep out the weather.]
[In the circle *he had drawn*] he made him lie down,
[and *falling flat*] like a net lay himself in the doorway.]

[Gilgamesh rested his chin on his knees,]
[sleep fell upon him, that spills over people.] IV 135
[In the middle of the night he reached his sleep's end,]
[he rose and spoke to his friend:]

["My friend, did you not call me? Why have I wakened?]
[Did you not touch me? Why am I startled?]
[Did a god not pass by? Why is my flesh frozen numb?]
[My friend, I have had the fourth dream!]" IV 140

The details of the fourth dream and its explanation are not
well preserved in Tablet IV, but the Old Babylonian tablet
from Nippur supplies a more complete version of the text:

"My friend, I have had the fourth,
it surpasses my other three dreams! OB Ni 10
I saw a Thunderbird in the sky,
up it rose like a cloud, soaring above us.

"It was a ..., its visage distorted,
its mouth was fire, its breath was death.
[There was also a] man, he was strange of form, OB Ni 15
he ... and stood there in my dream.

"[He *bound*] its wings and took hold of my arm,
..... he cast it down [before] me,
..... upon it."

After a short lacuna, Enkidu explains the dream:

“[You saw a Thunderbird in the sky,
[up] it [rose like a] cloud, soaring above us. OB Ni 20

“It was a ..., its visage distorted,
its mouth was fire, its breath was death.
You will fear its awesome splendour,
I shall ... its foot and let you arise! OB Ni 25

“The man you saw was mighty Shamash ...”

The text of Tablet IV resumes, though badly broken:

“[My friend, favourable is] your dream, IV 155
..... this,
... Humbaba like,
...will be kindled ... upon [him.]

“We shall bring about his ..., we shall bind his wings,
.....we shall ... IV 160
His, we shall stand upon him.
[And next] morning we shall [see] a good sign
from the Sun God.”

[At twenty leagues] they broke bread,
[at thirty leagues] they pitched camp:
[fifty leagues they] travelled in the course [of a day.] IV 165

[Facing the sun] they dug a [well],
they put [*fresh water*] in ...
Gilgamesh [climbed] to the top [of the mountain],
to [the hill he] poured out an offering of [flour:]
“[O mountain, bring me] a dream, [so I see a good] sign!” IV 170

Enkidu [made] for [Gilgamesh a House of the Dream God],
he fixed [a door in its doorway to keep out the weather.]
In the circle [*he had drawn* he made him lie down,]
[and *falling*] *flat* [like a net] lay [himself in the doorway.]

[Gilgamesh] rested his [chin on his knees,] IV 175
[sleep fell] upon [him, that spills over people.]
[In the middle of the night he reached his sleep's end,]
[he rose and spoke to his friend:]

“[My friend, did you not call me? Why have I wakened?]
[Did you not touch me? Why am I startled?] IV 180
[Did a god not pass by? Why is my flesh frozen numb?]
[My friend, I have had the fifth dream!”]

Lacuna. Another account of one of the dreams and Enkidu's explanation of it survives in an Old Babylonian tablet from Tell Harmal, ancient Shaduppûm:

“My friend, I had a dream: Ha1 3
how *ominous* it was, how *desolate*, how unclear!

“I had taken me hold of a bull from the wild:
as it clove the ground with its bellows, Ha1 5
the clouds of dust it raised thrust deep in the sky,
and I, in front of it, *leaned myself forward*.

“Taking hold of enclosed my arms.
... he extricated [me] ... *by force* ...
My cheek ..., my ...,
[he gave] me water [to drink] from his waterskin.”

“The [god,] my friend, we are going against, Ha1 10
he's not the wild bull, he's different altogether.
The *wild bull* you saw was shining Shamash,
he will grasp our hands in time of peril.

“The one who gave you water to drink from his skin
was your god who respects you, divine Lugalbanda. Ha1 15
We shall join forces and do something unique,
a feat that never has been in the land!”

When the text of Tablet IV resumes, the heroes have almost reached the Forest of Cedar, and Enkidu is giving Gilgamesh courage:

“[*Why, my friend*, do your tears] flow? IV I95
[O offshoot sprung from] Uruk's midst, ...
... now stand and ...,
Gilgamesh [the king,] offshoot sprung from Uruk's midst, ...”

[Shamash] heard what he had spoken,
[straight] away [from the sky there cried out] a voice: IV 200
“Hurry, stand against him! Humbaba must not
[enter his forest,]
[he must not] go down to the grove, he must not ...!”

“He [must not] wrap himself in his seven cloaks ...!
[One] he is wrapped in, six he has shed.”
They IV 205
like a fierce wild bull, horns locked ...

He bellowed once, a bellow full of terror,
the guardian of the forests was bellowing,
.....
Humbaba was [thundering]
like the God of the Storm. IV 210

A long lacuna intervenes, then:

[Enkidu] opened his [mouth] to speak, IV 239
[saying to Gilgamesh:]
“...have come down, IV 240
...and [my arms] grow stiff!”

[Gilgamesh] opened his mouth to speak,
saying [to Enkidu:]
“[Why,] my friend, do we [speak] like weaklings?
[Was it not we] crossed all of the mountains?
“[Did not]before us? IV 245
Before we withdraw
My [friend,] experienced in combat,
who ... battle
“You ... and you fear not ...,
...like a *dervish*, and change ... IV 250
Let [your shout] resound [like] a kettle drum,
let the stiffness leave your arms, the tremors [your knees!]
“Take my hand, friend, and we shall go [on] together,
[let] your thoughts dwell on combat!
Forget death and [seek] life! IV 255
.....the careful man.
““[Let him who] goes first be on guard for himself and
bring his comrade to safety!
It is they made a name [for days] long in the future!”
[At the] *distant* ... the two of them arrived,
[they ceased] their talking and came to a halt. IV 260

Tablet V. The Combat with Humbaba

They stood there marvelling at the forest,
gazing at the lofty cedars,
gazing at forest’s entrance—
where Humbaba came and went there was a track.
The path was straight and the way well trodden. V 5
They saw the Mountain of Cedar, seat of gods
and goddesses’ throne.
[On the] face of the mountain the cedar proffered its
abundance,
its shade was sweet and full of delight.
[Thick] tangled was the thorn, the forest a shrouding canopy,
...cedar, *ballukku*-trees V 10
After a lacuna intervenes, the text continues, though it is not
completely recovered:
At once the dirks, V 53
and from the scabbards
The axes were smeared, V 55
hatchet [and] dirk in
One,
they stole into
Humbaba V 59

Gilgamesh [opened his mouth to speak,] V 65
[saying to Enkidu:]
“What, [my friend,]

“[For] Enlil”
Enkidu [opened] his mouth [to speak,] V 70
[saying to Gilgamesh:]
“My [friend], Humbaba,
one-to-one
“[Two] garments, however,,
even a glacis-slope two [*climbing can conquer.*]
Two V 75
a three-ply rope [*is not easily broken.*]
“[Even] a mighty lion two cubs [*can overcome.*]”

A fragment of this conversation is also preserved on a second
Old Babylonian tablet from Tell Harmal (Ha₂):

“We have come to a place where a man shouldn’t go ...,
let us set our weapons in the gate of Humbaba!”
...[Enkidu] declared to his friend:
“A tempest’s onslaught is [ferocious Humbaba!]
[Like] the god of the storm he will trample us down.”

When the text of Tablet V resumes, the heroes are face to face
with the forest’s guardian:

Humbaba opened his mouth to speak, V 85
saying to Gilgamesh:
“Let fools take counsel, Gilgamesh, with the rude and brutish!
Why have you come here into my presence?
“Come, Enkidu, you spawn of a fish, who knew no father,
hatchling of terrapin and turtle,
who sucked no mother’s milk!
In your youth I watched you, but near you I went not,
would your ... have filled my belly? V 90
“[Now] in treachery you bring before me Gilgamesh,
and stand there, Enkidu, like a warlike stranger!
I will slit the throat and gullet of Gilgamesh,
I will feed his flesh to the locust bird,
ravaging eagle and vulture!”
Gilgamesh opened his mouth to speak,
saying to Enkidu: V 95
“My friend, Humbaba’s features have changed!
Though boldly we came up to his lair to defeat him,
yet my heart will not quickly ...”

- Enkidu opened his mouth to speak,
saying to Gilgamesh:
“Why, my friend, [do you] speak like a weakling? V 100
With your spineless words you [make] me despondent.
- “Now, my friend, but one is [our task,
the copper is already pouring into the mould!
To stoke the furnace for an hour? To ...the coals for an hour?
To send the Deluge is to crack the whip! V 105
- “[Don’t] draw back, don’t make a retreat!
.....make your blow mighty!” V 107
- He smote the ground and ... faced him head on. V 132
- At the heels of their feet the earth burst asunder,
they shattered, as they whirled,
Mounts Sirion and Lebanon.
Black became the clouds of white, V 135
raining down on them death like a mist.
- Shamash roused against Humbaba the mighty gale-winds:
South Wind, North Wind, East Wind and West Wind,
Blast, Counterblast, Typhoon, Hurricane and Tempest,
Devil-Wind, Frost-Wind, Gale and Tornado: V 140
- there rose thirteen winds and the face of Humbaba darkened—
he could not charge forwards, he could not kick backwards—
the weapons of Gilgamesh then reached Humbaba.
In a plea for his life said Humbaba to Gilgamesh:
- “You are so young, Gilgamesh, your mother
just bore you, V 145
but indeed you are the offspring of [Wild-Cow Ninsun!]
By Shamash’s command the mountains you flattened,
O offshoot sprung from Uruk’s midst, Gilgamesh the king!
- “..., Gilgamesh, a dead man cannot ...,
...alive for his lord V 150
Spare my life, O Gilgamesh,,
let me dwell here for you in [the Forest of Cedar!]
- “Trees as many as you command,
I will guard you myrtle,,
timber to be the pride of [your] palace!” V 155
- Enkidu opened his mouth to speak,
[saying to Gilgamesh:]
“Do not listen, my [friend,] to Humbaba’s words,
[ignore] his supplications,”
- [Humbaba opened his mouth to speak,] V 174
[saying to Enkidu:]
“You are experienced in the ways of my forest,
the ways ..., V 175
also you know all the arts of speech.
I should have picked you up and hanged you
from a sapling at the way into the forest,
I should have fed your flesh to the locust bird,
ravaging eagle and vulture.
- “Now, Enkidu, [my] release lies with you:
tell Gilgamesh to spare me my life!” V 180
Enkidu opened his mouth to speak,
saying to Gilgamesh:
- “My friend, Humbaba who guards the Forest of [Cedar:]
finish him, slay him, do away with his power!
Humbaba who guards the Forest [of Cedar:] V 185
finish him, slay him, do away with his power,
before Enlil the foremost hears what we do!
- The [great] gods will take against us in anger,
Enlil in Nippur, Shamash in [Larsa] ...,
Establish for ever [*a fame*] that endures,
how Gilgamesh [*slew ferocious*] Humbaba!”
- Humbaba heard [*what Enkidu was saying,*]
he [lifted] his head and ... V 190
- [Humbaba opened his mouth to speak,]
[saying to Enkidu:]
“...You sit before [him] like a shepherd, V 236
like his hireling [*doing his bidding.*]
Now, Enkidu, [my release] lies with you ...,
tell Gilgamesh to [spare] me my life!”
- Enkidu opened his mouth to speak, V 240
saying [to Gilgamesh:]
“My friend, Humbaba who guards the Forest [of Cedar—]
[finish him,] slay him, [do away with his power,]
before [Enlil] the foremost hears what we do!
- The [great] gods will take against us in anger,
Enlil in Nippur, Shamash in [Larsa] ...
Establish for ever [*a fame*] that endures,
how Gilgamesh *slew [ferocious]* Humbaba!” V 245
- Humbaba heard ... and ... [*bitterly cursed them:*]
-

"May the pair of them not grow old,
besides Gilgamesh his friend, none shall bury Enkidu!" V 256

Enkidu opened his mouth to speak,
saying to Gilgamesh:

"My friend, I speak to you but you do not hear me!
While the curses, V 260
[let those curses return] to his mouth."

[Gilgamesh heard the words] of his friend,
he drew forth [the dirk at] his side.
Gilgamesh [smote him] in the neck,
Enkidu ...while he pulled out the lungs. V 265

[...] ...springing up,
[from] the head he took the tusks as booty.
[Rain] in plenty fell on the mountain,
...in plenty fell on the mountain. V 269

A different version of the slaying of Humbaba and his minions, but better preserved, is given in an Old Babylonian tablet from Ishchali:

[Said] Gilgamesh to [him.] to Enkidu: Ish 10'
"Now, my friend, we must impose our victory.
The auras slip away in the thicket,
the auras slip away, their radiance *grows dim*."

Said Enkidu to him, to Gilgamesh:
"My friend, catch a bird and where go its chicks? Ish 15'
Let us look for the auras later,
as the chicks run here and there in the thicket!

"Smite him again, slay his servant *alongside him!*"
Gilgamesh heard the word of his companion.
He took up his axe in his hand, Ish 20'
he drew forth the dirk from his belt.

Gilgamesh smote him in the neck,
his friend Enkidu *gave encouragement*.
Hehe fell,
the ravines did run with his blood. Ish 25'

Humbaba the guardian he smote to the ground,
for two leagues afar ...
With him he slew,
the woods he

He slew the ogre, the forest's guardian, Ish 30'
at whose yell *were sundered* the peaks
of Sirion and Lebanon,
...the mountains did *quake*,
...all the hillsides did tremble.

He slew the ogre, the cedar's guardian,
the broken Ish 35'
As soon as he had slain all seven (of the auras),
the war-net of *two talents' weight*, and the dirk of eight,

a load of ten talents he took up,
he went down to trample the forest.
He discovered the secret abode of the gods,
Gilgamesh felling the trees,
Enkidu choosing the *timber*. Ish 39'

After a gap the text of Tablet V resumes:

Enkidu opened his mouth to speak, V 292
saying to Gilgamesh:
"My friend, we have felled a lofty cedar,
whose top thrust up to the sky.

"I will make a door, six rods in height, two rods
in breadth, one cubit in thickness, V 295
whose pole and pivots, top and bottom, will be all of a piece."

At this point Tablet V is badly damaged. A better-preserved version of the episode is known from an Old Babylonian tablet of unknown provenance, now in Baghdad:

...he went trampling through the Forest of Cedar, IM 17
he discovered the secret a bode of the gods.
The Wild-Born knew how to give counsel,
he said to his friend:

"By your strength alone you slew the guardian, IM 20
what can bring you dishonour? Lay low the Forest of [Cedar!]
Seek out for me a lofty cedar,
whose crown is high as the heavens!

"I will make a door of a reed-length's breadth,
let it not have a pivot, let it travel in the door-jamb.
Its side will be a cubit, a reed-length its breadth, IM 25
let no stranger draw near it, let a god have love for [it.]

"To the house of Enlil the Euphrates shall bear it,
let the folk of Nippur rejoice over it!
Let the god Enlil delight in it!" IM 29

The text of Tablet V resumes for the final three lines:

They bound together a raft, they laid [*the cedar on it*] V 300
Enkidu was helmsman,
and Gilgamesh [*carried*] the head of Humbaba.

THE BIBLE — Selections

Critical Introduction

The Bible is perhaps the most important and influential text in Western cultural history. It did not begin as a single book, but is instead something of a compilation of sources written by Jews and Christians in the ancient period. It is the foundational text of the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The earliest texts of Jewish scripture were written in Hebrew, likely beginning in the eighth century BCE. The Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) was largely written by the mid-sixth century BCE. This formed the basis of the Christian Bible, wherein Jewish scripture is framed as the “Old Testament,” in contrast to the “New Testament,” a series of Christian writings surviving primarily in Greek. The earliest of these are the letters written by St. Paul in ca. 50–60 CE. The Gospels, the central texts of Christianity, purportedly written by Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, were written over the following half-century.

The Bible—Hebrew, Greek, later Latin translations, and other languages—is replete with monsters. There are numerous giants (Goliath, of course, but also the Nephilim and Anakim, among others), dragons, unicorns, basilisks, Behemoth, Leviathan, and the beasts of the Apocalypse. What they are called and how they are interpreted vary widely from language to language (many “jackals” in Hebrew texts were transformed into “dragons” in Latin translations), and culture to culture. By some theologians, these beings are seen as literal, tangible monsters; by others, they are seen as metaphors. However they are interpreted, their prevalence is certain.

Here, we present a collection of monsters drawn from Jewish and Christian biblical texts: the giant Nephilim, born of the sons of God and the daughters of humans; Goliath, the Philistine nemesis of King Saul and David; Behemoth and Leviathan, a pair of impressive monsters from the Book of Job; and some of the beasts of the Apocalypse, disordered and disturbing heralds of the end of time.

Reading Questions

How does the Bible encourage its readers to respond to monsters? What are any commonalities among these Biblical monsters?

Editorial Notes

We here present the New Revised Standard Version. It was published in 1989 and is widely accepted as the best English translation for most academic purposes. Places where we have removed sections of text for the sake of brevity are indicated with three dashes (- - -). Verse lines are marked with superscripted numerals at the start of each new verse; editorial notes are indicated with superscripted symbols (*, etc.). All explanatory footnotes are original to the NRSV text, unless bracketed.

Further Reading

- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Nigg, Joe, ed. *The Book of Fabulous Beasts: A Treasury of Writings from Ancient Times to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Said, Edward. **Orientalism**, in volume 1; originally published in *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
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ASM

THE BIBLE Selections

The Nephilim: Genesis 6, Numbers 13

6 When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them,² the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose.³ Then the Lord said, “My spirit shall not abide¹ in mortals forever; for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.”⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.

⁵The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.⁶ And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.⁷ So the Lord said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”⁸ But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.

13 The Lord said to Moses,² “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites; from each of their ancestral tribes you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.”³ So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the Lord, all of them leading men among the Israelites....⁴ So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath.⁵ They went up into the Negeb, and came to Hebron; and Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the Anakites, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.)⁶ And they came to the Wadi Eshcol, and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them. They also brought some pomegranates and figs.⁷ That place was called the Wadi Eshcol,² because of the cluster that the Israelites cut down from there.

⁸At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land.⁹ And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the Israelites in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land.¹⁰ And they

¹ Meaning of Heb. uncertain.

² That is, *Cluster*.

told him, “We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.¹¹ Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there.¹² The Amalekites live in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan.”

¹³But Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.”¹⁴ Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we.”¹⁵ So they brought to the Israelites an unfavorable report of the land that they had spied out, saying, “The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size.¹⁶ There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.”

Goliath: I Samuel 17

17 Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim.² Saul and the Israelites gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah, and formed ranks against the Philistines.³ The Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them.⁴ And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six³ cubits and a span.⁴ He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze.⁵ He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders.⁶ The shaft of his spear was like a weaver’s beam, and his spear’s head weighed six hundred shekels of iron;⁶ and his shield-bearer went before him.⁷ He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, “Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul?”

³ [Some manuscripts read *four*. Eds.]

⁴ [9 feet and 9 inches, or about 3 metres.]

⁵ [Just over 121 pounds, or about 55 kg.]

⁶ [14.5 pounds, or about 6.5 kg.]

Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. ⁹If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.” ¹⁰And the Philistine said, “Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together.” ¹¹When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

¹²Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in years. ¹³The three eldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle; the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. ¹⁴David was the youngest; the three eldest followed Saul, ¹⁵but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem. ¹⁶For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening.

¹⁷Jesse said to his son David, “Take for your brothers an ephah⁷ of this parched grain and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers; ¹⁸also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See how your brothers fare, and bring some token from them.”

¹⁹Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. ²⁰David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, took the provisions, and went as Jesse had commanded him. He came to the encampment as the army was going forth to the battle line, shouting the war cry. ²¹Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. ²²David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage, ran to the ranks, and went and greeted his brothers. ²³As he talked with them, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines, and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.

²⁴All the Israelites, when they saw the man, fled from him and were very much afraid. ²⁵The Israelites said, “Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. The king will greatly enrich the man who kills him, and will give him his daughter and make his family free in Israel.” ²⁶David said to the men who stood by him, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” ²⁷The people answered him in the same way, “So shall it be done for the man who kills him.”

²⁸His eldest brother Eliab heard him talking to the men; and Eliab’s anger was kindled against David. He said, “Why have you come down? With whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart; for you have come down just to see the battle.” ²⁹David said, “What have I done now? It was only a question.” ³⁰He turned away from him toward another and spoke in the same way; and the people answered him again as before.

³¹When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul; and he sent for him. ³²David said to Saul, “Let no one’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.” ³³Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.” ³⁴But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. ³⁶Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.” ³⁷David said, “The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.” So Saul said to David, “Go, and may the Lord be with you!”

³⁸Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. ³⁹David strapped Saul’s sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.” So David removed them. ⁴⁰Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd’s bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

⁴¹The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴²When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. ⁴³The Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴The Philistine said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.” ⁴⁵But David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will

⁷ [Just over 34 pounds, or about 15.5 kg.]

strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand."

⁴⁸When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

⁵⁰So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand. ⁵¹Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. ⁵²The troops of Israel and Judah rose up with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron. ⁵³The Israelites came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp. ⁵⁴David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armor in his tent.

Behemoth and Leviathan: Job 40–41

⁶Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

⁷"Gird up your loins like a man;

I will question you, and you declare to me.

⁸Will you even put me in the wrong?

Will you condemn me that you may be justified?

⁹Have you an arm like God,

and can you thunder with a voice like his?

¹⁰"Deck yourself with majesty and dignity;

clothe yourself with glory and splendor.

¹¹Pour out the overflowings of your anger,

and look on all who are proud, and abase them.

¹²Look on all who are proud, and bring them low;

tread down the wicked where they stand.

¹³Hide them all in the dust together;

bind their faces in the world below.

¹⁴Then I will also acknowledge to you

that your own right hand can give you victory.

¹⁵"Look at Behemoth,

which I made just as I made you;

it eats grass like an ox.

¹⁶Its strength is in its loins,

and its power in the muscles of its belly.

¹⁷It makes its tail stiff like a cedar;

the sinews of its thighs are knit together.

¹⁸Its bones are tubes of bronze,

its limbs like bars of iron.

¹⁹"It is the first of the great acts of God—

only its Maker can approach it with the sword.

²⁰For the mountains yield food for it

where all the wild animals play.

²¹Under the lotus plants it lies,

in the covert of the reeds and in the marsh.

²²The lotus trees cover it for shade;

the willows of the wadi surround it.

²³Even if the river is turbulent, it is not frightened;

it is confident though Jordan rushes against its mouth.

²⁴Can one take it with hooks

or pierce its nose with a snare?

41 "Can you draw out Leviathan⁸ with a fishhook,
or press down its tongue with a cord?

²Can you put a rope in its nose,

or pierce its jaw with a hook?

³Will it make many supplications to you?

Will it speak soft words to you?

⁴Will it make a covenant with you

to be taken as your servant forever?

⁵Will you play with it as with a bird,

or will you put it on leash for your girls?

⁶Will traders bargain over it?

Will they divide it up among the merchants?

⁷Can you fill its skin with harpoons,

or its head with fishing spears?

⁸Lay hands on it;

think of the battle; you will not do it again!

⁹Any hope of capturing it will be disappointed;

were not even the gods overwhelmed at the sight of it?

¹⁰No one is so fierce as to dare to stir it up.

Who can stand before it?

¹¹Who can confront it and be safe?

—under the whole heaven, who?

¹²"I will not keep silence concerning its limbs,

or its mighty strength, or its splendid frame.

¹³Who can strip off its outer garment?

Who can penetrate its double coat of mail?

¹⁴Who can open the doors of its face?

8 Or *the crocodile*. [Many modern editors and translators have interpreted the passage as a garbled description of a crocodile. This, however, ignores the parallels between Leviathan and the ancient Syrian sea-monster, Lotan—who is most certainly not a crocodile. Eds.]

There is terror all around its teeth.
¹⁵Its back is made of shields in rows,
 shut up closely as with a seal.
¹⁶One is so near to another
 that no air can come between them.
¹⁷They are joined one to another;
 they clasp each other and cannot be separated.
¹⁸Its sneezes flash forth light,
 and its eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn.
¹⁹From its mouth go flaming torches;
 sparks of fire leap out.
²⁰Out of its nostrils comes smoke,
 as from a boiling pot and burning rushes.
²¹Its breath kindles coals,
 and a flame comes out of its mouth.
²²In its neck abides strength,
 and terror dances before it.
²³The folds of its flesh cling together;
 it is firmly cast and immovable.
²⁴Its heart is as hard as stone,
 as hard as the lower millstone.
²⁵When it raises itself up the gods are afraid;
 at the crashing they are beside themselves.
²⁶Though the sword reaches it, it does not avail,
 nor does the spear, the dart, or the javelin.
²⁷It counts iron as straw,
 and bronze as rotten wood.
²⁸The arrow cannot make it flee;
 slingstones, for it, are turned to chaff.
²⁹Clubs are counted as chaff;
 it laughs at the rattle of javelins.
³⁰Its underparts are like sharp potsherds;
 it spreads itself like a threshing sledge on the mire.
³¹It makes the deep boil like a pot;
 it makes the sea like a pot of ointment.
³²It leaves a shining wake behind it;
 one would think the deep to be white-haired.
³³On earth it has no equal,
 a creature without fear.
³⁴It surveys everything that is lofty;
 it is king over all that are proud.”

The Beasts of the Apocalypse: Revelation 9, 12–13, 17

⁹ And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit; ²he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened

with the smoke from the shaft. ³Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth. ⁴They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁵They were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone. ⁶And in those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them.

⁷In appearance the locusts were like horses equipped for battle. On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, ⁸their hair like women’s hair, and their teeth like lions’ teeth; ⁹they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. ¹⁰They have tails like scorpions, with stingers, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months. ¹¹They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon,⁹ and in Greek he is called Apollyon.¹⁰

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¹² A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ²She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. ³Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. ⁴His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. ⁵And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; ⁶and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days.

⁷And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan,

⁹ That is, *Destruction*.

¹⁰ That is, *Destroyer*.

the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

¹⁰Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming,
 “Now have come the salvation and the power
 and the kingdom of our God
 and the authority of his Messiah,
 for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down,
 who accuses them day and night before our God.
¹¹But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb
 and by the word of their testimony,
 for they did not cling to life even in the face of death.
¹²Rejoice then, you heavens
 and those who dwell in them!
 But woe to the earth and the sea,
 for the devil has come down to you
 with great wrath,
 because he knows that his time is short!”

¹³So when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. ¹⁵Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. ¹⁶But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. ¹⁷Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.

¹⁸Then the dragon took his stand on the sand of the seashore.

13 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names. ²And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth. And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority. ³One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed. In amazement the whole earth followed the beast. ⁴They worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?”

⁵The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. ⁶It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is,

those who dwell in heaven. ⁷Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. It was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation, ⁸and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered.

⁹Let anyone who has an ear listen:

¹⁰If you are to be taken captive,
 into captivity you go;
 if you kill with the sword,
 with the sword you must be killed.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

¹¹Then I saw another beast that rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. ¹²It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and it makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed. ¹³It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of all; ¹⁴and by the signs that it is allowed to perform on behalf of the beast, it deceives the inhabitants of earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived; ¹⁵and it was allowed to give breath¹¹ to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast could even speak and cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. ¹⁶Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, ¹⁷so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. ¹⁸This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty-six.¹²

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17 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore who is seated on many waters, ²with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk.” ³So he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet,

¹¹ Or *spirit*.

¹² Other ancient authorities read *six hundred sixteen*.

and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; ⁸and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations." ⁹And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus.

When I saw her, I was greatly amazed. ¹⁰But the angel said to me, "Why are you so amazed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. ¹¹The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

¹²"This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, ¹³of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while. ¹⁴As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. ¹⁵And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. ¹⁶These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast; ¹⁷they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

¹⁸And he said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the whore is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. ¹⁹And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the whore; they will make her desolate and naked; they will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire. ²⁰For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. ²¹The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

HESIOD, *THEOGONY* — Selections Translated by DEBBIE FELTON

Critical Introduction

Most likely writing sometime in the late eighth or early seventh century BCE, the Greek poet Hesiod is known not so much for elegant poetry but for the earliest extant version of the Greek creation myth. Drawing on Near Eastern creation myths, his *Theogony*, or “Origin of the Gods,” covers the origins of the cosmos, of the earth and everything on it, and of the gods themselves. Ancient Greece was a polytheistic society, and Hesiod’s account of three generations of gods shows them “evolving” from abstractions to monstrous hybrid beings to the anthropomorphic deities known as the Olympians. In mythological terms, the *Theogony* includes a number of elements very common in creation stories around the world, including:

- a **cosmogony**, or account of the origin of the cosmos;
- a **world parent** aspect, in which two entities produce much of the known world, but are then separated from each other so that the world can exist and thrive on its own (the **separation of Earth and Sky** is the most typical version of this motif);
- a **theogony**, or story of the origins of the gods;
- a **genealogy**, listing the various offspring produced by the mating of various entities;
- a **succession myth**, in which younger generations of gods overthrow their elders; and
- a **chaos monster**, a creature representing uncontrollable nature, which must be tamed by a civilizing force.

Hesiod is notorious for his geographically vague descriptions; it is virtually impossible to draw a map of the cosmos based on his account. He focuses instead on how the world came to be in its present form, and especially on the gods themselves, most notably how Zeus brought order to the cosmos by defeating both earlier generations of deities and the monstrous Typhoeus.

Reading Questions

The first four entities that come into being are Chaos, Gaea, Tartarus, and Eros. Why do you suppose Greek tradition saw these particular beings as necessary for everything that came after them? In what specific ways are the female entities characterized as monstrous, as opposed to the male entities? Why do you think Gaea herself produces this last, greatest monster for Zeus to fight? What might Typhoeus represent, and what does it say about Zeus that he can defeat this creature? Why do you think Hesiod focuses so much on the physical environment in his description of all the fighting?

Editorial Notes

Hesiod’s verse, written in epic metre (dactylic hexameter), includes characteristics common to epic poetry such as formulaic lines and traditional epithets. Hesiod’s poetry, however, shows more repetition and less variation of expression than Homer’s, and includes more awkward and ambiguous expressions. An excessive number of footnotes would be required to explain every time this translation varies from the Greek, so for the purposes of this sourcebook, only those expressions that diverge most widely from the Greek have been noted.

Further Reading

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HESIOD, *THEOGONY*

Selections

Translated by DEBBIE FELTON

Selection I (lines 104–206): The first gods and monsters, and the birth of Aphrodite

Hail, daughters of Zeus!¹ Grant me sweet song.
Make famous the divine race of undying gods
 who live forever, 105
who were born from Gaea and starry Uranus²
and from dark Night; and whom the salty Sea brought up.
Tell how the gods and earth first came into being,
and the rivers and the immense sea, stormy with waves,
and the shining stars and the vast expanse
 of the sky above 110
and the gods born from them—the gods, givers of good
 fortune;
and how they distributed their wealth and shared honours
 among themselves
and how they first took Olympus with its deep valleys.
Tell me these things, Muses, who have Olympus as your home
tell me from the beginning, and tell me which of them first
 came into being. 115

Indeed, Chaos was the very first to come into being,³
and next came broad-bosomed Gaea, the secure seat
of the immortal gods who dwell on the peak of snowy Olympus,
and murky Tartarus,⁴ in the farthest corner of the broad earth,
and Eros, most attractive among the deathless deities, 120
who releases tension and overpowers
the reason and wisdom within all gods and men.
From Chaos, both Erebus⁵ and black Night were born,
and from Night both Aether⁶ and Day were born,

¹ The nine Muses, offspring of the god Zeus and goddess Mnemosyne, “Memory.” The Greeks believed that the Muses, goddesses who represented various aspects of literature, art, and science, were the source of inspiration for various artists, including poets.

² The Greek words for “earth” and “sky,” respectively.

³ The Greek word “chaos” does not mean disorder, but rather “chasm,” “abyss,” “yawning gap,” or “void.”

⁴ “Tartarus,” a vague concept not well delineated by Hesiod (see lines 720–23, below), appears to be the lowest or deepest part of the world. Successive generations of gods used Tartarus as a prison for their enemies. At the same time, Hesiod here personified Tartarus as one of the primordial elements of the cosmos.

⁵ The personification of Darkness.

⁶ The air or atmosphere.

whom she bore, impregnated by Erebus, after uniting with
 him in love. 125
And Gaea first bore starry Uranus, equal to herself,
so that he would cover her all around,
and so that he would always be a steadfast home for the
 blessed gods.
And she produced the high mountains, pleasant haunts
of the Nymphs⁷ who dwell in their forested glens. 130
Gaea also brought forth the restless open expanse, stormy
 with waves,
the Sea—all by herself, without delightful affection,⁸
but then with Uranus she bore deep-eddying Ocean,
and Coeus and Crius and Hyperion and Iapetus
and Thea and Rhea and Themis and Mnemosyne 135
and gold-crowned Phoebe and lovely Tethys.⁹
After these, the youngest, was born devious Cronus,
most clever of her offspring—and he hated his forceful father:

Earth also birthed the lawless Cyclopes, prideful at heart:
Brontes and Steropes and stubborn Arges, 140
who gave thunder to Zeus and made the lighting-bolt.
They resembled the gods in every other way,
except that a single eye lay in the center of their brow.
So the Cyclopes took their name from this feature—
the one round eye set in the middle of their forehead. 145
Power and strength and skill were in their works.

Others too were born of Gaea and Uranus:
three children, gigantic and strong beyond words,
Cottus and Briareus and Gyes, insolent offspring.
One hundred arms sprang from their shoulders— 150
monstrous! And fifty heads grew from the shoulders
of each, upon their massive limbs.
A fierce, monstrous strength was in their massive shapes.

⁷ Nymphs, in general, were minor female deities associated with various aspects of nature, such as the mountains, woods, and streams. They were “spirits” personifying nature. The Greeks used different terms to refer to nymphs associated with various habitats: nymphs of streams and springs, for examples, were *naiads*, while mountain nymphs were *oreads*, and nymphs of ash-trees were *meliads* (see line 187, below).

⁸ That is, without a mate.

⁹ Ocean, Coeus, Crius, Hyperion, Iapetus, Cronus, Tethys, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne, Phoebe, and Thea comprised the original twelve Titans.

They were the most terrible of all the children Gaea and
 Uranus bore,
 and hated by their own father from the very beginning: 155
 as soon as each of them was born, he would hide them away,
 in a hollow place within Gaea, and not allow them into the light—
 and Uranus rejoiced in his wicked deed.
 But Gaea groaned, filled with her gigantic burden,
 and came up with a cunning, pernicious plan. 160
 Immediately creating the element of grey adamant¹⁰
 she fashioned a sturdy sickle and spoke to her dear children,
 and encouraging them, grieving at heart, said:

“My children, offspring of an arrogant father,
 if you are willing to obey me, we may punish him 165
 for his vile outrage against you;
 for it was he who first plotted despicable deeds.”

Thus she spoke, but fear seized them all
 and they kept a stunned silence.
 But then great Cronus, the devious one, taking heart,
 answered his dear mother with these words:

“Mother, I will take it upon myself to do this deed. 170¹¹
 I don’t care at all about our father—
 can’t even bear to say his name—
 for it was he who first plotted despicable deeds.”

So he spoke, and great Gaea took heart.
 Hiding him, she set him in ambush, and put into his hands
 the saw-toothed sickle, and explained her entire strategy. 175

Uranus arrived, bringing darkness and, desiring sex,
 spread himself all around, enclosing Gaea in his embrace.
 But his son, from the hiding place, stretched out his left hand,
 while with his right he took the massive, long, jagged sickle
 and eagerly cut off his own father’s genitals 180
 and tossed them aside to be swept far away.
 Nor did they fall from his hand uselessly,
 for Gaea received all the bloody drops that dripped down.
 And, as time passed, she gave birth to the mighty Furies¹²

¹⁰ The Greek *adamas*, literally meaning “unconquerable,” was a term for the hardest possible known metal; in Hesiod’s time, this might have referred to iron. Alternatively, it might refer to a very hard rock, such as flint.

¹¹ Some rearrangement has been necessary for reasons of language and syntax, which affects the line numbering.

¹² The Erinyes, more commonly known as the Furies, were the goddesses of vengeance.

and to the great Giants,¹³ shining in their armour, 185
 holding long spears in their hands.
 And she bore the Nymphs, whom people
 on the broad earth call “Meliae.”¹⁴

Right after cutting off his father’s genitals with the sickle,
 Cronus threw them down from the land into the stormy sea.
 They drifted on the sea for a long time, and around them
 white foam was churned up from the immortal flesh;¹⁵ 190
 in it, there grew a girl. First, she floated to sacred Cythera;
 then, she came to Cyprus,¹⁶ surrounded by the sea.
 And she came out of the sea there as a revered and
 beauteous goddess,
 And grass grew under her slender feet as she walked.
 Men and gods alike call her “Aphrodite” 195
 and “Foam-born Goddess” and “Garlanded Cytherea,”
 because she grew from the sea-foam and arrived at Cythera;
 and they call her also “Cyprogenea,” because
 she grew up in wave-washed Cyprus;
 and “Philommedes”¹⁷ because she arose
 from the genitals of Uranus. 200
 Eros accompanied her, and sensual Desire followed her
 from the moment she was born, as she took her place among
 the gathering of gods.
 From that moment on she has held this honour
 and obtained this lot among men and the immortal gods:
 the charms of maidens and their smiles and deceits 205
 and sweet delight and love and caressing.

Selection 2 (lines 265–335): One monster after another

Thaumas took as a wife Electra,¹⁸
 daughter of deep-flowing Ocean 265

¹³ The Gigantes, or Giants, were a group of beings known more for their strength, aggression, and arrogance than for being literally very large. During Hesiod’s time, in Greek art they were depicted simply as armed warriors the same size as humans.

¹⁴ The nymphs of the ash-trees; *melia* is “ash-tree.”

¹⁵ Again, line numbering is irregular here (and in places following) due to the needs of the translation.

¹⁶ Cythera is an island off the southern coast of Greece; Cyprus is a much larger island, situated in the eastern Mediterranean. In antiquity, both sites were sacred to Aphrodite, with Cyprus being the centre of her cult worship.

¹⁷ Literally, “loving genitals.”

¹⁸ Thaumas, Electra, and many of the other characters mentioned in the following lines were very minor deities whose main appearance is here in the *Theogony*. For the genealogies in lines 265–336, notes are provided only for the more important figures.

and she bore swift Iris and the fair-haired Harpies:

Aello and Ocypetes,¹⁹

who with their swift wings keep up with the gusts of wind
and birds—for that is how high in the air they fly.

And what's more, Ceto²⁰ bore to Phorcys the fair-skinned

Graiae,²¹ 270

grey-haired from birth; indeed, both immortal gods
and men who dwell on earth call them the "Graiae"—
beautifully-dressed Pempredo and yellow-robed Enyo.

Ceto also bore the Gorgons, Stheno and Euryale and Medusa,
who dwell beyond the known ocean

in the farthest reaches, toward where the sun sets,
where the sweet-voiced Hesperides live. 275

Two of the Gorgons were immortal and ageless,
but Medusa, who was mortal, came to a bad end.

The dark-haired one, Poseidon,²² lay with her
in a soft meadow among the spring flowers.

And when Perseus killed her by cutting off her head, 280

great Chrysaor sprang up, and the horse Pegasus—²³
the latter so called because he was born

near the springs of Ocean,

and the former because he held a golden sword in his hand.

Pegasus flew away, abandoning the earth, nurturer of flocks,
and arrived among the immortals; he dwells

in the palace of Zeus, 285

19 The Harpies were creatures with the heads of women and the bodies of birds. Their names mean "Storm" and "Swift-flying," respectively.

20 The Greek *cetos* was also the generic term for "huge fish," "whale," or "sea monster." The modern science of cetology (the study of whales, dolphins, and porpoises, i.e. order Cetacea) takes its name from this term.

21 The Graiae, or "Grey Ones," were sisters who, in later mythological tradition, had only one eye and one tooth between them. Hesiod names only two Graiae (Pempredo and Enyo) but later myths add a third (Dino). The only myth in which they play a role is that of the hero Perseus, who temporarily stole their eye until they gave him the information he needed to complete his quest to slay the Gorgon Medusa (see line 280, below).

22 Poseidon, one of the brothers of Zeus, was god of the Sea.

23 Chrysaor literally means "the man with the golden sword," as explained in subsequent lines. This character has no major role in any Greek myth, other than his fathering the creatures Geryon and Echidna, as described below. Pegasus, the famous winged horse, aided the hero Bellerophon on his quest to slay the Chimera. Pegasus did not, as various modern films would have it, aid the hero Perseus: note that Pegasus is not born until after Perseus slays Medusa. "Pegasus" most likely derives from *pēgē*, the Greek word for "spring" or "fountain."

bringing the thunder and lightning bolts to that shrewd god.

Chrysaor fathered three-headed Geryon,

after lying with Callirhoe, daughter of noble Ocean.

But the strength of Heracles²⁴ killed Geryon
alongside his lumbering oxen, on the island Erythea 290

on a day when he was driving his broad-browed herd

to sacred Tiryns, after he had crossed wide Ocean

and killed Orthus²⁵ and the cowherd Eurytion

in the dusky stables beyond noble Ocean.

And in a hollow grotto Ceto also bore another

extraordinary creature, 295

utterly unlike mortal men and the immortal gods,

astounding, fearless Echidna;²⁶

half of her is a bright-eyed, fair-cheeked nymph,

but the other half is a prodigious serpent, terrifying and gigantic
and scaly, eating raw flesh in the depths of revered Gaea. 300

There she dwells, in a cave formed by a curved rock,

far from the undying gods and mortal men;

there the gods allotted a home for her, known far and wide.

And so grim Echidna keeps watch in Arima under the earth,

an immortal nymph, unaging for all her days. 305

People say that Typhon,²⁷ terrifying and violent and lawless,

lay with her, the bright-eyed nymph, and that

becoming pregnant, she gave birth to audacious children.

First she bore Orthus, the hound of Geryon.

The second child she birthed was immense,

unmanageable, 310

unspeakable, savage: Cerberus, the fifty-headed, fierce,

reckless, trumpet-voiced hound of Hades.²⁸

24 Heracles, one of the most well known heroes of Greek myth, was famous for his extraordinary strength and for the twelve Labours he was sent on to atone for killing his family in a fit of madness brought on by the goddess Hera, who hated Heracles because he was the illegitimate son of Zeus, Hera's husband. Obtaining the cattle of Geryon was Heracles's tenth Labour. The Romans called him "Hercules."

25 As explained below (line 309), Geryon's ferocious dog, brother of Cerberus (see below).

26 See *Ovid's Metamorphoses* in this volume for references to the children of Echidna.

27 There is some ambiguity as to whether this Typhon (Typhaon in the Greek) is the same character as Typhoeus (Typhoeus in the Greek, line 821, below), but the consensus is that both names refer to the same creature.

28 Hesiod gives Cerberus fifty heads; later tradition settled on three. Cerberus guarded the entrance to Hades, the land of the dead. "Borrowing" Cerberus from Hades was Heracles's twelfth and final Labour.

Then she bore a third, the Lernaean Hydra,²⁹
 full of destructive thoughts,
 whom the white-armed goddess Hera cherished,
 bearing a boundless grudge against mighty Heracles. 315
 And he, Heracles, of the house of Amphitryon and, as well,
 the son of Zeus,
 killed the Hydra with his ruthless steel,
 with the aid of brave Iolaus,
 by the design of Athena, leader of warriors.
 Echidna also gave birth to the Chimaera, who breathed
 unquenchable fire,
 a creature terrifying and immense and swift and strong, 320
 who had three heads; one was that of a fierce lion,
 another, that of a goat, and the third, that of a snake,
 a mighty dragon.
 In front she was a lion; in back a snake,
 and in the middle a goat,
 breathing out a terrible blast of blazing fire.
 Noble Bellerophon and Pegasus overpowered her. 325

Echidna also bore the deadly Sphinx, bane of the Cadmeans,³⁰
 after being seduced by Orthus; and she bore the Nemean Lion,³¹
 which Hera, noble wife of Zeus, raised and let loose
 in the hills of Nemea, a calamity for men;

²⁹ The Hydra of Lerna (an area in southern Greece, known for its many springs and a lake) was usually depicted in Greek myth and art as a snaky creature with several heads (anywhere from five to a hundred), all of which had venomous breath. Issuing from the water, it would ravage the countryside, destroying crops and herds. Heracles killed the Hydra as his second Labour; though, more accurately, he did not so much kill it as put it out of commission: every time one of the Hydra's heads was cut off, it immediately grew back (some myths say two or more heads grew to replace every one cut off). Heracles, with the aid of his nephew Iolaus, cauterized the stump of each head to prevent regrowth. Only one head could not be destroyed, so Heracles buried the creature and set a rock on top of it, and that was the end of the Hydra. The creature's name derives from the Greek *hydr-*, "water:"

³⁰ "Cadmeans" refers to the people of Thebes, a city in central Greece founded by Cadmus, who also became its first king. Later, during the time of Oedipus, the Sphinx became the "bane" of Thebes because she blocked the entrance to the city and killed anyone who could not answer her famous riddle, the main version of which is this: "What goes on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?" Only Oedipus provided the correct answer: "Man," who as an infant crawls on all fours, walks on two legs as an adult, and uses a cane in old age.

³¹ This gigantic lion was also invulnerable, as its skin could not be pierced by any weapon. Heracles's first Labour was to kill the Nemean Lion, which he managed to do by strangling it with his bare hands. He then flayed the creature with its own claws (the only thing that could penetrate its skin), and wore the lion's hide as a cloak.

there the lion destroyed the tribes of men who lived there 330
 and lorded over Nemean Tretus and Apesas also.³²
 But the force of Heracles' strength overpowered the lion.

And Ceto, joining in love with Phorcys, bore her youngest child,
 the terrible serpent that, in the depths of the dark earth,
 at its farthest edges, guards the golden apples.³³ 335
 This was the offspring of Ceto and Phorcys.

Selection 3 (lines 617–743): The Titanomachy

But when first Uranus, their father, became angry at Briareus
 And Cottus and Gyes,³⁴ he bound them in strong chains,
 envying their excessive might and their physiques
 and their stature. He forced them to live
 under the broad earth. 620
 There, they were sent to dwell under the great earth,
 at its extremity,
 at its very borders, suffering hardships,
 greatly distressed for a long time,
 exceedingly vexed at heart.
 But the son of Cronus³⁵ and the other deathless gods,
 whom fair-haired Rhea bore in her love for Cronus, 625
 led them up into the light again thanks to Gaea's cunning.
 For she explained everything to the gods in detail:
 how, with these three, they would gain victory and their
 glorious goal.

The Titan gods and those who were the offspring of Cronus 630
 fought for too long, with heartbreaking effort,
 each against the other, through stubborn battles,
 the high-born Titans from lofty Othrys³⁶
 and the gods of Olympus, givers of good fortune,
 whom fair-haired Rhea bore after lying with Cronus.
 These, indeed, filled with gut-wrenching bile, 635
 fought each other then for ten whole years in a row.
 Nor was there any solution for their hateful strife,
 or any settlement on either side,
 and a victory in the war was still possible for both alike.

³² Mountains in the area of Nemea, in the northeastern Peloponnese.

³³ The serpent referred to here is Ladon, who guarded the golden apples of the Hesperides. Heracles's eleventh Labour was to steal these golden apples, which he did by tricking Atlas (son of the Titan Iapetus) into helping him.

³⁴ The hundred-handers.

³⁵ That is, Zeus.

³⁶ A mountain in central Greece.

But when the son of Cronus provided to these three
all the necessary equipment, and nectar and ambrosia,
which the gods themselves eat, 640
the fighting spirit arose within all their breasts.
And after they partook of the nectar and delightful ambrosia,
then the father of gods and men said to them:

“Heed me, noble children of Gaea and Uranus,
so that I may say what I really feel. 645
For a very long time now, every day,
the Titan gods and those who are the offspring of Cronus
have been fighting against each other for victory and power.
Now show your great strength and invincible force
in baneful battle against the Titans 650
remembering our amiable friendship;
having suffered greatly,
you are coming back into the light again from your cruel
imprisonment,
out from under murky darkness, because of our planning.”

So he spoke: and noble Cottus answered back:
“Noble god, you are not saying anything
we do not already know. 655
We ourselves are well aware of your keen mind and
perception,
and you have become one who wards off icy doom
from the immortals.
Through your cleverness, Lord, son of Cronus,
we have returned back again from the murky darkness,
from our cruel fetters, after suffering unexpectedly. 660
So now, with our minds intent and with
well-considered counsel,
we will support your strength in this dire conflict,
fighting against the Titans throughout the fierce battle.”

So he spoke. And the gods, givers of good fortune,
were very pleased when they heard his words.
And their spirits longed even more strongly for war. 665
They all, both female and male, on that very day,
stirred up baneful battle—the Titan gods
and the children of Cronus,
and those, fearful and strong and overwhelmingly fierce,
whom Zeus brought up into the light from Erebus
under the earth. 670
One hundred arms sprang from the shoulders
of all of them alike,
And fifty heads grew from the shoulders of each,
upon their massive limbs.
These, then, stood against the Titans in baneful battle,
holding huge rocks in their hulking hands. 675

Opposite them, the Titans readily strengthened their ranks,
and then both sides at once showed the work of their
strength and might:
the wide sea echoed terribly and the great earth resounded,
and broad heaven, shaken, groaned aloud,
and high Olympus trembled at its base 680
and quivered under the immortals,
and the tremor reached deep down to murky Tartarus,
as too did the sound of their heavy footfalls
and the huge rocks thrown in their furious onslaught.
Thus they hurled their thundering weapons at each other.
And the din from both sides clamouring
reached the starry sky 685
as they clashed together with a great battle-cry.

Nor did Zeus any longer restrain his strength;
rather, his very heart was now filled with fury,
and he showed off the extent of his might.
From heaven and from Olympus
he came, hurtling lightning all the way. 690
From his sturdy hand the bolts flew one after another,
thunder and lightning, blazing with divine fire.
And all around the earth shrieked, aflame,
and the immense forests crashed and crackled
as they burned.
The whole earth baked, and the streams of Ocean 695
and the barren sea boiled over; the searing air
blasted the earth-born Titans on every side,
and unceasing flames reached the atmosphere.
Despite their strength, the flashing blaze
of the thunder and lightning bolts
blinded them. An awful heat spread over Chaos; 700
and from what one could see with eyes or hear with ears,
it seemed as if Gaea and broad Uranus were colliding;
such a tremendous crash would have risen
if Gaea were being dashed to ruin
and Uranus were striking her down from above,
so great was the noise produced when the gods came
together in strife. 705
And the fierce winds caused earthquakes
and swirling dust-clouds
and storms and thunder and blazing lightning-bolts—
the weapons of great Zeus—and carried the shrieking
and roaring
into the middle of the two sides; and the unparalleled
din of terrible strife arose.
The might of their actions was evident.
But the fighting turned; 710
before that, though, the two sides, attacking each other,
clashed continually in cruel combat.

And on the front lines, Cottus and Briareus and Gyes,
 who couldn't get enough of war, urged on the bitter battle.
 They hurled three hundred rocks from
 their brawny hands, 715
 and overshadowed the Titans with these missiles,
 and sent them under the vast earth,
 and bound them in tight chains
 after conquering them by might, despite their daring strength.
 As far down away from earth as heaven is above earth, 720
 that is the distance from earth into murky Tartarus:
 for an anvil of bronze, falling from heaven
 for nine nights and days,
 would reach the earth on the tenth,
 and again for nine nights and days
 an anvil of bronze, falling from earth,
 would reach Tartarus on the tenth. 725
 Around Tartarus is set a bronze barrier, and around its rim
 Night is spread in three rows, while from above grow
 the roots of earth and of the barren sea.
 There the Titan gods, under the deep, dim darkness,
 lie hidden away in a dank space at the ends of the earth
 thanks to the devices of cloud-gathering Zeus. 730
 And they are not allowed to leave.
 Poseidon placed bronze gates there,
 and a wall encircles it on every side.
 There Gyes and Cottus and high-hearted Briareus are stationed,
 trusted guards placed by aegis-bearing Zeus. 735
 And there, set out in order, are the beginnings
 and endings of everything:
 of twilight earth, and murky Tartarus, and the barren sea,
 and starry sky:
 A chasm dank and disturbing, a place even the gods detest,
 so vast that if once someone were to venture inside its
 entrance,
 not before a year had passed would he reach its finish; 740
 rather, fierce windy blasts, one after another,
 would buffet him to and fro. This monstrosity evokes awe
 even among the immortal gods.

**Selection 4 (lines 820–80):
 The battle between Zeus and Typhoeus**

After Zeus drove the Titans out of heaven, 820
 massive Gaea bore her youngest child, Typhoeus,
 after mating with Tartarus through the influence
 of golden Aphrodite.
 His hands were incredibly strong, as evident in his deeds,
 and the feet of this mighty god were untiring.
 From his shoulders grew one hundred snaky heads, 825
 those of a terrible dragon, all licking with clammy tongues,

and under the brows, from the eyes in those alien heads, fire
 flashed forth;
 from all the heads flame blazed as he glared.
 And there were voices emanating from all those terrible
 heads
 uttering all kinds of awful noises: 830
 at one time producing sounds such as the gods would
 understand,
 but at another time bellowing like a bull out of control and
 proud of it;
 sometimes they roared like a stout-hearted lion,
 and other times like yelping puppies, an amazing sound,
 and yet other times Typhoeus made a whistling noise
 that rang all through the tall mountains. 835

And an irrevocable deed would have come to pass that day:
 he would have ruled over mortals and immortals alike
 if the father of gods and men had not had
 keenly perceived the danger.
 His thundering was strong and mighty, and the earth
 resounded all around,
 as did the vast sky from above,
 and the streams of the sea and the ocean 840
 and the lowest reaches of earth. Great Olympus
 shook under the immortal feet
 of the god as he rushed on, and Gaea groaned.
 The burning heat from Zeus's thunder and lightning
 and fire from the monstrous creature 845
 and from blasting winds and blazing bolts
 spread from both sides through the dark blue sea.
 All earth's surface, and the sky and waters, seethed;
 high surf pounded the beaches and swept the shores
 and the earth shook constantly at the onslaught of the
 immortals.
 Hades trembled in fear, though he ruled
 over the decaying dead; 850
 the Titans, too, companions of Cronus, recoiled
 at the unceasing clamour and dreadful clashing.

When Zeus had gathered his strength and seized his weapons,
 thunder and lightning and foreboding storm-clouds,³⁷
 he leapt down from Olympus and struck Typhoeus 855
 and burned all the awful heads of the dreadful creature.
 And when Zeus had overpowered Typhoeus, raining blows
 upon him,

³⁷ In Greek the terminology is somewhat repetitive: βροντήν τε στεροπήν τε καὶ αἰθαλόεντα κεραυνόν translates literally to “thunder and lightning and also dark [or blazing] thunderbolts,” so I have opted for some variation. Cf. line 707 above, which in Greek is the same.

he tumbled down, wounded, and massive earth groaned.
Flame shot from from the lightning-struck lord
in the dark rugged glens of the mountain 860
when he was struck down. Much of the massive earth
was set ablaze
by the inhuman vapour and melted like tin
when heat-softened in a well ventilated crucible
by the skill of workers; or like iron,
the hardest material of all,
when, softened in a burning fire in the mountain glens, 865
it melts onto the divine earth by the art of Hephaestus.
Indeed, in this way the earth melted in the blaze of the
intense fire.
And Zeus resolutely cast Typhoeus down into wide Tartarus.

HOMER, *THE ODYSSEY*, ODYSSEUS AND HIS MEN ENCOUNTER THE CYCLOPS

Translated by DEBBIE FELTON

Critical Introduction

Written sometime in the eighth century BCE, *The Odyssey*, along with *The Iliad*, was first passed down orally from generation to generation for hundreds of years, resulting in formulaic elements such as consistent epithets (e.g. “rosy-fingered Dawn”) and repetitions of entire lines. These two epic poems, the earliest works of Western literature, reflect an earlier period in Greek history: a late Bronze Age society (ca. thirteenth and twelfth centuries BCE) of cities ruled by kings. *The Iliad* focuses on a period of mere weeks during the Trojan War, which was a ten-year-long assault on the citadel of Troy in Asia Minor by combined Greek forces under the command of King Agamemnon. *The Odyssey*, on the other hand, covers the ten-year journey of the Greek warrior Odysseus as he tries to return from Troy to his home on Ithaca, an island off the Greek mainland.

The Odyssey opens a full ten years after the Trojan War; Odysseus has been absent for twenty years and is presumed dead by the majority of people on Ithaca. Only his wife Penelope and son Telemachus hold out hope that he may still return. Odysseus, we find out, has been held against his will for seven years by Calypso, a sea nymph. When she finally releases him, his raft is wrecked at sea and he washes up on the shore of the island of the Phaeacians, who welcome him and ask to hear his story. This begins a long “flashback” portion of poem, a narrative of all Odysseus’s experiences since leaving Troy. His adventures up to this point, as he tells the Phaeacians, include the following:

- a piratical raid on the Cicones, a tribe in Thrace;
- an encounter with the Lotus-Eaters, a people addicted to the lethargy-inducing lotus-fruit;
- exploration of the Cyclops’s island;
- a short stay with Aeolus, king of the Winds;
- being attacked by the Laestrygonians, a tribe of giant cannibals;
- meeting Circe, an enchantress who turns Odysseus’s men into swine;
- a voyage to Hades, land of the dead;
- avoiding the Sirens, whose sweet song aims to lure sailors to their deaths on the rocky shore;

- running afoul of Scylla and Charybdis, two monstrous creatures who devour men and ships, respectively;
- trespassing on the island of Thrinacia, home to the sacred cattle of Helios, god of the Sun; and
- ending up on Calypso’s island.

It is Odysseus’s relatively early encounter with the Cyclopes, a tribe of one-eyed giants living off the land, that marks a significant turning point in his voyage. This is the first episode in which he and his crew face a “monster,” but, more significantly, it is Odysseus’s interactions with the Cyclops Polyphemus that result in the loss of his ships and crew and the years-long delay of his return home to his wife and son.

As Odysseus tells his story, he draws a contrast between the “lawless” society of the Cyclopes and the “civilized” Greek society he himself inhabits. Notably, although Odysseus occasionally remarks upon the size and strength of Polyphemus, it is the Cyclops’s behaviour rather than physical appearance that disturbs the Greeks. According to Odysseus, the Cyclopes, as a group, have no hierarchical structure, no government, and no laws to live by. In Odysseus’s view, this makes them inferior. He remarks that each Cyclops sets the rules for his own family, and that they do not care about each other’s problems. Of more concern to Odysseus, though, is what he considers Polyphemus’s utter disregard for the guest-host relationship. The Greeks held the concept of *xenia*, or “guest-friendship,” in very high regard: when strangers arrived at your doorstep, far from their home, the custom was to provide food, shelter, and various gifts. The expectation of guests was that they would behave well and also present their hosts with gifts. One aspect of the god Zeus, head of the Greek pantheon, was his role as the patron god of hospitality; he looked after guests and avenged wrongs done to them. Polyphemus, however, expresses his disdain for both *xenia* and Zeus—the Cyclopes do not worship the Olympian gods—and instead kills and eats several of Odysseus’s men. Odysseus, renowned for his cleverness, comes up with a plan with which to best the Cyclops. He and his surviving men get away, but Odysseus cannot resist boasting about his clever trick—which allows Polyphemus to curse, very specifically, “Odysseus, Laertes’s son, who lives on Ithaca.”

Reading Questions

This passage provides a good chance for perspective-taking. Who is really the monster here: Odysseus or Polyphemus? The ancient Greeks would have sympathized with Odysseus, but the text provides a lot of reasons for a different audience to consider the plight of Polyphemus. Note that Odysseus's men warn him not to explore the Cyclops's cave unnecessarily: they already have enough supplies. Moreover, Odysseus's men urge him not to boast to the Cyclops, but he doesn't listen. What other evidence can you find to argue for or against these two characters as being "monstrous"?

Editorial Notes

Marked line numbers in the translation indicate the corresponding lines in the Greek text. For ease of reading, the original Greek metre of dactylic hexameter (or any other metre) has not been reproduced in English, and the line breaks in English tend to be by phrase or thought rather than by any exact match with the Greek lines.

Further Reading

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HOMER, *THE ODYSSEY*, ODYSSEUS AND HIS MEN ENCOUNTER THE CYCLOPS

Translated by DEBBIE FELTON

From there we sailed aggrieved at heart, 105
and arrived at the land of the Cyclopes who,
arrogant and lawless,
trusting in the immortal gods, do not plant trees or plow;
instead, the unsown, untilled earth brings forth
everything for them,
wheat and barley, and the vines that produce
wine from fine grapes; and thundering Zeus cherishes them.
They have no democratic assemblies, no law-courts;
rather, they dwell on the high tops of lofty mountains,
in hollow caves, each looking after his own family,
but not watching out for his fellows. 115

There happened to be a forested island stretching out
alongside the shore,
not especially close to the land of the Cyclopes, nor yet too far,
teeming with wild goats, there being no men to scatter them off:
no hunters came there to work in the woods
while wending their way over the high peaks.
This isle held no domesticated flocks, no arable land,
but, unsown and unploughed, had lacked men for all its days,
sustaining only the bleating goats.
For the Cyclopes had no red-cheeked ships, 125
nor anyone skilled in carpentry, who might build for them
sturdy ships to carry them to the cities of men—
for men often use ships to cross the sea to sojourn
with each other.
Indeed, craftsmen would have made this island
usable for the Cyclopes,
for there was nothing wrong with it at all,
and it would bear everything in season.
On this island were green grasslands by the shores
of the grey sea,
dewy and soft, where the vines would never wither,
and land fit for ploughing,
and fields where they could always harvest plenty of grain,
since the underlying soil was so rich. 135
And this island's harbour had good spots for mooring—
so good there was no need to throw out anchor-stones,
no need for cables, no need to rope the prow.
But after softly sailing to shore, sailors could wait
until they had a mind to set to sea again, when the breezes
blew gently.
And it happened that from the mouth of this harbour
a clear spring flowed

from a cavern, around which black poplar trees grew.
To this spot we sailed, but some god must have guided us
through the dim darkness,
for no light shone through the overcast sky; rather,
the night fog hung thick around the ships, nor could the moon,
closed in by the clouds, cast a mote of light
through the mist. 145

At that point none of us could see the island,
nor did we see the long low waves rolling toward the shore,
until we beached our sturdy ships.
And when we put our ships to shore, we furled the sails
and went ashore ourselves; falling right to sleep,
we awaited the bright dawn.

When in the early morning rosy-fingered Dawn shone forth,
we roamed about the island, marvelling at all it held.
And nymphs, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus,¹
roused the wild mountain goats, so that our company
could make a meal: 155
Immediately we took from the ships our curved bows
and long spears;
dividing ourselves into three groups, we went hunting,
and Zeus quickly provided more than enough game.
I commanded twelve ships and to each nine goats were
chosen by lot,
but for me alone they set aside ten.

Then all day long, until the sun set,
we sat feasting on abundant meat and sweet wine,
for our ships' supply of this gladdening drink
had not yet run out;
rather, there was a good amount left, for each ship had
drawn a full store of amphorae when we sacked the
sanctuary of the Cicones.² 165

¹ Nymphs, in general, were minor female deities associated with various aspects of nature, such as the mountains, woods, and streams. They were "spirits" personifying nature. The Greeks used different terms to refer to nymphs associated with various habitats: nymphs of streams and springs, for examples, were *naiads*, while mountain nymphs were *oreads*, and nymphs of ash-trees were *meliads*.

² For the Cicones, see the Critical Introduction. *Amphorae* (*amphora*, singular) were containers of various shapes and sizes, usually made of clay, and used mainly for storage and transport of liquids such as wine and olive oil.

And we gazed across at the land of the Cyclopes,
 close enough that we could see
 smoke from their fires and hear their voices
 and the bleating of herds.
 When the sun set and darkness came on,
 we again lay down to sleep on the shore.

When in the early morning rosy-fingered Dawn shone forth,
 I called my men together and addressed them, saying,
 “Stay here for the moment, my faithful comrades,
 while I go with my own ship’s crew to see what kind
 of men those are,
 whether they are inclined to violence and are
 uncivilized and unjust, 175
 or whether they welcome foreigners, and
 respect the laws of Zeus.”

At this I boarded my ship, and called my companions
 to come aboard also,
 and to release the mooring ropes. They embarked right away,
 and, taking their seats in order on the rowing-benches,
 swept the grey sea with their oars. When we arrived
 at the place,
 which was not far, we saw a cave high on a cliff near the water,
 overhung with laurel trees. Many flocks lay lazily around,
 both sheep and goats,
 and outside the cave was a clearing,
 ringed round with quarried stones and tall pines
 and lofty oaks. 185
 There a gigantic man took his rest, who tended his flocks
 alone and far from his kind.
 He did not associate with others, but isolated himself,
 thinking lawless thoughts,
 for he was indeed a mighty monster, quite unlike
 a man who makes grain into bread;
 rather, he resembled a forested peak in the lofty mountains,
 one that stands apart from the others.

Then I commanded most of my faithful crew
 to stay there by the ship and guard it,
 while I, selecting twelve of my best men,
 went on my way. 195
 I took with me a goatskin filled with the dark, sweet wine,
 given to me by Maron, son of Euanthes, priest of Apollo,³

3 Apollo, son of Zeus and the goddess Leto, was the god of many of the more “civilized” aspects of Greek life, such as science, music, and poetry, and in this capacity presided over the nine Muses. He was also associated with intelligence, reason, and rationality. At the same time, he was the god of prophecy—which might seem irrational, but this aspect of Apollo was connected with poetry, as oracular utterances

the god who guards Ismaros. Maron lived in a wooded grove
 sacred to Phoebus Apollo, and had given it to me because
 we reverently protected him and his son and wife.
 And he gave me splendid gifts: seven talents of finely
 wrought gold,
 a mixing-bowl made entirely of silver, and twelve jars
 of sweet, unmixed wine, a divine drink. 205
 Nor did any among the servants in his household,
 male or female,
 know about this; only he and his dear wife, and his steward.
 Whenever they would drink the dark, honey-sweet wine,
 Maron, filling one cup, would pour in twenty measures of water,
 and such a divinely sweet scent would waft from the bowl
 that no one could resist a taste.
 This is the wine I took with me, filling a large goatskin,
 also bringing along a leather sack full of provisions,
 for I felt in my heart that I would soon meet a formidable foe
 possessed of great strength—but uncivilized, knowing
 absolutely nothing about justice or law. 215

We quickly got to the cave, but did not find him inside
 because he had taken his plump sheep out to pasture.
 Entering the cave, we observed every detail:
 there were baskets heavy with cheese and pens crowded
 with lambs and kids. Each kind was penned separately,
 according to age: the newborns apart from the newly weaned,
 and those in-between also in a pen of their own.
 Milk-buckets and wide bowls and all sorts of well-made vessels,
 into which he had milked, overflowed with whey.
 Then my comrades spoke up, urgently begging me 225
 to take the cheeses and leave, and to drive the lambs and kids
 to the swift ship and sail away over the briny sea.
 But I didn’t heed them—would that I had; but I stayed to see
 the man whose home this was, in case he would offer us
 hospitality.
 Unfortunately, his appearance would not prove a welcome
 sight for my companions.

Then we kindled a fire, offered a sacrifice, and helped
 ourselves to the cheese,
 and sat down inside the cave to wait for him to return from
 pasturing his flocks.

were usually in verse form, and Apollo was thought to inspire seers in the same way that he and the Muses inspired poets. One of his epithets, “Phoebus” (line 201), meaning “bright one” or “shining one,” referred originally to the light of reason that Apollo represented; in Hesiod’s time, the Greeks did not associate Apollo with the sun, and had a separate sun deity, Helios. During the third century BCE, though, they seem to have started conflating Apollo with Helios, and by the third century CE there was little to no distinction between the two deities.

He carried with him into the cave a heavy load of dry wood
with which to cook his supper and threw it down
with a clatter. 235

Frightened, we backed into a corner of the cavern.
He drove his ewes—the ones he milked—into the wide cave,
but left the males outside, the rams and the he-goats, in the
broad clearing.

Then, lifting high a door-stone, he set it in place;
it was a huge, heavy thing, so large that twenty-two sturdy
four-wheeled wagons
could not have budged it at all—that's how enormous this
stone was!

Then he sat down and milked the ewes and bleating goats,
all in turn, and put each with her young. After this 245
he curdled half of the white milk, placed it in plaited
baskets, and stored it away;

the other half he put in jars, for himself to drink
with his meals.

But after he had efficiently done all these chores,
he made a fire and saw us, and said to us,
“Strangers, who are you? From where have you sailed here,
over the waves?

Have you come on some business, or are you just wandering
aimlessly across the sea
like pirates, who roam around risking their lives to plunder
people near and far?” 255

So he spoke, breaking our spirits, for we were terrified
of his deep voice and monstrous size.

Nevertheless, I managed to say this to him:

“We are Greeks, on our way home from Troy,
driven off course

over the deep sea by all sorts of winds; we seek
another path home—any path at all.

Evidently it pleased Zeus to devise this course for us.

I declare to you that we are the men of Agamemnon,
son of Atreus,

whose renown is now greatest under heaven,
so great a city did he raze, where so many
people perished. 265

And we, having arrived here, kneel before you,
hoping that you might offer us hospitality and other
kindnesses,

the customary treatment due to foreign visitors.
Mighty as you are, respect the gods; we are suppliants,
and Zeus Xenios, the avenger of suppliants and strangers,
watches over foreigners deserving of respect.”

So I spoke, and he responded immediately, ruthlessly,
“You are foolish, stranger, or you have come
from very far away,
expecting me to dread or shrink from the gods.

We Cyclopes don't care about 'aegis-bearing'⁴ Zeus or the
other 'blessed' gods, 275
since we are far better than they; and I would not spare you
or your friends

just to avoid the enmity of Zeus; I'd spare you if I wanted to.
Tell me, though: where did you moor your sturdy ship—
far off, or nearby? I'm curious.”

When he said this, I knew he was trying to trick me,
but instead I cleverly answered him this way:
“Poseidon, the Earth-shaker,⁵ wrecked my ship,
dashing it upon the rocks on the borders of your country,
forcing it toward the cape
after the wind drove us in from the open sea. 285
But I and my companions survived.”

So I spoke, but he, instead of responding,
jumped up and stretched forth his hands toward my
comrades,
and seizing two of them like puppies, pitilessly dashed them
to the ground.

Their brains seeped out onto the soil and dampened the dirt.
then he chopped them limb from limb and prepared
them for his dinner.

He devoured them just like a mountain lion, wasting nothing:
guts and flesh and marrow-filled bones—
he gulped them all down.

We wailed aloud when we saw these shocking deeds,
appealing to Zeus as despair seized our hearts. 295

But when the Cyclops had filled his huge belly
with his meal of human flesh and gallons of milk,
he lay down there in the cave, stretched out by his flock.
Then, in my brave heart, I made a plan: going nearer to him
I would draw my sharp sword from its scabbard
and thrust it into his chest, in his midriff, in his liver,
feeling for the right spot with my hand.

But then a thought struck me:
my companions and I would die a horrible death there,
unable to lift or even push aside the enormously
heavy door-stone

⁴ “aegis”: In Greek myth, the nature of the *aegis* is not entirely clear, but the aegis has been regularly interpreted as an emblem of some kind, possibly a shield or animal skin, usually emblazoned with the design of a Gorgon's head (also mentioned by *Hesiod*) or, in some myths, with the actual head of the Gorgon Medusa. Both Zeus and Athena were occasionally described as “aegis-bearing.” More recently, the expression “under one's aegis” has come to mean “under the protection of.”

⁵ The Greeks believed that Poseidon, god of the sea, also caused earthquakes. Hence the epithet “Earth-shaker.”

that he had placed at the entrance. 305
 Instead, groaning in sorrow, we waited for morning.

When in the early morning rosy-fingered Dawn shone forth,
 he kindled the fire and milked his splendid flock,
 all in turn, and put each with her young.
 But after he had efficiently done all these chores,
 he again seized two of my men—and ate them for breakfast.
 Having eaten, he drove his plump sheep from the cave,
 easily moving aside the huge door-stone.

But he put it back again
 on his way out, as one might put the lid back on a quiver.
 And, whistling merrily, the Cyclops turned his fertile flock
 toward the mountain, 315
 while I was left behind thinking dark thoughts,
 pondering how I might best exact my vengeance,
 hoping Athena⁶ would grant me glory.

And this seemed to me the best plan:
 by the sheep pen lay the Cyclops's huge cudgel,
 made from green olive-wood, which he'd cut to carry with him
 when it dried. When we looked at it, this cudgel seemed to us
 as large as the mast of a twenty-oared black-tarred ship,
 a broad merchantman, which travels over the
 expanse of the sea—
 so great did this cudgel's length appear to us,
 so vast its width.

Standing beside it, I cut off a piece about six feet long, 325
 and set it before my companions, and asked them to taper it.
 They sanded the wood, and I, standing by,
 sharpened it to a point
 and immediately blackened it in the burning fire.
 Then I hid it away, concealing it under the dung,
 which lay in heaped up in huge piles throughout the cave.
 I ordered my comrades to determine by lot
 which of them would dare with me to lift the stake
 and pierce the Cyclops's eye while he slept peacefully.
 The ones selected by lot were those I'd have chosen myself.
 There were four of them, and I myself made five. 335

The Cyclops returned at dusk, herding his woolly sheep,
 and right away drove them into his wide cave,
 all of them together;

this time, he did not leave any of them out in the broad
 clearing,
 possibly because he had some foreboding or because a god
 caused him to.
 But as usual he put the enormous door-stone in its place,
 raising it aloft,
 and then he sat down and milked the ewes and bleating goats,
 all in turn, and put each with her young.
 But after he had efficiently done all these chores,
 he again seized two of my men, and made a meal of them.
 And then I, drawing near, addressed the Cyclops, 345
 holding out a wooden drinking-cup in my hands,
 full of dark wine:

"Cyclops, here—drink some wine, now that you've had your
 meal of man-flesh,
 so that you'll know what kind of drink our ship contained.
 I was bringing it to you as an offering, hoping
 that you would take pity
 and help me on my way home, but you have been raging
 exceedingly.
 Cruel fellow, how would any other man—of all the many
 there are—
 visit you after this, since you act so unlawfully?"

So I spoke, and he took the cup and drained it dry.
 He was terribly delighted by the sweet drink, and asked me
 for a second helping:

"Give me more, gladly, and tell me your name right now, 355
 so that I may give you a gift of the sort due to a stranger,
 which will make you happy:
 for among the Cyclopes, the life-giving earth
 brings forth wine from fine grapes, and the rain from Zeus
 makes them grow,
 but *this* is a distillation of ambrosia and nectar."

So he spoke, and again I poured out the strong wine—
 and then gave him a third round, and he drank it all down
 greedily.

But when the wine had dulled his wits,
 I addressed him with these soothing words:

"Cyclops, you've asked by what name I'm known,
 and I will tell you:
 and, in turn, give me the sort of gift due to a stranger, as
 you've promised. 365
 'No-one' is my name; 'No-one' is what my mother and father
 and all of my friends call me."

⁶ Athena, Greek goddess of wisdom, was the patron and protector of many heroes, including Perseus, Heracles, and Odysseus. As the deity associated with military strategy (in contrast to the bloodthirsty god Ares, who stood for the madness and chaos of war), Athena seems to have admired Odysseus's cleverness, and she helped him throughout his journey when her father Zeus allowed her to.

So I spoke, and he replied as fit his ruthless nature:
 “No-one, I will eat you last, after your comrades—
 I’ll eat them first. That will be my gift of hospitality to you.”

At this, swaying drunkenly, he fell backward and then
 lay there with his thick neck turned sideways, and sleep,
 which conquers all, overpowered him.

As he slept, from his gullet
 gushed forth wine and gobs of human flesh; he vomited in
 his drunken stupor.
 Then I drove the stake into the embers for a time,
 until it grew hot, 375
 and encouraged all my men, lest any of them hesitate from fear.
 But when the olive-wood stake was nearly on fire,
 green though it was, glowing red-hot,
 then I took the stake from the fire and drew closer to the Cyclops.
 My companions stood around me, and some god inspired
 great courage in us.
 Seizing the olive stake, sharpened at its tip, they thrust it into
 his eye,
 while I, leaning down hard upon it from its top, spun it around,
 as when a carpenter bores through a ship’s beam with a drill,
 and others, from below, spin the drill with a leather strap 385
 held fast on each end, and the drill turns, unstopping.
 In the same way, grasping the fiery-pointed stake, we bored
 into his eye,
 and the blood flowed around the heated tool.
 The fire singed off his eyelashes and crept around his
 eyebrow
 while his eyeball burned and its roots crackled, aflame.
 As a loud hissing arises when a blacksmith dips a large axe
 or an adze
 in cold water to temper it, which strengthens the iron,
 just so did the Cyclops’s eye hiss around the olive-wood stake.
 He screamed horribly, and the rocky cavern
 walls echoed, 395
 while we shrank back in terror, but from his eye
 he tore the stake,
 dripping with gore. Then he flung it away from himself,
 flailing his arms,
 and shouted loudly to the Cyclopes who lived around him
 in the caves throughout the windy peaks. Hearing his cry,
 they hastened from all around, and having gathered at the cave,
 asked what distressed him so:

“Polyphemus, what on earth has happened to make you
 shout so
 during the divine night, depriving us of sleep?
 Has some mortal man driven away your flock
 against your will? 405
 Or is someone trying to kill you, by guile or with force?”

And from inside his cave the mighty Polyphemus replied,
 “Friends, No-one is killing me by guile, not by force.”

And answering with winged words,⁷ they admonished him:
 “Well, if you’re alone and no one is hurting you,
 it’s some illness from great Zeus that you can’t avoid,
 so just pray to your father, Lord Poseidon.”

At that, they went away, and I laughed privately
 that my name and clever trick had worked.
 The Cyclops, groaning and in extreme pain, 415
 groping about with his hands, removed the stone
 from the entryway
 and sat himself down on the threshold, spreading
 his arms wide,
 hoping to capture anyone trying to go outside with the flock.
 It was foolish of him to expect to catch me this way.
 Still, I was concerned about how things might best turn out—
 whether, that is, I would find a way for my comrades
 and myself
 to escape death. So I considered all sorts of intricate plans,
 given that our lives depended on it, so grave was the
 immediate situation.
 Finally, this plan seemed to me to be the best:
 there were a great number of large, plump, woolly rams, 425
 with thick dark fleece. These I quietly bound together,
 three at a time,
 using pliant twigs on which the Cyclops, that godless
 monster, usually slept.
 The ram in the middle carried a man, while the other two,
 one on each side, went along with it, saving my companions.
 In this way, each group of three rams carried one man.
 As for me, one ram was by far the best of the flock, and
 grasping him by his back, I curled close up
 under his fleecy belly
 and lay there, patiently holding on tightly to his sweet-
 smelling wool with my hands. 435
 Thus, lamenting our situation, we awaited the sunrise.

When in the early morning rosy-fingered Dawn shone forth,
 then the rams rushed forth to the pasture,
 and the ewes bleated in their pens, eager to be milked,
 their udders full to bursting. Their master, suffering from
 agonizing pains,

⁷ This phrase, translated literally from the Greek, was very common in Homeric epic. The metaphor seems to mean that words “fly” from the speaker’s mouth to the listener’s ear, but the phrase also indicates that the words have particular influence or significance.

groped at the backs of all the rams as they stopped right in front of him,
 but he was not smart enough to realize that my men were tied to the undersides of the shaggy sheep.
 Last of all my ram went out, burdened with its heavy fleece and my own shrewd self. 445
 Mighty Polyphemus, searching him by touch, said this:

“My favourite ram—why are you the last of the flock to leave the cave?
 You didn’t used to lag behind the others;
 no, with your long strides
 you were usually the first out to pasture on the soft grass, the first to reach the streams flowing from the river, the first to want to get back to the pens at dusk.
 But now you’re last of all?
 I suppose you’re upset over the loss of your master’s eye, which an evil man has gouged out, helped by his sorry companions,
 overpowering my senses with wine—
 it was No-one, and I tell you he has not yet escaped his doom. 455
 If you were able to feel my anguish and had the power of speech,
 then you could tell me where that man hides, fleeing from my might.
 I would smash his brains out on the ground, scattering them all over the cavern,
 and my heart would be relieved from the sorrows which that worthless No-one has brought.”

So saying, he sent the ram on its way.
 And after we’d gone a little way from the cave and the clearing
 I unbound myself first, then released my companions from under the sheep.
 We quickly drove the plump flock before us, but kept looking back to check behind us until we reached the ships. 465
 Those of us who escaped death were a welcome sight to our dear comrades,
 but they lamented the others, weeping for their loss.
 I couldn’t allow them to mourn for long, though, and frowned,
 ordering them to quickly herd the woolly flock on board and set sail over the salty sea.
 They embarked right away, and, taking their seats in order on the rowing-benches,
 swept the grey sea with their oars.
 But when I was a good distance away,
 as far as a man can still make himself heard when shouting,
 then I called to the Cyclops, mocking him:

“Cyclops, that man was no weakling, the one whose companions 475
 you planned to devour in your hollow cave, using brute force. Such evil intentions were certain to come back around to you, wretch, who did not fear to eat guests in your own home. Zeus and the other gods have made you pay for this!”

So I taunted him, and his mood grew even blacker.
 Breaking off the peak of a huge hill,
 he hurled it right in front of our prow,
 falling just short of our helm.
 The sea splashed up under the falling rock,
 and the back-flowing wave bore us toward land, 485
 driving the ship swiftly back to shore.
 But I snatched up a long pole in my hands
 and pushed us away again, and urging on my comrades with a nod of my head, commanded them
 to pull hard on the oars
 so that we might escape our destruction;
 and they redoubled their efforts.
 But when we had rowed twice as far over the sea,
 I started to call to the Cyclops again, though my crew on all sides tried to restrain me with calm words:

“Stubborn fellow, why do you want to enrage this savage creature,
 who just now threw a rock into the sea at us, 495
 forcing the ship back to shore? We thought we were going to die on the spot!
 If he had heard any of us opening our mouths and daring to make a sound,
 He would have crushed our heads and smashed our ship with a jagged rock, so powerfully does he throw.”

So they spoke, but did not persuade my arrogant heart.
 Instead, I boasted to the Cyclops angrily,
 “Cyclops, if any man alive asks about the shameful blinding of your eye,
 tell them it was Odysseus, sacker of cities, who gouged it out—
 Odysseus, son of Laertes, who lives on Ithaca!” 505

So I spoke, and he lamented aloud:
 “Ah, so at last what was prophesied to me so long ago has come to pass!
 There came here once a man, noble and tall, who was a seer, Telemus son of Eurymus, who excelled in the art of divination,
 and he lived out his life among the Cyclopes,
 foretelling the future.
 He told me all these things would come to pass eventually—that I would be deprived of sight at the hands of Odysseus.

But I was on the lookout for a large fellow of noble bearing
to arrive here, one possessing great courage.
Instead, a tiny, worthless, feeble man has put out my eye 515
by overpowering me with drink.
Come here, why don't you, Odysseus, so that I may present
to you
gifts befitting a guest, and speed your return home,
should the renowned Earth-shaker grant you one;
for I am his son, and he declares that he is my father,
and *he* will heal me himself if he wishes to do so,
but no other of the blessed gods or mortal men."

So he spoke, but I answered him this way:
"If I could, I would deprive you of both your life and your soul,
and send you down to the house of Hades,
and then not even the Earth-shaker would be able
to heal your eye." 525

In response, the Cyclops prayed to lord Poseidon,
stretching his arms toward starry heaven:
"Hear me, dark-haired Poseidon, who enfolds the earth;
If I am really your son and you declare yourself my father,
grant that Odysseus, sacker of cities, son of Laertes,
who lives on Ithaca, never reach his home!
But if it is fated that he see his friends
and return to his stately home in his own native land,
may he arrive late and faring poorly,
having caused the death of all his companions;
and may he arrive in someone else's ship
and find misery at home."⁸ 535

Such was his prayer, and the dark-haired lord heeded him.
Then, this time lifting a boulder even more enormous,
he swung it around and hurled it at us,
putting all his strength behind it.
He cast it a little behind our dark-prowed ship,
and it fell just short of the tip of the rudder.

⁸ Polyphemus here utters a formal curse against Odysseus, in the form of a prayer for justice. Odysseus, with his boast, has inadvertently empowered the curse by providing the Cyclops with his real name, specific epithet ("sacker of cities"), genealogy ("son of Laertes"), and home ("Ithaca"). Poseidon does enact the curse, causing so many storms at sea that ultimately all the crew have drowned, the ship is wrecked, and Odysseus is left alone to wash up on Calypso's island (see Critical Introduction). After the Phaeacians take Odysseus home, Poseidon punishes them by turning their ship (the "someone else's ship") to stone, and Odysseus finds "misery" at home because, in his absence, over a hundred young men have been wooing his wife, harassing his son, and making themselves at home in his palace, eating his food, drinking his wine, and abusing the servants.

The sea splashed up under the falling rock,
and the wave carried us forward, headed for shore.

But when we arrived at the island, where our other sturdy ships
were waiting all together and our worried comrades were
encamped,
still waiting for us, we drove our ships onto the sand and
disembarked. 545

Driving the flock of the Cyclops out of the hold,
we divided them up so that no one would go cheated of an
equal share.

But when the sheep were being allotted,
my well-greaved⁹ companions set apart for me the ram,
which I then sacrificed on the shore to stormy Zeus,
son of Cronus,
who rules over everything, burning the thighs.¹⁰

But Zeus did not care for my offering; even then he was
already planning
how all of my sturdy ships and loyal comrades
would be destroyed. 555

Then all day long, until the sun set,
we sat feasting on abundant meat and sweet wine.
When the sun set and darkness came on,
then we lay down to sleep on the shore.

And when in the early morning rosy-fingered Dawn
shone forth,
urging on my crew I ordered them to go aboard
and to release the mooring ropes.

They embarked right away, and, taking their seats
in order on the rowing-benches, swept the grey sea
with their oars.

So we sailed on, greatly distressed at heart, 565
glad that we had escaped death, but having lost our friends.

⁹ "greaves": pieces of armour used to protect the shin. In ancient Greece, greaves were usually made from a combination of metal plating and leather padding. In Greek epic poetry, "well-greaved" was a common epithet for warriors.

¹⁰ "burning the thighs": In ancient Greek sacrificial ritual, the animals (usually cattle, sheep, or goats) were cut up into sections, with some parts dedicated to the gods and other parts left for people to eat. The thigh-bones were cut out, wrapped in layers of fat, and burnt to the gods, while much of the meat from the thigh was left for the sacrificial feast. The Greek author Hesiod provides a myth explaining this ritual in his poem *Theogony* (lines 535–57).

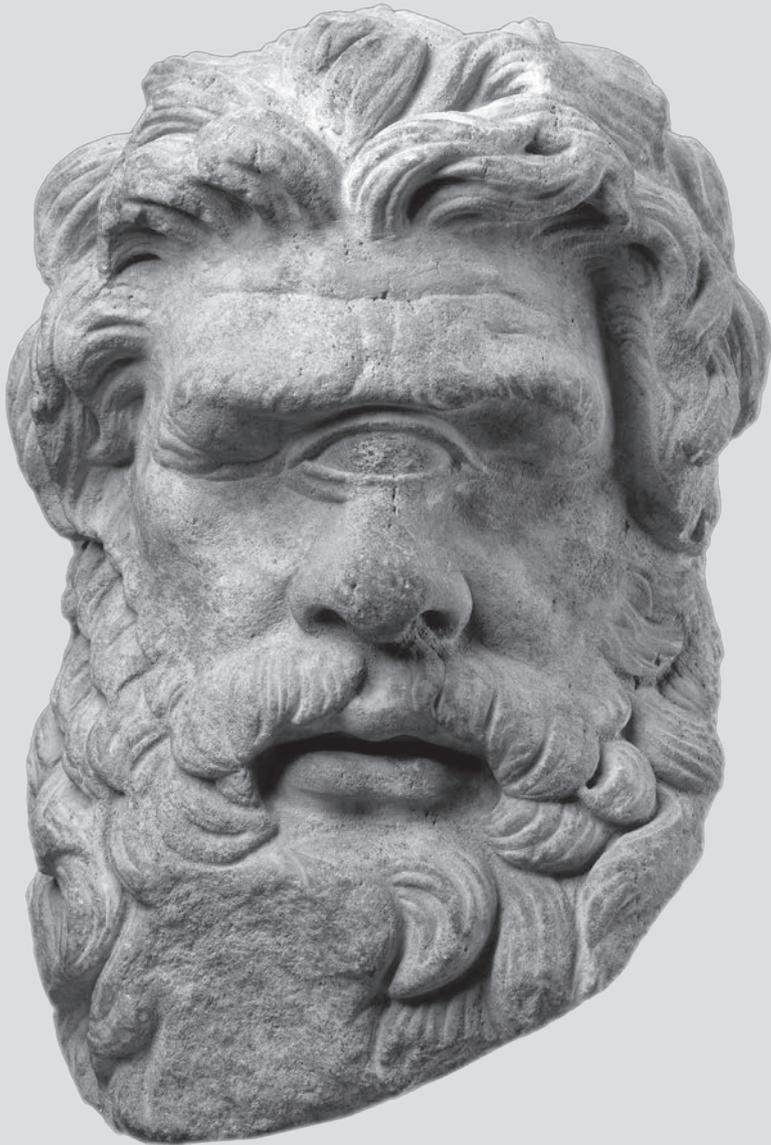


Figure 1. Bust of Polyphemus, Greek or Roman, Hellenistic or Imperial Period, ca. 150 BCE or later, 38.3 cm. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 63.120

BUST OF POLYPHEMUS

Critical Introduction

This sculpted head of the giant Cyclops Polyphemus came from a larger sculptural group depicting a scene from *The Odyssey*. We cannot tell if it is a Greek or Roman work, since Roman artists often very closely copied Greek models. It is similar to a figure from the Roman Emperor Tiberius's imperial villa at Sperlonga, on the west coast of the Italian peninsula. The head is quite different from earlier images of Cyclopes, which made the monsters more bestial or comical. In this powerful image, it is clear that the monster is based on an entirely human prototype. Even the signature feature of the Cyclops, the single eye in the middle of the face, emerges from the suggestion of a normative *pair* of eyes. The crow's feet to the left of the eye seem to mimic the lid of another eye, tightly closed. The space to the right of the eye also bulges a bit, like there is an eyeball beneath the flesh.

In Hellenistic style, the face is carved in a highly naturalistic manner. The tousled hair, tangled beard, wrinkled forehead, and bulbous nose are all convincing, and the softly textured skin sagging off the cheekbones conveys not only flesh and the bone structure beneath, but also the Cyclops's age and his long exposure to the elements on the island where Odysseus and his men find him. The naturalism of the sculpture, which has a solid, convincing presence, makes this mythical monster feel plausible, even possible.

Viewing Questions

What emotions are conveyed in this image? What would it feel like to stand in front of it, in the gaze of the single, great eye? Does this image strike you as a monster? Why or why not?

ASM

PLINY THE ELDER, *NATURAL HISTORY* — Selections
(BOOK VII.1.6–VII.4.36)
Translated by **EMILY ALBU**

Critical Introduction

Gaius Plinius Secundus, better known as Pliny the Elder (23/24–79 CE), is one of the most well known Roman authors, and his encyclopedic *Natural History* is the earliest surviving compendium of its kind. It covers everything from the countries and peoples that make up his world to birds and beasts, trees and grains, medicines, metals, and stones. While books of the *Natural History* often begin where we might expect, Pliny's loose structure allowed him to include surprising subjects throughout. A section on different kinds of stone, for example, becomes an account of famous Egyptian, Greek, and Roman sculptures and works of architecture. The *Natural History* has consequently been mined for information about the classical world by scholars since its initial publication. It was highly respected throughout the Middle Ages, when it was treated as font of ancient knowledge, and it remains a standard primary source for modern scholars interested in ancient history, art, politics, ecology, and philosophy.

Pliny is particularly important in the history of monsters as his *Natural History* is a main conduit whereby a popular group of monstrous beings was disseminated throughout Europe and the larger Mediterranean world. Pliny borrowed this set of beings from Herodotus's *Histories* (Greece, 440 BCE), and he in turn cites earlier texts that no longer survive by Ctesias and Megasthenes; they claim to have received their information on these monsters from Indian and Persian sources. This may well be true, as some of the creatures appear in Indian epics.

The most interesting monstrous figures in Pliny's text appear in book VII, where he discusses humanity and its origins and diversity. Here, in addition to more bestial monsters like griffins and hippocentaur, we find one-eyed Cyclopes (prominent in our selection from **Homer's *Odyssey***), cannibals, backward-footed Antipodes, dog-headed Cynocephali, and swift, one-legged Sciapods, among many others. These monstrous peoples (often problematically referred to as "monstrous races," as discussed in the introduction to **Friedman's *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought***) differ from their normative Roman male prototypes in body, diet, dress, and practices. Together, through their collective otherness, they assemble a composite picture, in negative, of what Pliny believes to be "normal."

Reading Questions

What are common strategies for making monsters in this text? What does each tell us about Roman notions of normality and normativity? Think about Pliny's geography: where are most of his monsters located, and why do you think he (and/or his sources) place them there?

Editorial Notes

The passage is presented with numbers denoting the books and chapters within Pliny's encyclopedic *Natural History*. This translation uses the term "hermaphrodites" because the ancient source uses this term. It is no longer the preferred term for actual human beings whose bodies or gender identities lie between traditional notions of male and female. Intersex or trans* are now common terms.

Further Reading

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ASM

PLINY THE ELDER, *NATURAL HISTORY* Selections (Book VII.1.6–VII.4.36)¹

Translated by EMILY ALBU

I. 6. In my account of the world's peoples, I have in large part spoken about the whole of the human race. I am certainly not going to treat all their customs and manners, which are incalculable and almost as many as the groups of human beings. Yet certain ones I think really cannot be omitted, especially those of people living rather far from the sea.² I have no doubt that many readers will find some of these things strange and incredible. Who in the world, for instance, believed in Ethiopians³ before seeing them? Or what isn't considered a wonder when it first becomes known? How many things are considered impossible until they occur? **7.** In truth the power and majesty of the nature of the universe at every turn lacks credibility if anyone's mind embraces only parts of it and not the whole. To say nothing of peacocks, and tigers' or panthers' spots, and so many animals' colourations, it is a small matter to mention but vast when you think on it: so many world languages and so many dialects, such a variety of speech that a foreigner barely seems like a human being to a person from some other place. **8.** Furthermore, although our outward form and appearance has only ten or so features, to think that no two identical faces exist among all the thousands of people—a condition that no art could produce, especially when applying that small number of variants! And yet in most cases I will not give my own guarantee that these details are true, but on all doubtful points I will just refer to the authorities whom I will cite. Only let us not be disdainful of following the Greeks, with their far greater dedication and their devotion to study that goes back further in time.

II. 9. I have pointed out that some Scythian⁴ tribes—in fact, quite a few of them—feed on human bodies. This would

perhaps seem unbelievable unless we reflect that such monstrous peoples, namely the Cyclopes and Laestrygonians,⁵ have existed in the center of the world, and that in very recent times transalpine peoples have practiced human sacrifice, which is not far from eating human flesh. **10.** Next to them, toward the north, not far from where the north wind rises, where there is a cave named for it that people call earth's keyhole, the Arimaspi (whom I have mentioned earlier)⁶ are said to live, notable for having one eye in the middle of the forehead. Herodotus⁷ and Aristaeus of Proconnesus write that they are continually at war with the griffins in the vicinity of the latter's mines. The griffin is a type of wild beast with wings, as is commonly reported, that digs gold out of tunnels. The beasts guard the gold and the Arimaspi try to steal it, each exhibiting extraordinary greed. **11.** Beyond the other Scythian cannibals, in a large valley in the Himalayas, lies a region called Abarimon where there are forest-dwellers who have their feet on backwards. They run extremely fast and wander about here and there with the wild animals. Baeton, Alexander the Great's route-surveyor, reported that these people could not breathe in another climate and therefore were not hauled off to neighbouring kings or to Alexander himself. **12.** Isogonus of Nicaea reports that those cannibals who I said lived toward the north, ten day's journey beyond the river Borysthenes,⁸ drink out of human skulls and use the scalps with hair on as napkins covering their chests. Isogonus also reports that certain people in Albania are born with piercing grey eyes. They are bald from childhood and see better by night than in the daytime. He also says that the Sarmatae,

1 For an excellent detailed commentary on this passage, see Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History Book VII (with Book VIII, 1–34)*, ed. Tyler T. Travillian (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 105–23, with notes (pp. 15–26) on all of Pliny's sources cited in this passage.

2 The Mediterranean was the centre of the civilized world for the Romans, who viewed the farthest regions as home to the strange and the monstrous.

3 For Pliny, these were the peoples living south of Egypt. He read reports that some lacked a nose or mouth or tongue (*Nat. Hist.* VI.35.187–88).

4 Greco-Roman term for nomadic peoples who ranged across

the northern steppes from the Black Sea coast eastward across the Caucasus to lands beyond the Aral Sea.

5 The *Cyclopes* and Laestrygonians were mythic giants, who snatched and ate some of Odysseus's men on their return home from the Trojan War (*Homer, Odyssey* 9, 10.80–132).

6 Elsewhere (*Nat. Hist.* VI.19.50) Pliny counts the Arimaspi among the easternmost Scythian tribes.

7 Greek historian (ca. 484–425 BCE) whose work on the Persian Wars features ethnographic and geographical details mined by Pliny.

8 The River Dnieper in modern Ukraine, about 1400 miles/2250 kilometres long, flows into the Black Sea.

living thirteen days' journey beyond the Borysthenes, always eat every other day.

13. Creates of Pergamum states that there was a tribe near Parium on the Hellespont, whom he calls Ophiogenes,⁹ accustomed to cure snake-bites by touch and draw the venom from the body by placing their hand on it. Varro¹⁰ reports that there are still a few people there whose saliva is a remedy for snake-bites. **14.** As Agatharchides writes, there was a similar tribe in Africa, the Psylli, so-called for King Psyllus, whose tomb is in the region of the Greater Syrtes.¹¹ They produced in their bodies a poison deadly to snakes, and its odour put snakes to sleep. They had the custom of exposing their children, immediately at birth, to extremely savage snakes and using that species to test their wives' chastity since snakes do not avoid persons born of adulterous blood. This tribe has almost been exterminated by the Nasamones, who now occupy these dwelling-places, although a tribe descended from the people who escaped or who were away when the fighting took place survives today in a few places. **15.** A similar tribe still exists in Italy, the Marsi, said to be descended from Circe's¹² son, and so they possess the same natural potency. And yet all people have within themselves a poison that is effective against snakes: it is said that snakes flee from contact with saliva as though from boiling water; and if it gets in their throats they even die, especially if it comes from the lips of a person who is fasting. Beyond the Nasamones, but neighbouring them, Calliphanes places the Machlyes, who are androgynous and have intercourse with members of either sex, sometimes with one, sometimes the other. Aristotle¹³ adds that they have the left breast of a man and the right breast of a woman.

16. In the same part of Africa, Isogonus and Nymphodorus report, there are households practicing sorcery; their ritual performance causes meadows to dry up, trees to wither, and babies to die. Isogonus adds that there are people of the same

⁹ "Snake-race."

¹⁰ In addition to many fragments, only two complete works survive from the hundreds of books written by Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BCE), on a great variety of topics including history, geography, rhetoric, philosophy, literature, and law.

¹¹ The Gulf of Sidra, off the Libyan coast.

¹² Sorceress who changed Odysseus's men into pigs (Homer, *Odyssey* 10) and held Odysseus on her island long enough (according to the mythic tradition) for him to father her three sons.

¹³ Greek philosopher (384–322 BCE), student of Plato, and tutor to Alexander the Great.

sort among the Triballi and the Illyrians who also give the evil eye and kill people they stare at for a long time, especially when their eyes show rage. Adults feel their evil eye more readily. It is especially noteworthy that these people have two pupils in each eye. **17.** Apollonides records that there are also women of this type in Scythia, who are called Bitiae, and Phylarchus, too, mentions the Tibii tribe and many others of this same type, whose distinguishing marks he reports as a double pupil in one eye and, in the other, the image of a horse; and furthermore, he says that these same people cannot drown, even when weighed down with clothing. Damon records a people like them, the Pharmaces in Ethiopia, whose sweat removes pestilence from bodies it touches. **18.** Among us, too, Cicero¹⁴ affirms that all women everywhere who have double pupils inflict harm with a glance. In fact, when nature decided to implant in human beings the habit of eating human flesh, she also saw fit to implant poisons in the whole body, and in the eyes of some people, too, so that there should not be any evil that was not in a human being.

19. Not far from the city of Rome, in the land of the Falisci, there are a few families called the Hirpi. At an annual sacrifice to Apollo that occurs on Mount Soracte¹⁵ they walk over a pile of charred logs without being burned. For this reason, by a perpetual decree of the senate they enjoy an exemption from military service and from all other obligations. **20.** Some people are born with body parts that are amazing in some special way, like King Pyrrhus¹⁶ whose great toe on his right foot cured inflamed spleens by its touch. They say that when he was cremated, it would not burn with the rest of his body, and it was stowed away in a chest in a temple.

21. India and the expanse of Ethiopia especially teem with wonders. The largest animals grow in India. For example, the dogs there are bigger than any others. The trees are said to be so tall that an arrow cannot be shot over them, and if we are disposed to believe it, that squadrons of cavalry can hide beneath a single fig tree. It is said that reeds are so high that a single section between two knots will make a canoe that carries in some cases three people. **22.** It is agreed that many

¹⁴ Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE), Roman orator and consul, wrote speeches, letters, philosophical and rhetorical works, along with a now-lost work (*Memorabilia*) on marvels.

¹⁵ A mountain north of Rome, immortalized in Horace's *Odes* 1.9.

¹⁶ (319–272 BCE) Hellenistic king of Epirus in northwestern Greece, whose costly military victories in Italy produced the phrase "Pyrrhic victory."

people there are more than seven feet tall, do not spit, do not suffer from headache or toothache or pain in the eye or rarely from pain in any other part of the body. Their philosophers, whom they call gymnosophists,¹⁷ stay standing from sunrise to sunset, staring at the sun with a fixed gaze, balancing on one foot and then the other all day long in the burning hot sand. **23.** Megasthenes¹⁸ records that on the mountain called Nulos there are people with their feet turned backwards and with eight toes on each foot. On many mountains live a tribe of dog-headed people covered with wild beasts' skins; instead of speaking, they bark, and they survive by hunting and bird-catching with their fingernails as weapons. He says that there were more than 120,000 of them when he was publishing his book. Ctesias¹⁹ writes that in a certain tribe in India women give birth just once in their lifetime and the babies' hair immediately begins to turn grey. He also writes about a tribe called the Monocoli, who hop on one leg with astonishing speed. The same people are called Sciapods because in hot weather they lie on the ground and shade themselves with their feet. They are not far from the Trogodytes,²⁰ and farther west of these live people without necks and with eyes on their shoulders.

24. There are also satyrs²¹ in the mountains of eastern India, in the region of the Catarcludi. The animal is quite agile, running sometimes on all fours and sometimes upright like humans. Because of their speed only the old or sick are captured. Tauron mentions a forest tribe called the Chormandae, who have no language but a dreadful screech, hairy bodies, grey eyes, and teeth like a dog's. Eudoxus says that in the south of India the men have feet eighteen inches long and the women such small feet that they are called Sparrow-Feet. **25.** Among the Nomads of India Megasthenes records a people called the Sciritai who have only holes in place of nostrils, like snakes, and are bow-legged. At the farthest limits of India to the east, near the source of the Ganges, he locates the Astomi, who have no mouth and a body covered in hair. They dress in foliage-down and live only on the air they breathe and the scent

17 Indian ascetics, a fascination for Greco-Roman writers including Strabo, Plutarch, and Megasthenes.

18 Greek historian (ca. 350–290 BCE) and envoy to India from the Macedonian king Seleucus II.

19 Late fifth-century BCE Greek physician and author of works on Persia and India.

20 "Cavemen."

21 Mythic creatures, part-human and part-animal; the witnesses here probably spotted monkeys.

they inhale through their nostrils. They have no food or drink, only the various scents from roots and flowers and woodland apples that they carry with them on long journeys so they are not without a supply of scent. Megasthenes says that they can easily be killed by a rather strong smell. **26.** Beyond the Astomi, in the most distant mountain region, so the story goes, live the Trispithami²² and Pygmies, no taller than three spans, i.e. about twenty-seven inches. The climate is healthy and always spring-like, protected by mountains on the north. Homer has also written that the Pygmies were assaulted by cranes. The story goes that in springtime the entire troop, armed with arrows and riding on rams and she-goats, goes down to the sea and eats the cranes' eggs and chicks during a foray that lasts three months; that otherwise they could not protect themselves against the flocks to come; and that their houses are built of mud, feathers, and eggshells. **27.** Aristotle writes that the Pygmies live in caves, but the rest of his information agrees with others' accounts. Isagonus reports that the Cyrni, an Indian people, live to be 140, and likewise the Ethiopians, the Macrobiani,²³ and the Serae²⁴ and those who live on Mount Athos,²⁵ the latter because they eat snakes' flesh, a diet that keeps their head and clothes safe from creatures harmful to the body.

28. Onesicritus says that in the parts of India where there are no shadows there are people about eight feet tall who live 130 years, dying middle-aged without growing old. Crates of Pergamum tells of Indians he calls Gymnetae²⁶ who live more than 100 years; some people call them Macrobiani. Ctesias says that a people called the Pandae, dwelling among them in the valleys, live 200 years, white-haired youths but black-haired in old age. **29.** In contrast to the Macrobiani, he says, their neighbours live no longer than forty years, with the women bearing children only once. Agatharchides reports this as well, adding that they eat locusts and are swift runners. Clitarchus called them the Mandi, and Megasthenes counted 200 of their villages and reported that the girls bear children in the seventh year and old age comes in the fortieth. **30.** Artemidorus says that on the island of Taprobane²⁷ people live very long without any loss of bodily strength. Duris

22 "The Three-Span People."

23 "Long-Livers."

24 "The Silk People," likely the Silk-Road traders with the Chinese.

25 In northeastern Greece.

26 "The Naked People."

27 Sri Lanka.

says that some Indians have sex with wild animals and the offspring are hybrids, half-human and half-beast; and that among the Calingae, a tribe from the same part of India, girls conceive at the age of five and do not survive beyond their eighth year of life, and that elsewhere extremely swift people are born with a hairy tail, while others are completely covered by their ears. The Arabis River is the boundary between the Indians and the Oritae, who know no other food but fish. They cut them up with their fingernails and roast them in the sun to make bread, so Clitarchus reports. **31.** Crates of Pergamum says that the Trogydites beyond Ethiopia are swifter than horses, that there are Ethiopians more than twelve feet tall, and that this people is called the Syrbotae. The tribe of Ethiopian nomads called the Minismini, ranging along the Astragus River toward the north, is twenty days' journey from the ocean. The tribe lives on the milk of animals that we call Cynocephali,²⁸ herds of which it pastures, killing the males except those kept for breeding. **32.** In the deserts of Africa human apparitions suddenly present themselves and vanish in a flash. These and similar varieties of humankind ingenious nature has fashioned as playthings for herself, and for us as marvels. And really, who could possibly reckon up the various things she fashions day by day and nearly hour by hour? To reveal her power, let it be sufficient to have included peoples among her wonders. From these I turn now to a few marvels attested for individual human beings.

III. 33. The birth of triplets is confirmed by the example of the Horatii and Curiatii.²⁹ More than this number is considered ominous, except in Egypt, where drinking Nile water produces fertility. Recently on the funeral day of the late Augustus³⁰ a woman of the lower classes, named Fausta, gave birth to four children—two boys and two girls—beyond a doubt portending the food shortage that followed. In the Peloponnese, I also found the case of a woman who produced quintuplets four times, most of whom survived at each birth. Trogus is the authority for seven babies at one birthing in Egypt. **34.** Persons are born with the characteristics of both sexes. We call them hermaphrodites. Formerly called androgyny and considered portents, now they are sources of entertainment. Among the decorations of his theatre Pompey the Great³¹

²⁸ "Dog-Headed."

²⁹ According to the Roman historian Livy (1.23–5) two sets of triplets fought each other to determine whether Rome or Alba Longa would control Italy.

³⁰ The emperor Octavian Augustus died in 14 CE.

³¹ Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (106–48 BCE), illustrious Roman

placed images of famous wonders specially crafted for this by the talent of great artisans. Among those portrayed we read of Eutyche, who was carried to her funeral pyre at Tralles³² by twenty children—she had given birth thirty times—and of Alcippe, who gave birth to an elephant, a case that counts among the portents since among the first incidents of the Marsic War were these: a slave woman also gave birth to a snake; and recorded among the omens are births of offspring multi-formed in many different ways. **35.** Claudius Caesar³³ writes that a centaur³⁴ was born in Thessaly but died the same day, and during his reign I myself saw one brought here from Egypt, preserved in honey. Among these cases is one where a newborn at Saguntum immediately returned to the womb, in the year when that city was destroyed by Hannibal.³⁵

IV. 36. Transformation of females into males is not a myth. We find in the *Annals*³⁶ that, during the consulship³⁷ of Publius Licinius Crassus and Gaius Cassius Longinus, a girl at Cassinum became a boy right before her parents' eyes and at the order of the augurs³⁸ was banished to an uninhabited island. Lucius Mucianus has recorded that he saw at Argos³⁹ a man called Arescon, whose name had been Arescusa and who had married a husband, but later had grown a beard and developed male attributes and married a wife; and that he had also seen a boy at Smyrna⁴⁰ who had experienced the same fate. I myself saw in Africa a person who had changed into a male on the wedding day. This was Lucius Constitius, a citizen of Thysdrus.⁴¹

general, celebrated three triumphs in Rome and dedicated the first permanent theatre in Rome in 55 BCE. For a time allied to Julius Caesar, he eventually joined the Republican opposition against Caesar and was killed in the resulting civil war.

³² A city in western Asia Minor.

³³ Before becoming Roman emperor (reigned 41–54 CE), Claudius pursued scholarship, studying history and religion.

³⁴ Mythic creatures, half-horse and half-man.

³⁵ Celebrated Carthaginian general (247–183/2 BCE), who instigated the Second Punic War by attacking the Spanish town of Saguntum, a Roman ally.

³⁶ Perhaps the yearly records compiled by the head of the Roman priesthood.

³⁷ Romans of the Republic annually elected two chief magistrates, consuls, who shared civil and military powers.

³⁸ Priests charged with reading and interpreting the signs from the gods.

³⁹ A Greek city of the Peloponnese.

⁴⁰ A city on the west coast of Asia Minor; now Izmir.

⁴¹ A Roman settlement in North Africa, in what is now Tunisia.

OVID, METAMORPHOSES, LYCAON AND CADMUS

Translated by BRITTA SPANN

Critical Introduction

Publius Ovidius Naso (43 BCE–17/18 CE), known now simply as Ovid, is one of the most celebrated of Roman poets, though his life was marked by tragedy. After enjoying success with *Amores* (16 BCE), *Heroides* (?), and *Metamorphoses* (8 CE), Ovid was banished to Tomis (in what is now Romania) by the emperor Caesar Augustus. Little is known about the reason for this exile, but it had a tremendous impact on Ovid: though he continued to write, his star had waned, and he died in exile a decade later.

Metamorphoses, the text included here, is considered Ovid's masterpiece. It is a collection of stories, all clustered around the theme of transformation—in body, soul, nature, or thought. The poem also deals heavily in Greco-Roman mythology, while at the same time taking on the entire scope of human history—from the creation of the universe to the deification of Julius Caesar. The two stories presented here, Lycaon and Cadmus, deal with physical transformation. They introduce an interesting element into the history of monsters by blurring the line between the human and the monster (in the case of Lycaon) and by exploring the transcendent and foundational roles monsters play in the creation of civilization.

Reading Questions

Lycaon is one of the earliest werewolf stories we have, but how do you think it compares to later werewolves such as those found in *Bisclavret* and werewolf movies such as *The Howling* (1981) or the *Twilight* franchise? Specifically, think about how the different werewolves begin: do characters get the choice to become werewolves? Is lycanthropy couched in a moral context? Lastly, consider the importance of the wolf for Roman identity: a she-wolf was said to suckle Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, and the wolf is bound up with the beginnings of Rome. Does that change your understanding of the werewolf in this story?

Cadmus, as the founder of Thebes, functions as a sort of culture hero. Why do you think that the founding of Thebes based on a monster? What might the dragon represent? What might it mean that Cadmus sows the dragon's teeth and that

the spawn of the dragon become the founding members of Theban society?

Editorial Notes

The dactylic hexameter of ancient epic poetry is notoriously difficult to render in English, and the standard options (blank verse and heroic couplets) can create a monotonous effect that is at odds with Ovid's playful, energetic style and the rapid shifts in tone and mood in this text. This translation relies on an unconventional choice to use alternating long and short lines. This form recalls the alternating lines of hexameter and pentameter used in Ovid's elegiac verse and thus emphasizes the influence of this earlier work on the *Metamorphoses*. Further, this form underscores that the text defies generic conventions: although classified as an epic due to its metre, the narrative and themes of the text have more in common with Ovid's erotic elegies than with the other classical epics. Perhaps most importantly, breaking the lines in this way works toward preserving the pace, momentum, and shifting tones of original text in a translation that adheres closely to the diction and, where possible, the syntax of the original text. We have numbered the lines in each section here independently of the numbering in the original text.

Further Reading

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OID, METAMORPHOSES, LYCAON AND CADMUS

Translated by BRITTA SPANN

Book I, ll. 151–241

They say that lest the lofty heavens be more peaceful than the earth,
the giants aspired to the celestial kingdom
and piled together a heap of mountains to the stars above.
Then the almighty father hurled his lightning,¹
broke straight through Olympus,² and shook Pelion down from Ossa.³
When those fearsome corpses lay dead, crushed
by their own weight, they say that the Earth was drenched,
bathed in the copious blood of her children,
and that she reanimated the steaming gore. Lest no monument
to her progeny remain, she shaped them 10
into the form of humans; but this offspring also scorned the gods,
was filled with greed for acts of violence
and gruesome slaughter: you can see they were born from blood.

The father of the gods, son of Saturn,⁴ groaned
when he saw these events from the highest citadel, recalling
the foul feasts served at Lycaon's table—
things so recent that they are not yet common knowledge—
and a great, righteous anger grew in Jove's soul.⁵
He called for a counsel, and no delay held those he summoned.

There is a lofty trail visible in the peaceful sky. 20
It is called "milky," remarkable for its whiteness. It is the path
the supreme gods travel to the palace,

1 Jupiter is the father of the gods, and the god of lightning and the sky. His Greek name is Zeus.

2 Olympus is the highest mountain in Greece and the name of the gods' celestial home.

3 Both Pelion and Ossa are mountains. When the giants attacked Olympus, they placed Pelion on top of Ossa to climb into the heavens. Here, Jupiter repels the attack by knocking the mountains apart with his lightning bolt.

4 Jupiter (also known as Jove) was the son of Saturn. In both Greek and Roman culture, people and the gods are frequently referred to using patronymics: names based on the name of one's father. Jupiter became the father of the gods after usurping the throne. Saturn (called Chronos in Greek) had heard a prophecy that one of his children would overthrow him and began cannibalizing them, but Jupiter's mother, Rhea, hid him away in a cave to save him. When he was grown, Jupiter forced his father to vomit up his siblings, and they joined forces to conquer Saturn and imprison him in the underworld.

5 Lycaon's name is derived from the Greek word *lykos*, which means "wolf."

the regal home of the great Thunderer: On either side, the homes
of the noble gods are clustered,
double doors wide open. The lower gods live elsewhere.
But here the more powerful
and distinguished of the gods have placed their households.
This place, if my words may be so bold,
I would not fear at all to call the Palatine of the great heavens.⁶

And so, when the supreme gods were seated 30
in the marble chamber, Jove, sitting in a higher position, leaning
on his ivory sceptre, shook three, four times
the menacing dark hair with which he moves earth, sea, and stars.
Then indignantly he spoke these words:
"I was not more anxious about the terrestrial kingdom in that age
when each of the snake-footed giants
was preparing to throw their hundred arms around the captive sky.⁷
For although that enemy was savage,
their attack depended upon one host from a single origin.
Across the globe, any place Nereus sounds,⁸ 40

I must now destroy the mortal race: I swear upon the infernal rivers
flowing underground in the Stygian grove.⁹

6 The Roman capital was surrounded by seven hills. The Palatine was the center hill and the most important because of its significance for the founding of Rome. According to one legend about the founding of Rome, the king of a nearby region ordered that his twin sons, Romulus and Remus, be abandoned and left to die on the outskirts of the kingdom because he viewed them as a threat. The brothers were discovered by a female wolf who took them to her lair on the Palatine hill and raised them. The twins founded a city there, and Romulus (after whom Rome is named) became its ruler after slaying his brother. Note the similarities between this myth and the story of Saturn and Jupiter.

7 Echidnades, the son of the she-dragon Echidna, was a giant that had two serpents for feet. The Hecatoncheires were three giants who each had one hundred arms and fifty heads. Both Echidnades and the Hecatoncheires allied themselves with the giants in the attack on Olympus. Here, Ovid combines these figures into a single, even more grotesque monster. See *Hesiod's Theogony* in this volume.

8 Nereus is one of the shape-shifting "Old Men of the Sea," the sea deities who were the offspring of Pontus (the sea itself) and Gaia (the earth itself). Nereus was the god of fish, but here he represents the sea in general: Jupiter is vowing to hunt down mortals anywhere the ocean sounds.

9 The forest on the other side of the river Styx, which marks the boundary between the earth and the underworld.

All other remedies have been tried; now the infected flesh must be excised by the sword to save the healthy part. The demigods, the pastoral deities, the nymphs, the fauns, the satyrs, and the mountain-dwelling spirits are my subjects;¹⁰ we have not so far deemed them worthy of the honour of the heavens, so surely we must allow to live in the lands we granted to them. But do you believe, Noble Gods, that they will be safe enough 50 when Lycaon, known for savagery, has lain traps for me, the one who masters the lightning and rules you?"

All growled in agreement, and with ardent zeal, they called for punishment for the one who dared such deeds. And it was the same as when that impious band raged to extinguish the Roman name with the murder of Caesar:¹¹ the human race was astonished, stricken by sudden terror at the fall of so great a man, and all the world trembled. The piety and gratitude of your subjects, Augustus, was no less than that of Jove's.¹² 60 He then checked their murmuring with his voice and a gesture; all fell silent. When his royal presence had calmed the clamour, Jupiter broke the silence once more: "he has indeed (calm your worries!) paid the penalty; nonetheless, I will tell you the crime he committed and what the punishment is. A dark rumour of these times reached our ears; hoping it false, I descended from high Olympus and, a god in human form, I surveyed the lands. It would take me a long time indeed to list the evil acts 70 I saw everywhere I looked: the truth was worse than the rumour. I crossed the fearsome Maenalian,¹³

10 Demigods have one divine parent and one mortal; Hercules is one famous example. Pastoral deities are minor gods associated with the countryside. Nymphs are female spirits who inhabit a particular area of nature (water, woods, the sky, and so forth) and sometimes even specific landforms. They often take the form of attractive young women. Fauns and satyrs are half-human, half-goat creatures that inhabit forests. The mountain-dwelling spirits described here are minor woodland deities that don't have a specific form. These divine entities lived on the earth and serve the "noble gods" of Olympus.

11 Julius Caesar, a popular general who marched his army into Rome, seized control of the government, and established himself as dictator. He was assassinated by a group of senators. His death sparked numerous riots in Rome and led to a long civil war that ultimately led to the downfall of the Roman republic.

12 Augustus Caesar was Julius Caesar's great-nephew and heir. He was the ultimate winner of the civil wars and established himself as emperor, marking the beginning of imperial government in Rome.

13 A mountain range in Greece named after Lycaon's son, Maenalus. Its modern name is the Mainalo.

teeming with the lairs of wild beasts, then the Cyllene,¹⁴ and the icy pine woods of Lycaeus:¹⁵ here as late twilight faded into night, I entered the Arcadian tyrant's realm, an inhospitable home. I signaled that a god had arrived, and the crowd began to worship. First, Lycaon mocked their pious vows, then he said 'I will prove with an open test whether he is a god or mortal: the truth will not be in doubt.' 80 He planned to murder me, deep in slumber, in the night—a death undreamed of—that test pleased him.¹⁶ Then, not satisfied by that, with a sword he slit the throat of a hostage sent from the Molossian people, then tenderized the limbs, still half-living, for awhile in boiling water and lightly roasted them over a fire. As soon as he served them on his tables, I destroyed the roof with vengeful flames, bringing it down onto the household gods that merited a master of such little worth.¹⁷ Terrified, he fled. When he reached 90 the silent plains, he howled, trying in vain speak. His slathering jaws filled with rage, ever greedy for blood; he turned against the cattle, then took delight in their slaughter. His clothes turned to shaggy fur, his arms turned into to legs: he became a wolf. But he retained some traces of his old form: the same gray hair, the same violence, the same glaring eyes, the same ferocity in his appearance. One house fell, but it was not the only house deserving destruction: all across the world, the dire Furies reign."¹⁸ 100

14 Another Greek mountain, sometimes called Mount Kyllini.
15 A mountain named after Lycaon. It is known as Mount Lykaion today.

16 Ovid's grammar here is deliberately snarly because Jove is outraged. Ovid is drawing emphasis to the monstrosity of these actions, which are, in Roman culture, great: Lycaon's plans violate the important ethos of guest-friendship and hospitality.

17 Lares, guardian deities that protect whatever is in their boundaries, play a central role in Roman religious practice. A typical Roman household included a shrine, which contained figures representing a domestic Lares to protect the home as well as the Penates, the ancestral deities. Families placed these figures on the table at meal times and gave them regular offerings. Jupiter is, in essence, calling not only Lycaon but also his entire household and ancestral line worthless, which is one of the harshest insults one can deliver in a society that engages in ancestor worship.

18 The Furies are three female deities of vengeance who live in the underworld and punish those who sin against the natural order of things. The types of crimes they might punish include murder, crimes against one's family or rulers, and violations of the code of guest-friendship. If the Furies were called upon to punish an offender, they relentlessly plagued their target until they died or made proper acts

Book 3, ll. 26–130

Cadmus was preparing to make offerings to Jove:¹⁹
 he ordered his servants to go and seek
 waters from living fountains to be used in the libations.²⁰
 There stood an ancient grove, scarred by
 no blade, and in the centre there was a cave, thick
 with willows and twigs, with stones
 joined together in a low arch, and teeming with full springs.
 Hidden in the cave was a serpent, sacred
 to Mars,²¹ remarkable for its crests of gold; its eyes flashed
 with fire, its whole body swelled thick
 with poison, and three rows of teeth filled its mouth. 10
 When the travelers from Tyre set
 unlucky foot into the grove and the splash of their pitchers
 dipping into the water resounded,
 the dark blue-green serpent stretched its long head
 from the cave and hissed horrifically.
 The pitchers slipped from their hands as their blood ran cold,
 and their bodies began to shake in terror.
 The serpent twisted its scales into writhing coils and, with a jump,
 curved its body into a huge bow. 20
 Having raised more than half its length into the light air,
 it glared down over the entire grove,
 its body as large, if you could see the entire thing at once,
 as the space that separates the twin Bears.²²
 Immediately, it seized the Phoenicians whether they prepared
 for fight or flight or their terror
 held them back from doing either: it killed some with its bite,
 others in the crush of its embrace,
 and still more dissolved in the deadly poison it breathed.

of atonement. Their punishments ranged from madness to disease or misfortune, depending on the severity of the crime.

19 Cadmus is one of the earliest and greatest mythological heroes. He was originally from Tyre, the capital of ancient Phoenicia and, in modern times, a major city in Lebanon. After Jupiter abducted his sister, his father commanded him to search for her and not return home until he found her. During this quest, he visited the Delphic oracle, which told him to abandon his journey and, instead, follow a special cow. When it got tired and lay down, he was to build a city in that location.

20 Libations are drinks poured out as an offering to a god or gods. The cow Cadmus had been following has stopped, and he is preparing to sacrifice it. Libations were an important part of sacrifice rituals in the ancient world.

21 Mars, known as Ares in Greek, is the god of war and violence.

22 The constellations Ursa Major and Ursa Minor. These Latin names mean "Greater She-Bear" and "Smaller She-Bear." The Big Dipper and Little Dipper make up the tails of the two bears, making the constellations look practically identical other than their difference in size.

Already, the sun had reached its apex 30
 and made the shadows scarce. The son of Agenor wondered
 what might have delayed his companions
 and followed their tracks.²³ His armour was the skin of a lion,
 and he was armed with a glinting iron spear,
 with a javelin, and with a mind sharper than any blade.
 When he entered the grove and saw
 the slain bodies and the towering body of the victorious foe,
 licking their wounds with a bloody tongue,
 he cried out: "to you, most faithful and beloved, I will be
 either avenger or companion in death!" 40
 Thus he spoke, and with his right hand he lifted a massive stone,
 and with great effort, he hurled it.
 High walls with towering turrets would shake under that blow,
 but the serpent remained unhurt;
 protected by scales like a coat of armour, it repelled the strong blows
 with the hardness of its black skin.
 But that hardness did not conquer the javelin, which stood fixed
 in the middle curve of its twisting spine,
 and it fell with the iron buried in its entrails. In pain, it twisted
 its ferocious head around to its back 50
 and saw the wound. It bit the fixed javelin, violently shook it
 and loosened it on every side,
 then with great effort ripped it out. But the head of the dart
 remained lodged in the serpent's bones.
 Then, indeed, this new strike fueled the flames of its innate rage,
 its throat swelled with engorged veins,
 white foam flowed all around its gaping jaws, the earth
 screeched with the scrape of its scales,
 and the breath from its black Stygian mouth poisoned the foul air.
 Sometimes it curled its spirals into a huge ball, 60
 at other times it stretched itself out, straighter than a wooden beam,
 and then it surged forth in a massive rush
 like a river swelled with rain, and plowed trees down with its body.
 Cadmus, son of Agenor, retreated a short way,
 absorbed the blow with his lionskin armour, and blocked its fangs
 with his spear. It raged and tried in vain
 to inflict wounds on the spear, but its teeth shattered on its tip.
 And then the blood began to gush
 from its poisonous throat and soak the green grass with its spray.
 But the wound was a minor one 70
 because it had pulled back from the strike, preventing
 it from sinking in further.
 Then, following, Cadmus pressed the blade lodged in its throat
 until an oak blocked its retreat,
 and its neck, skewered and joined together with the wood.
 The tree bent under the its weight
 and groaned as its wood was beaten by the tip of the its tail.

23 Cadmus. Ovid refers to him by his patronymic here.

As the victor stared at the enemy's size,
suddenly there was voice; he could not discern its location,
but he heard it: "Why, Cadmus, do you 80
regard the dead serpent? You will also be regarded as a serpent."
He trembled a long time, the colour
had drained from his face, and his hair stood straight up
in freezing terror. Behold! Pallas,
his patron, appeared, having floated down through the air.²⁴
She ordered him to till the soil
and plant the viper's teeth to grow a race for the future.
He obeyed, and when the driven plow
had opened a furrow, he sowed the teeth into the ground
as bidden: the seeds of mortal beings. 90
Then (greater than can be believed!) the soil began
to shift; first the tips of spears,
then helmets with waving coloured crests appeared,
and soon shoulders, chests, and arms
laden with spears, and a field of shielded men grew up,
just as, at festival theatres, the figures
rise up when the curtains are raised, show their faces first,
and then the rest appears, bit by bit,
everything is drawn upward with a smooth movement until
they stand on the curtain's edge. 100

Terrified by the new enemy, Cadmus prepared to take up arms.
"Unhand your weapon," called one of the race
the earth created; "do not involve yourself in our civil war!"
He struck one of his earth-born brothers
with his stout sword in hand-to-hand combat, then he himself
was felled by a javelin hurled from afar,
but the one who gave him over to death did not live any longer
than he and let out the breath
he had just breathed in. The entire crowd raged in like manner,
and those suddenly-made brothers 110
fell in their shared war through mutually inflicted wounds.
Now the young race fate had granted
such a brief span of life was beating at its mother's breast,
warm with their blood. Five remained,
one of whom was Echion.²⁵ At the admonishment of Pallas
he threw his arms to the ground,
and he both sought and made pacts of fraternal peace.

24 Pallas is another name for Athena, the goddess of wisdom, strategy, and warfare. Like most mythological heroes, Cadmus has a divine patron who gives him aid and instructions.

25 The most prominent of the men grown from the serpent's teeth. He later married Agave, Cadmus's daughter.

ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, CITY OF GOD — Selections (XVI.vii–ix; XXI.vii–viii)
Translated by GWENDOLYNE KNIGHT

Critical Introduction

Augustine (354–430 CE) was bishop of the North African town of Hippo. His works had profound influence on theology and philosophy in the Latin West, and he is considered one of the most important of the Church Fathers whose impact on Christian thought and practice can hardly be overstated. As in many other matters, Augustine’s arguments regarding monsters received frequent citation, both throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, and he remains a frequent source for modern scholars writing about Late Antique and medieval concepts of and attitudes towards the monstrous.

Augustine uses the adjective *monstrousus* in book 16 to describe certain atypical peoples (such as Sciopods) and atypical people within “normal” human society (such as polydactyls), but the noun *monstrum* appears in book 21 as “omen,” directly correlated with the verb *monstrare*, “to show.” Nevertheless, establishing a definition of what one ought to consider monstrous does not appear to have particular importance to Augustine himself. He seems much more preoccupied by whether these partial-others may be said to belong to the human category than by any need to establish one of their own for them.

He describes humans as “rational mortal creatures (or animals)”; this creates certain problems when he comes to the Cynocephali, or dog-headed people, whose barking apparently marks them as more animal than human. This element of speech, however, is not elsewhere taken up. The second section of this excerpt concerns the capacity of God to transform one thing into another and to manipulate the properties of objects, up to and including the stars. Throughout both excerpts, Augustine also engages with the use and reliability of classical polytheist histories and authorities on the one hand, and witnesses on the other. Ancient polytheistic texts may be authoritative, he argues, but they are hindered by the fact that their composers were not “divinely taught.” Nevertheless, Augustine finds a particular use for them: he figures that if the polytheists believe these books and not Christian scripture, he can find useful correlates for his arguments also in these histories.

Reading Questions

What does Augustine consider natural? Are monsters natural according to Augustine? Do monsters serve a greater purpose, according to Augustine? If so, what is it? If not, why? Does Augustine describe non-Christians as monsters?

Editorial Notes

This translation generally hews as close to the Latin as possible; however, at some points words have been added and sentences split in order to make the text easier to read. At times, minor liberties with the text help render it into idiomatic English. This translation uses the term “hermaphrodites” because the ancient source uses this term. It is no longer the preferred term for actual human beings whose bodies or gender identities lie between traditional notions of male and female. Intersex or trans* are now common terms.

Further Reading

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ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *CITY OF GOD*

Selections (XVI.vii–ix; XXI.vii–viii)

Translated by GWENDOLYNE KNIGHT

Book XVI.viii

Whether certain monstrous kinds of humans proceeded from the propagation of Adam or the sons of Noah.

It is also frequently asked, whether it is to be believed that certain monstrous kinds of humans, which pagan history describes, were generated from the sons of Noah, or rather from that one man¹ whence they themselves also sprang. Among these there are said to be certain ones who have one eye in the middle of their forehead,² among others the soles of the foot are turned backwards toward the legs,³ among certain peoples of both sexes it is natural that the right breast is male, the left female, and in intercourse with each other both beget and bear children;⁴ among others there is no mouth and they live only by breathing through their noses,⁵ others are a cubit in stature, whom the Greeks call Pygmies from “cubit,”⁶ elsewhere women conceive at five years and in life do not exceed eight years.⁷ Likewise they claim that there is a people who have a single leg on their feet and cannot bend their knee, and are wondrously swift. They are called “Skiopods,”⁸ because through the summer, lying on their backs on the ground, they cover themselves with the shadow from their feet. Certain men without necks have their eyes in the shoulders, and other kinds of humans, or even quasi-humans, which are pictured in mosaic on the esplanade at Carthage, derive from books of even more curious history.

¹ Here and elsewhere, the “one man” from whom all humans (including, as here, the sons of Noah) are descended refers to Adam, the first human created by God in the Christian mythology.

² **Pliny, *Natural History***, gives these one-eyed creatures the name Arimaspi, but they are perhaps better known today as Cyclops (which Pliny identifies as a different creature).

³ Identified by Pliny as the forest-dwellers of Abarimon.

⁴ These people are known as Androgyni.

⁵ The Astomi.

⁶ A cubit is traditionally a unit of measurement spanning the distance between the tip of the middle finger and the base of the elbow.

⁷ These girls appear among the Calingi.

⁸ From the Greek σκιάποδες, literally “shadow foot.”

What shall I say about the Cynocephali, whose dogs’ heads and actual barking show that they are more beasts than humans? But it is not necessary to believe in all the kinds of humans which are spoken of. Indeed, anyone born anywhere as a human, that is as a rational mortal creature, however unusual their bodily form, or motion, or sound, or their nature with any power, part, or quality, appears to our notions, no one of faith may have a doubt that they derive their origin from that single progenitor. There appears, however, that which will have persisted in great numbers by its nature, and that which would be marvellous by its own rarity.

Furthermore, the same explanation that is given regarding monstrous births among we humans can be made for those same races. For God is the creator of all, who himself knows where and when it may be proper or will be proper that something be created; knowing this, he composes the beauty of the universe out of parts from its similarity and diversity. But one who is unable to look upon the whole is offended by the deformity of one part, so to speak, because they do not know with what it corresponds and with what it may be classified. We know about people born with more than five digits on their hands and feet; even this is more trifling than any aberration; but still, far be it that someone would be so foolish that they suppose the Creator erred in the number of human digits, although not knowing why he did this. So, though a greater variation may arise, he knows what he’s doing, whose works no one rightly censures.

At Hippo Zaritus, there is a man who has almost crescent-shaped feet and only two toes on them, and similar hands. If somehow there were such a people, it would be added to that curious and marvellous history. Surely we shall not, then, because of this deny that that man is descended from the one man who was first created?

However much Androgyni, whom they also call Hermaphrodites, may be quite rare, it is nevertheless difficult to find times in which they are absent. In them thus both sexes are apparent, such that it would be uncertain from which they are preferably fated to receive their name; however, the custom of speaking prevails such that they are called by the better one, that is by the masculine. For no one ever called

them Androgynaecae or Hermaphroditae.⁹ A few years ago, certainly within my memory, a man was born in the East with double upper limbs and single lower. For there were two heads, two chests, four hands, but only one belly and two feet, just as with a single person; and he lived for so long that the report attracted many to see him.¹⁰

Furthermore, who could recall all the human progeny far and away dissimilar to those from whom it is certain they were born? Therefore, just as it cannot be denied that these derive their origin from that one man, so whichever peoples are reported to deviate in diversities of body from the customary course of nature that many and nearly all follow, if these are included in the definition that they be rational and mortal animals, it must be acknowledged that their lineage descends from that same man, the first father of all, if only those things are true that are told about the variety of those nations and about all the differences between them and us. For if we did not know that apes, and long-tailed monkeys, and chimpanzees are not humans but beasts, those historians, glorying in their curiosity, could falsely assert to us in their unscathed vanity that these are other kinds of humans. But if they are humans, about whom these wonders were written, what if God wanted to create some such peoples so we should not think regarding these monsters, which are properly born among us from humans, that his wisdom by which he fashions human nature erred as if the conduct of some less than perfect artisan? Thus it ought not seem absurd that, just as among each individual tribe there are certain monsters, so in the human race as a whole, there may be certain ones of the tribes that are monstrous.

On this account, I will then conclude this investigation cautiously and carefully; either those accounts like what is written about certain peoples are entirely worthless; or if they do exist, they are not human; or if they are human, they are descended from Adam.

Book XVI.ix

Whether it may be believed that the lower part of the earth, which is opposite to our dwelling place, has antipodes.¹¹

Though in regard to what they say about the antipodes, that is, people on the other side of the earth where the sun rises when it sets for us, who tread with their footsteps opposite to us, there is no reason for believing this. People do not maintain that they learned this from any historical inquiry, but they conjecture as if to infer with it that the earth is suspended within the sphere of heaven and that the world has the same low and middle point; and from this they suppose that the other half of the earth that is beneath cannot lack in human habitation. And they do not consider that even if the world is believed to be a global and round figure, or if by some reason it should be shown, it does not necessarily follow that the land on the other side is not covered by an accumulation of waters; then, even if it be uncovered, nor does it necessarily have humans. The Scripture, which gains faith for past events because its predictions are fulfilled, does not deceive in any way, and it is too absurd to be mentioned that some humans could have sailed from this and arrived on the other side, having crossed the boundless ocean, so that the human race might also be established in that place from the one first man.

Because of this, let us investigate, then, among those populations of humans, who are said to have been divided into seventy-two tribes and as many languages, if we can enter the City of God and its earthly pilgrimage, which was guided continuously to the flood and the ark and was shown to have continued in the sons of Noah through the benediction of the sons, most particularly in the eldest who is called Shem, since indeed Japheth was only so blessed in that he lived in his, that is, his brother's, homes.

⁹ These are Latin feminine plural forms of these names.

¹⁰ Augustine writes here of conjoined twins, though he refers to him/them in the singular.

¹¹ From the Greek ἀντίποδες, “antipodes,” meaning “with feet opposite (to ours)” and in Greek writings usually used to refer to the opposite side of a spherical earth. However, the Latin adaptation *antipodas* changed the sense of the word to “those with feet opposite,” hence Augustine’s interpretation of those “who tread with their footsteps opposite to us.”

Book XXI.vii***Wherein the final reason for believing in wondrous things may be the omnipotence of the Creator.***

And so why can God not cause both the bodies of the dead to rise again and the bodies of the damned to be tortured in eternal fire, who made a world full with innumerable miracles in heaven, on earth, in the air, in the waters, while the world itself is even yet beyond doubt a greater and superior miracle than the things with which it is full? But these people with whom or against whom we argue, who believe both that the world is made by God and that there are gods made by him, through whom by him the world is managed, they either do not deny, or moreover even proclaim worldly powers that are producers of miracles, whether spontaneous or obtained by any kind of veneration and ritual, or magical. When we propose to them the admirable power of other things, which are neither rational animals nor spirits furnished with any reasoning, just as those are of which we mentioned a few, they are wont to respond, "That is the power of nature, thus their nature has it itself, those are the efficacies of their peculiar natures." And thus the whole reason why fire makes Agrigentine salt melt, and water makes it crackle, is that this is its nature. But this rather seems to be contrary to nature, which gives not fire but water the capacity to melt salt, and fire not water to burn it. But the natural power of this salt, they say, is that it submits to the opposite of these. This reason is consequently given also regarding that Garamantian spring, one single stream of water that is cold during the day and hot during the night, with each force being irksome to the touch; this also regarding that other spring which, while it may be cold to the touch and extinguishes a lit torch like other springs, unlike them, the same one itself also marvellously lights an extinguished torch; this also regarding the asbestos stone, which when it has no fire of its own nevertheless, having taken fire not its own, thus burns so that it cannot be extinguished; this also regarding the others which it is irksome to unravel, in which a strange power seems to be contrary to nature, and yet no other reason is given regarding this, but that it is said that this is their nature.

Doubtless that explanation is short, I grant, and is a sufficient answer. But since God is the author of all natural things, why do they not want us to give a stronger reason? When they, for instance, do not wish to believe an impossible thing, and we respond that this is the will of omnipotent God, they demand to be given an explanation. Who would certainly not be called omnipotent if he could not do whatsoever he

wishes, who was able to create so many things which, unless they were displayed or were confirmed by credible witnesses also today, would certainly be thought impossible, not only those things unknown among us, indeed also the very well known ones that I set down. For those which have no witness except those in whose books we read about them, and are written by those who were not divinely taught and may have been able to be deceived accidentally after the manner of humans, it is reasonable to not believe in everything without proper censure.

For I do not wish that everything that I have set down be heedlessly believed, because I do not believe them myself in such a way that there may be no doubt about them in my thought, these things being excepted that I experienced myself and may be tested easily by anyone—just as the limestone that boils in water and is cold in oil, the magnet that, I know not how, does not move a straw but snatches up iron by an imperceptible force, the flesh of the peacock which does not decay while that even of Plato has decayed, the straw so cold that it prevents snow from melting and compels apples to ripen, the shining fire that, following its brightness, makes stones dazzlingly white while baking them, and contrary to its same brightness darkens many things while burning them. Of such a kind is also that black spots are spread over something by clear oil, similarly black lines are marked with white silver. Also, regarding charcoals, with the igniting fire everything is changed to its opposite, such that from beautiful wood they make something ugly, something fragile from something solid, something lasting from something decaying. These I knew myself, some along with many, some along with all, and many others which it would be tedious to introduce in this book. About these things, however, that I have set down, those not experienced but read—except regarding that spring where both burning torches are quenched and quenched ones kindled, and regarding the apples of the land of Sodom, on the outside almost ripe, on the inside smoke—I could not find other capable witnesses from whom I might hear whether they were true. And I have not found any who may say they had seen that particular spring in Epirus, but I did find those who know a similar one in Gaul, not far from the city of Grenoble. However, regarding the fruits of the trees of the Sodomites, not only are they mentioned faithfully in meritorious literature, indeed so many say they have experienced it that I could not doubt this. Thus indeed I have others that I decided to neither deny nor confirm, but on that account I also put them down since I read them among the histories of those against whom we argue, so that I might demonstrate

what sort of things, many in number, that many of them believe with no express reason when written in the records of their men of letters, who do not condescend to believe us with the reason given when we say that omnipotent God will do that which may go beyond their experience and sense. For what better or stronger reason regarding such things can be given as when the Almighty is said to be able to do, and is said that he will do, things which it is read that he foretold, where he foretold many other things that he is made known to have done? Naturally, he will do them, because he who foretold that they will be done, these things thought impossible, it is he who promised and made it so that incredible things should be believed by unbelieving peoples.

Book XXI.viii

It is not contrary to nature when something, whose nature is known, begins to be something notoriously different from that which it was.

However, they may reply, on that account, that they don't believe what we say regarding human bodies always burning without dying, because we know that the nature of human bodies is organized far differently. Hence the reason for this cannot be given which has been given regarding those natural wonders that permits it to be said: "That force is natural, that is the nature of this thing," because we know that this is not the nature of human flesh. For this we have something from the sacred writings that we may give as answer: certainly before sin this human flesh was itself composed differently; that is, it could never endure death. After the sin it was, however, otherwise, such as became known in the hardship of this mortality, that it cannot retain life perpetually. So therefore regarding the resurrection of the dead it is accomplished differently than is known to us. But since they¹² do not believe these writings where it is read what sort of man lived in paradise and how estranged he was from the necessity of death—certainly if they believed in them we would not argue laboriously with them about the punishment of the damned which is to come—it is preferable to borrow from their writings, which were written by the most learned men among them, in which there appears a thing which can become different than what had previously been known regarding its fixed nature.

¹² Here and in the following instances, "they" refers to the Roman polytheists against whom St. Augustine is arguing (whom he also refers to as "unbelievers" (infidels) further down).

There is a passage in one of M. Varro's¹³ books, whose title is *On the Race of the Roman People*, which I will also set down here with the same words in which it is read there: "In the sky," he writes, "there appeared an extraordinary portent. For on the most splendid star Venus which Plautus calls 'Vesperugo' and Homer 'Hesperos,' saying 'most beautiful,' Castor writes that such a portent appeared with the result that it changed colour, size, shape, course; which happened thus neither before nor since. The well-known astronomers Adrastus of Cyzicus and Dion of Naples say this happened in the reign of Ogygus." Such an authority as Varro would certainly not call this a portent if it did not seem to be contrary to nature. Of course, we say that all portents are contrary to nature, but they are not. For how is a thing done by the will of God contrary to nature, when certainly the will of such a creator is the nature of each created thing? A portent, therefore, does not happen contrary to nature, but contrary to that which is well-known nature. Yet who may reckon the multitude of portents that is contained in the history of the pagans? But now let us consider this one, which pertains to the thing about which we are arguing.

What is so properly ordered by the natural author of heaven and earth as the perfectly ordained course of the stars? What so established by firm and immovable laws? And yet, when he willed it, he who rules what he created by supreme command and power, a star most well-known before the others for its size and splendour changed colour, size, shape, and (what is extraordinary) its regular and lawful course. On that occasion he certainly confounded the models of the astrologers, if there were any then, which they had drawn up as with inerrable computations of the past and future motions of the stars, following these models, they were so bold as to say that this thing that affected Venus had never affected it before or after. We read, however, in the divine books that even the sun itself also stood still, when the holy man Joshua, son of Nun, had requested it from the Lord God, until he would conclude the battle that he had begun with victory, and that it turned back so that fifteen years had been added to the life of King Hezekiah, these things, with the prodigy added to this, being signifiers of the promise of God. But these miracles, which were granted of the saints for their merits, when they¹⁴

¹³ Marcus Terentius Varro (ca. 116 BCE–27 BCE) was one of the most prominent scholars of Rome, whose works exerted great influence both before and after the founding of the Roman Empire in 27 BCE.

¹⁴ The pagans.

believe them as facts, are ascribed to magical arts. Whence is that which I quoted above, which Virgil said: "To stop water in flowing streams and turn back the stars." For a river also stopped above and flowed below when the people of God, led by the previously mentioned Joshua, took the road, and we read in the sacred writings about the prophet Elijah having crossed and later his student Elisha did the same, and we just mentioned that in the reign of Hezekiah the greatest star was turned back. Indeed, what Varro wrote about Venus, it is not therein said that it was granted due to any sort of human prayer.

Therefore, unbelievers should not make confusion for themselves regarding knowledge of natural objects, as if in any thing the divine could not cause something different to happen than in its nature as they know it through their human experience. However much those things that in the nature of objects are known to all, they should not be less marvellous, and would be stupendous to all those who consider them if people wondered at many marvels beyond the rare ones. For who, having pondered the explanation, would not see that, among the countless number of people and so much similarity of nature, thus very marvellously individual people have individual faces, so that, if they were not alike among themselves, their species would not be distinguished from other animals, and in return if they are not dissimilar among themselves, individuals would not be distinguished from other humans? Thus the similarity is acknowledged, and we discover the same dissimilarities. But the consideration of the dissimilarities is more wondrous, since a common nature seems more properly to demand similarity. However, since what is uncommon is also wondrous, we marvel so much more when we find two so similar that in telling them apart we either always or frequently err.

But what I said about the writing from Varro, even if he is a historian and their most learned, perhaps they do not believe it truly happened. Or because the altered course of that same star did not remain for a long time, but returned to what is usual, they are less moved by that example. Therefore they have another that can also now be shown, and I think it ought to be enough for them that they have been reminded about that, while they may have turned towards something in one of the arrangements of nature and become very familiar with it, they should not thence ordain for God, as if he could not change something and alter it from that which is known to them. The land of the Sodomites was certainly not as it now is, but lay with the same façade as others and thrived with the same or even more fertility, for, in the divine utterances, it is

compared with the paradise of God. This land was afterwards struck in the highest degree by heaven, just as the history of those pagans also affirms, and now can be seen by those to come to that place, since then it is horrible with its unnatural soot and its apples that, beneath the lying appearance of ripeness, contain an interior of ashes. Behold, it was not thus, and thus it now is. Behold, its nature was changed by a miraculous mutation into something loathsomely different by the creator of nature, and although so much time goes past, for such a long time it persists.

Therefore, just as it was not impossible to establish such kinds as he wished, so it is not impossible for him to change the natures into something as he wishes. From this also the multitude of those things run wild, which are called omens, signs, portents, prodigies. If I would wish to recall and enumerate these, where would be the end of this work? *Monstra*, "marvel," reasonably gets its name from the action of *monstrare*, "show" which indicates something by a sign, and *ostenta*, "a display" from *ostendere*, "to display", and *portenta*, "portent," from *portendere*, "portend," that is, to show beforehand, and *prodigia*, "prodigy," which is *porro dicant*, "say aforesaid," that is, they predict the future. But their diviners may see in what way they are at times deceived by them, at times they even predict truths by the instigation of spirits solicitous of entangling the souls of men deserving of such a punishment with those snares of noxious curiosity, and at times over the course of much random talk they run into some kind of truth. Still, these were supposedly contrary to nature and they are said to be contrary to nature—in this habit of men was also how the apostle spoke, when saying that the wild olive tree grafted in the olive branches is made a partaker of the richness of the olive tree's roots¹⁵ is contrary to nature—and for us *monstra*, *ostenta*, *portenta*, *prodigia* should be called by name, they should demonstrate this, show or portend this, predict this: that God will do what he announced beforehand he will do regarding the bodies of humans,¹⁶ with no difficulty impeding him, with no circumscription by a law of nature. But the way in which he foretold this, I judge that I have explained adequately in the previous book, having gathered from the holy scriptures both old and new, not everything relevant to this, but I judged it to suffice for this work.

¹⁵ The biblical reference here is to Romans 11.17–24.

¹⁶ That is, the promise of the Resurrection: that God will resurrect the righteous, including their uncorrupted bodies.

TÁIN BÓ CÚAILNGE (CATTLE RAID OF COOLEY) — Selections Translated by LARISSA TRACY

Critical Introduction

The *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*Cattle Raid of Cooley*) is one of the great sagas of ancient Ireland, part of the Ulster Cycle, which recounts the exploits and fantastic deeds of the young hero Cú Chulainn (The Hound of Culann). The *Táin* is an eighth-century story that survives in several later medieval versions recounting the fantastic deeds of the heroes of prehistoric Ireland. It is an ancient tale full of contests, fantastic weapons, rivalries, and supernatural entities that insert themselves into the action. Gods and goddess walk the battlefield, intervening on behalf of or against the heroes as it pleases them. Cú Chulainn, the son of the god Lugh and a mortal woman (Dechtere), has marvellous abilities that turn him into a killing machine. Not only does he take up arms as a child and perform impossible feats with weapons, but he experiences a battle-spasm that literally turns his body inside out: blood shoots from the top of his head, his hair sticks straight out, he pulls his jaw back to his gullet, one eye pops out onto his cheek, the other one sucks deep into his skull, and a divine light shines above him. To many, Cú Chulainn seems like a monster as he transforms, but this fantastic element adds to his fame and strikes fear into the hearts of his enemies.

Centred around a marital dispute between Queen Medb of Connacht and her husband, Ailill, a prince of Leinster, the *Táin* includes several episodic stories of various Irish heroes, including Cú Chulainn, who enters battles at the tender age of seven and holds off the armies of four of the five provinces of Ireland by himself, ultimately dying a hero's death in his late teens. Cú Chulainn becomes the central figure of the story when he stands alone against the armies of Medb, Ailill, and the other three provinces of Ireland who are trying to steal a much-prized bull. Donn Cuailnge, the Brown, is owned by Dáire mac Fiachna, whose leader is King Conchobair of Ulster. When Medb's diplomatic plan to borrow Donn Cuailnge for a year falls through, Medb launches a massive cattle-raid to steal the bull. Cú Chulainn is the only one available to defend Ulster against this attack because all the men are laid low by birth-pangs that they suffer for nine days a year as part of a curse laid upon them by the faery woman Macha. In his stance against the armies of the other four provinces of Ire-

land—Connacht, Munster, Leinster, and Meath—Cú Chulainn performs numerous daring and incredible (and bloody) feats until he is slain by the machinations of the Mórrígan—a war goddess whose attentions Cú Chulainn spurned.

Reading Questions

How does Cú Chulainn's battle-spasm affect his character? Does it make him more or less heroic? More or less monstrous?

Why is it important that the god Lugh helps Cú Chulainn recover but will not help him fight his actual battle? What does this text say about the qualities of Irish heroes?

Editorial Notes

This is a translation of Recension I of the *Táin* which is available online from University College Cork's Corpus of Electronic Texts. There are earlier translations, most notably by Cecile O'Rahilly and Thomas Kinsella, which were consulted in the process of producing this translation. Kinsella's translation combines passages of the *Táin* from two fragmentary manuscripts, the twelfth-century *Lebor na hUidre* (*The Book of the Dun Cow*) and the fourteenth-century *Leabhar Buidhe Leacáin* (*Yellow Book of Lecan*), with some sections of the *Lebor Laignech* (*Book of Leinster*). Spelling and tenses have been normalized, adjusting the text in places for easier reading.

Further Reading

Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I. Edited by Cecile O'Rahilly. CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts: A Project of University College, Cork. <http://www.ucc.ie/celt>. 2001, 2014.

Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster. Translated by Cecile O'Rahilly. CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts: A Project of University College, Cork. <http://www.ucc.ie/celt>. 2000, 2010, 2014.

The Táin. Translated by Thomas Kinsella. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

TÁIN BÓ CÚAILNGE (CATTLE RAID OF COOLEY)

Selections

Translated by LARISSA TRACY

Cú Chulainn's Boyhood Exploits

"He was raised, truly," said Fergus, "by his mother and father at the Airgthech in Mag Muirthemne. He was told the famous tales of the youth in Emain. For three fifties of boys," said Fergus, "are there at play. This is how Conchobair enjoys his day: a third of the day watching the boys, third of the day playing chess, a third of the day drinking ale until he falls asleep. Though we are exiled from him, there is no other warrior in Ireland so wonderful," said Fergus.¹

Cú Chulainn asked his mother if he could go join the boys. "You will not go," said his mother, "until you can be escorted by Ulster warriors." "It's too long to wait for that," said Cú Chulainn. "Point me in the direction of Emain." "Northwards, there," said his mother, "and it is a difficult journey," she said, "because Sliáb Fúait² is between you and it." "I will make a guess at it," said Cú Chulainn. Thus, he went forth with his boy's wooden shield, toy javelin, driving club,³ and ball. He threw the javelin before him and caught it by the end before the bottom fell to the ground. He went to the boys then without their bonds of protection on him.⁴ No one went onto their playing field without engaging their protection, but he did not know that. "That boy outrages us," said Follomon, son of Conchobair, "yet we know he is of the Ulster people." They kept warning him off. He dashed into them. They threw three times fifty javelins at him and he stopped them all with his wooden shield. They also threw all their balls at him, and he

caught each one of the balls against his chest. They also threw three times fifty hurling clubs at him. He defended himself so that they could reach him, and he took an armful on his back. Then he became distorted. His hair rose-up, so you would have thought that each hair on his head was hammered into it. You would have thought there were sparks of fire from each one of them. He closed one of his two eyes so that it was as narrow as the eye of a needle. He opened the other eye as big as the mouth of a wooden bowl. He laid bare from his jaw to his ear and opened his mouth as far as his innards, so that his gullet was visible. The moon of the warrior⁵ rose out of the crown of his head. He struck the boys throughout, over-throwing fifty of them before they could reach the door of Emain. Nine of them came past me and Conchobair where we were playing chess. He sprang up over the chessboard after the nine boys.

Conchobair took him by the lower arm. "This is not a good way to deal with the lads." "It was proper for me, papa Conchobair," he said. "I have come from the house of my mother and my father to play and they have not been good to me." "What is your name?" said Conchobair. "I am Sétanta son of Súaltain and your sister Dechtere. I did not expect to be hurt here." "Why did you not bind your protection to the boys then?" "I did not know I needed to do that," said Cú Chulainn. "Take my protection from them in your hands then." "I acknowledge this," said Conchobair.

Therewith, Cú Chulainn turned aside to chase the lads throughout the house. "What is your problem with them now?" asked Conchobair. "Bind them under my protection now," said Cú Chulainn. "Take it in your hand then," said Conchobair. "Acknowledged," said Cú Chulainn. Then they all went to the playing field, and those who had been stricken raised themselves, helped by their foster-fathers and foster-mothers.

¹ Fergus, who served Conchobair of Ulster but was exiled for helping Conchobair's concubine Deidre escape with her lover, is telling this story to Queen Medb.

² Mount Fuse.

³ Cú Chulainn is carrying a driving club (or hurley), similar to a short field hockey stick, as well as his shield and short javelin. Hurling is a national sport in Ireland that dates back to prehistoric society. The objective is to hit a small ball between the opponent's goalposts with the hurley. The ball can be briefly carried, it can be kicked or swatted between players. The game is extremely fast, and the ball is very hard. Throughout the *Táin*, the boy-troop uses hurleys and balls as weapons.

⁴ Cú Chulainn is unknown to these boys and so he has not asked for their permission to join them, nor have they sworn oaths to protect each other. So they are perfectly within their rights to attack him.

⁵ This is a reference to a bright light that emanates from the top of Cú Chulainn's head, a warrior or champion's light that marks him out as an extraordinary hero.

The Sickle Chariot and the Great Slaughter on the Plain of Muirthemne

Then the Four Provinces of Ireland settled down and pitched camp at Breslech Mór on the Murthemne Plain. They sent their share of cattle and spoils ahead of them, southward to Clithar Bó Ulad.⁶ Cú Chulainn took up position at the grave mound of Lerga, near them. In the evening, at nightfall, his charioteer, Lóeg, son of Ríangabra, kindled a fire for him. Over the tops of the heads of the four Provinces of Ireland, Cú Chulainn perceived the burning glow of pure gold weapons as the sinking sun lit the clouds of evening. Anger and great wrath came to him when he saw the abundant host of his enemy because of the large number of foes. He grabbed his two spears, his shield and his sword. He rattled the shield, brandished the spear, and shook the sword, uttering a warrior cry in his throat so that the *bánánaig* and *bocánaig*,⁷ the sprites of the glen,⁸ and the demons of the air gave a terrified answer to his shout. Némain⁹ stirred the army to confusion. The four Provinces of Ireland fell into a panic, clashing their spear points and weapons amongst themselves; one hundred fell dead in from fright and terror in the middle of the encampment that nightfall.

Standing in his place, Laeg watched a solitary man crossing the encampment of the men of Ireland from the northeast straight towards him. "There is a solitary man coming straight towards us, Little Hound," said Láeg. "What kind of man is he?" said Cú Chulainn. "It is soon told. He is a fine man of great beauty, moreover, his close-cropped hair is fair and curled. He has a green cloak gathered up around him. A white-silver brooch holds the mantle at its opening. Next to his white skin he wears a tunic of kingly silk to his knees embroidered with

⁶ The Cattle Shelter of Ulster.

⁷ *Bánánach* is the name of a preternatural being who haunts the field of battle; a *bocánach* is a goat-like supernatural being usually associated with battle or a battlefield. *eDil*: <http://www.dil.ie/5327> and <http://www.dil.ie/6234> respectively.

⁸ Specifically, *geniti glinni* which can be translated as "goblins of the glen" (Kinsella 141) or spectres of the glen (O'Rahilly 183). *genit*: "A female mythical being of malevolent powers"; *geilt*: "one who goes mad from terror; a panic-stricken fugitive from battle; a crazy person living in the woods and supposed to be endowed with the power of levitation; a lunatic." *eDIL*: <http://www.dil.ie/25518>. According to the *eDIL*: "demoniac spectral women of the glen: a kind of otherworld Amazons who with like supernatural beings, appear with shrill cries on the battle-field." <http://www.dil.ie/25673>.

⁹ An ancient war goddess, wife of Néit; sometimes identified with Badb. *eDil*: <http://www.dil.ie/33076>.

red gold. He carries a black shield with a hard boss in gold and white bronze. He has a five-pointed spear in his hand, along with a pronged javelin. He performs strange and marvellous feats with these weapons and yet he attacks no one and no one attacks him for it seems that no one can see him."

"That is true, foster-child," he said. "That is one of my friends of the *sídhe*¹⁰ come to comfort me because of my great distress as I stand alone against the Four Provinces of Ireland at this time, during the Cattleraid of Cooley." It was truly as Cú Chulainn said. The warrior arrived at Cú Chulainn's place and spoke to him, addressing his compassion for him. "This is manly action, Cú Chulainn." "It isn't that great at all," said Cú Chulainn. "I will give you assistance then," said the warrior. "Who are you?" asked Cú Chulainn. "I am your foster-father from the *sídhe*, Lug mac Ethlend." "My wounds are truly serious. It is time they were allowed to heal." "Sleep for a little while, Cú Chulainn," said the warrior. "Sleep heavily in slumber beside the grave mound at Lerga for three days and three nights, and I'll stand against the armies for that length of time." Then he sang in the way men chant to each other until Cú Chulainn was asleep, and then Lugh searched and cleaned each wound.

This was the incantation of Lugh: Then Lugh said, "Rise mighty son of Ulster for your wounds are whole and healed in full; a pleasant champion, face your foes for the great reckoning, driving the enemy without; the *sídhe* delivers succour to save you in this place; you remain at the hound fords, a solitary guard, taking heed of these hides; strike and I shall strike with you. They have no period of life to match yours, so wage your hostile quarrel with your black foe. Mount your chariot, then arise, arise hero!"

Three days and three nights Cú Chulainn slept. Truly, it is natural that he might, for his sleep was as great as his weariness. From the Monday after Samhain¹¹ until the Wednesday

¹⁰ *sídhe*: Faery folk and ancient gods of Ireland who inhabited the Otherworld and often intervened in the lives of legendary heroes. Grave mounds, or barrows, were thought to be an access point for the Otherworld, though there are numerous references to Otherworldly figures appearing out of nowhere in the Irish tradition.

¹¹ Samhain is the Irish god of the dead whose feast marks the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. Celebrated starting on the eve of November 1, it was appropriated by Christians as the Feast of all Saints, or All Hallows and eventually All Hallows' Eve was shortened to Hallowe'en. This day retained a great significance throughout the Middle Ages as a period when the door between the Otherworld and the tangible world was thinnest and heroes could cross over more easily, encountering all manner of beings. Cf. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

after Imbolc,¹² Cú Chulainn had not slept except for a little while against his spear after the middle of the day, with his head on his fist, his fist on his spear, and the spear against his knee, but he kept hewing and cutting, slaughtering and striking the Four Provinces of Ireland.

Then the warrior of the *sídhe* placed curative herbs, healing plants and a curing charm on his hard-to-heal injuries, wounds, and sores so that he healed in his sleep without being aware of it.

It was at this point in time that the boy-troop of Ulster came south from Emain Macha, three-times-fifty of the kings' sons of Ulster led by Follomon, son of Conchobair. Three times they gave battle to that host, cutting down three-times as many of them; but the boy troop perished there as well, all except for Follomon, son of Conchobair. Follomon swore that he did not choose to return to Emain til the day of doom unless he carried off Ailill's head with its golden crown on top of it. But that was no easy task for him, for he was overtaken by the two sons of Bethe mac Báin, sons of Ailill's foster-mother and foster-father, who cut him down. That was the Death of the Boy-Troop of Ulster and Follomon mac Conchobair.

Cú Chulainn lay there in deep slumber for three days and three nights at the grave mound of Lerga. Cú Chulainn arose then from sleep and passed his hand across his face, turned a ruddy purple from top to bottom, his spirits high as though he were going to a gathering, a tryst, an ale-house, or one of the assemblies of Ireland.

"How long was I asleep just now, warrior," Cú Chulainn asked. "Three days and three nights," answered the warrior. "Alas for that!" said Cú Chulainn. "Why is that?" said the warrior. "The army has not been attacked for that length of time?" said Cú Chulainn. "They certainly have not," replied the warrior. "Why? How is that?" asked Cú Chulainn. "The boy-troop set forth south from Emain Macha, three-time-fifty boys led by Follomon mac Conchobair, the mighty King of Ulster. They gave three battles to that host for three days and three nights while you slept. They killed three times as many of them, but the boy-troop was cut down except for Follomon mac Conchobair. Follomon swore that he would take the head of Ailill. It was no easy task for him, for he was killed." "Alas that I was not my full strength! If I had been, the boy-troop would not have fallen, and Follomon mac Conchobair would not have been overtaken and killed." "Strive on beyond this, Little

Hound; there is no disgrace to your honour and no insult to your glory." "Stay here with us tonight, warrior," said Cú Chulainn. "So that together we may avenge the boy-troop upon the host." "No, I will not stay," said the warrior. "There are great victories and heroic deeds for a man in your company but not the fame nor the eminence, which falls on you. Because of this, I will not stay. But equip yourself, perform heroic deeds on your own upon the host, for they have no control over your life at this time."

"And the sickle-bladed chariot, my friend Laeg?" asked Cú Chulainn. "Can you harness it and equip it? If you can harness it and equip it, then do so. If you do not have the equipment, certainly do not harness it."

The charioteer rose and put on his charioteer's war-gear. This charioteer's war-harness that he wore was his smooth tunic made of skins, light and airy, supple and fine-textured, stitched and made of deer skin, which did not restrain the agility or movement of the arms. He took upon him an outer-cloak of raven's feathers made by Simon the Druid¹³ for Darius, King of the Romans: Darius gave it to Conchobair, and Conchobair gave it to Cú Chulainn, and Cú Chulainn gave it to his charioteer. He then took up his crested, metal-plated, four-sided helmet of every colour and every shape that reached past the middle of his shoulders. It was excellent for him to wear, not oppressive at all. With his hand, he placed the charioteer's fillet on his brow, to keep the hair from falling in his eyes: a circle of refined gold like a red-gold strip smelted over an anvil's edge, an indicator of his status as a charioteer that set him apart from his master. In his right hand, he took his horse-spancel¹⁴ and his ornamented goad. In his left hand, he took up the reins—the charioteer's controlling harness. He placed ornamented iron plate-armour on each horse, covering them from forehead to foreleg, adorned with little javelins, spikes, spear, and sharp points; every wheel of the chariot bristled and every angle, corner, end and front lacerated as it passed. He cast a protective spell over his two horses and companion so that they were not visible to anyone in the encampment but everyone in the encampment was visible to them. It was proper for him to cast this spell, for that day he performed three feats of charioteering: leaping the gap, steering straight, and casting the goad.

¹² Feb. 1. The first day of early spring, which was appropriated in Christianity as the Feast of St. Brigid, the female patron saint of Ireland and companion to St. Patrick.

¹³ The text actually says Simón Druí, or Simon the Druid, but both Kinsella and O'Rahilly translate this as a reference to the medieval alchemist Simon Magnus.

¹⁴ Switches for urging his horses.

Then the hero and architect of Badb's¹⁵ enclosure built with men and earth, Cú Chulainn, son of Súaltaim, took on his warrior's battle-array of fighting, contest, and strife. This battle-gear of fighting, contest, and strife was twenty-seven tunics polished with wax, compressed like plates and bound close to his naked skin with ropes, cords, and cables so that his wits and his head would not be deranged when his vehement fury came upon him. Over that he put on a battle-corselet of hardened leather, hardy and tanned, formed from the best parts of seven young ox-hides, which covered him from his narrow waist to the thickness of his armpit; he wore this to repel darts, points, spikes, spears, and arrows which glanced off it as though they had struck stone, horn or hard rock. Then he put on his apron of filmy silk with its ornate patterned edge over the soft part of his abdomen. Over his apron of filmy silk, he put on his supple dark brown leather apron made from the best parts of four yearlings, held up by a battle girdle made from cow-hide. Then the kingly warrior took up his battle-arms. The battle arms he took up included eight small swords with his bright-faced ivory-hilted sword; eight small spears with his five-pronged spear; eight little javelins and his ivory-handled javelin; eight small darts and his *deil chiss*—the feat-playing dart. He took up eight feat-playing shields with his curved black-red shield, which could fit a prize boar in its boss, with its razor sharp, keen edge all around, so sharp and keen that it could cut a hair in the stream. Whenever Cú Chulainn performed his feat of the shield-rim, he could slash with either shield-edge or spear or sword. He put on his head his crested war-helmet of battle, strife, and contest from every angle and corner of which was uttered his long-drawn-out cry that reverberated like the cry of one hundred warriors; *bánánaig* and *bocánaig* and *geniti* of the glen and demons of the air also cried out from that helmet encircling him whenever he went out to shed the blood of warriors and heroes. Covering all, he cast his cloak of concealment made from the raiment of Tír Tairngire, the Land of Promise, brought to him by his druid foster-father.

15 Badb is the name of a war-goddess, one of the three forms of the Mórrígan. She is variously called "hooded crow" and "scald crow." *eDIL*: <http://www.dil.ie/5114>. O'Rahilly, however, does not translate Badb as a proper name, only as "battle." Another way to translate this line is to say that Cú Chulainn is the "marshalled fence of battle of all men on earth" (O'Rahilly 186) which refers to the fact that Cú Chulainn stands alone in defense of Ulster against the four other provinces of Ireland while the men of Ulster suffer from the curse of the birth-pangs given to them with Macha's dying breath.

Then distortion seized Cú Chulainn so that he turned terrible, frenzied, many-shaped, and strange. His flesh trembled like a tree in the flood or like a rush in the stream—each limb, each joint, each end, and each member from top to bottom. He turned his body around in his skin. His feet, shins, and knees turned backwards; his heels, calves, and haunch turned to the front. The front-sinews of his calves came so that they were in front of his shins, each huge knot of them as big as a warrior's fist. The front muscles of his head were stretched to the nape of his neck, each immeasurable, vast, globular mass as big as the head of a one-year-old child. His face and countenance became a dark bowl. He sucked one eye so deep into his skull that a crane could hardly have reached to pluck it out onto his cheek. The other eye sprang onto his cheek. His mouth distorted terribly. His cheek drew back from his jawbone so that his entrails could be seen. His lungs and his liver fluttered in his mouth and his throat. His upper-palate clashed against the lower in a lion-killing blow, and fiery sparks as big as a ram's fleece came up from his mouth and his throat. The noisy beating of his heart against his ribcage was heard like the howling of a slaughter-hound or a lion attacking bears. Malefic clouds of mist and the torches of Badb were seen flickering red in the clouds and air over his head as the seething fury rose fiercely in him. His hair curled on his head like the branches of a red hawthorn bush used to re-fence a gap in the hedge. If a royal apple-tree heavy with fruit had been shaken over him, hardly a single apple would have fallen to earth, but each apple would remain adhered to a bristle of his hair as it rose in his rage. The radiant warrior moon rose out of his forehead as thick and as long as a warrior's whetstone equally as long as his nose, and he went insane, rattling his shields, urging his charioteer, and shooting stones at the host. As high, as thick, as strong, as powerful, and as long as the straight mast of a large ship rose the great spout of dark blood from the very top of the crown of his head, which then dissolved into a black magical mist, like the smoke of a royal hostel when a king comes to be cared for in the evening of a winter's day.

After his distortion, Cú Chulainn shifted form and leapt into the sickle battle-chariot with its iron-pointed spikes, sharp edges, thin blades, hooks, sharp points, heroic front spikes, ripping instruments, wounding nails on its shafts and straps and metal loop rings and cords. The frame of the chariot had a narrow and compact opening, straight and high enough for the champion to perform heroic feats, with room for eight sets of lordly weapons, and it moved as swiftly as a swallow or the wind or a deer across the level plain. The chariot was arranged with two swift horses, wild and furious,

with small, round, pointed heads, pricked ears, great hooves, a brown-red breast, and they were easily controlled by the reins, steady and well-yoked to Cú Chulainn's chariot. One of the horses was lithe and swift-leaping, eager for battle with an arched neck and great hooves that scattered the earth. The other had a curling mane and was slender-shanked, small-footed and small-heeled.

Thus, Cú Chulainn drove out to his enemies and performed his thunder-feat of one hundred, thunder-feat of two hundred, thunder-feat of three hundred, thunder-feat of four hundred but he stopped at the thunder-feat of five hundred for he thought it was sufficient that an equal number fell in his first attack, his first battle with the Four Provinces of Ireland. And in that way, he came out to attack his enemies and drove his chariot so hastily among them that the iron wheels sank into the ground, throwing up enough earth for a fort and fortress. The earth rose on the outside in a dyke as high as the iron wheels—boulders, rocks, stones, and gravel torn up by the ironclad wheels. He encircled the Four Provinces of Ireland all around in this circle of Badb so that they could not flee or escape him; he cornered them, and so he avenged the boy-troop. And he came into the middle of them and circled the host three times, and he threw up a great rampart of his enemies' corpses—an attack of enemies among enemies—so that they fell sole to sole and headless neck to headless neck, so thick was the carnage. Three more times he encircled them and left a thickness six-corpses deep, the soles of three men to the headless necks of three men all around the encampment. The name of this story in the *Táin* is the *Sesrech Breslige*—Sixfold Slaughter. It is one of three uncountable slaughters in the *Táin*: the Sixfold Slaughter, the Mutual Slaughter at Glenamnach, and the battle *Gáirech* and *Irgáirech*. But this time it was hounds, horses, and men alike.

Other stories say that Lug mac Eithlen fought beside Cú Chulainn at the Sixfold Slaughter.

It is impossible to count or to know the number of the common host who fell there but the names of their leaders' have been estimated. The names of the leaders and chiefs follow: two named Chrúaid, two named Chalad, two named Chír, two named Chíar, two named Ecell, three named Cruim, three named Caurith, three named Combirgi, four named Feochair, four named Furachair, four named Caiss, four named Fotai, five named Caurith, five named Cermain, five named Cobthaig, six named Saxain, six named Dáich, six named Dári, seven named Rocháid, seven named Rónáin, seven named Rurthig, eight named Rochlaid, eight named Rochtaid, eight named Rindaich, eight named Corpri, eight named Mulaich,

nine named Daigith, nine named Dári, nine named Dámaig, ten named Féic, ten named Fiacaich, and ten named Fedelmid.

In this great Slaughter on the Murtheimne Plain, Cú Chulainn slew seven score and ten kings and a countless number of hounds, horses, women, youths, children, and rabble. Not one man in three in Ireland escaped without his thighbone, his head, or his eye being broken or blemished for the rest of his life. And when the battle ended, Cú Chulainn came from there without shedding his own blood, without a mark on him or on his charioteer or either of his two horses.

THE WONDERS OF THE EAST
Translated by **ASA SIMON MITTMAN** and **SUSAN M. KIM**

Critical Introduction

The *Wonders of the East* is a short prose text that appears in three medieval English manuscripts from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It consists of a loosely connected series of descriptions of marvels, most of which are based on classical sources, including *Pliny's Natural History*. Unlike most texts in this collection, the *Wonders* begins without introduction and ends without conclusion. The brief vignettes therefore stand on their own, without apparent narrator or framing narrative. This gives them the feeling of a biological field guide. The wonders include beasts, humanoid beings, humans, and even strange plants. In most cases, the text provides only the basics: a name, physical description, and a characteristic behaviour.

All three *Wonders* manuscripts are heavily illuminated, with an illustration for almost every wonder in the text. The illustrations vary quite a bit from one manuscript to the next. The earliest copy, on which this translation is based, has loose, wild images that break through their frames and at times seem to attack the words of the text. They are dark, murky images that raise more questions about the wonders than they answer. This copy of the *Wonders* is bound in the same manuscript as the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*. The manuscript also contains *The Life of Saint Christopher*, who was purportedly a dog-headed giant, and a letter that claims to have been written by Alexander the Great, reporting on his monster-filled adventures in the East. The manuscript therefore appears to be an extended exploration of monstrosity.

Reading Questions

This text seems, at a first read, quite simple. However, a careful reading will reveal many strange facets. As you read, keep asking what we can *really* know about these creatures. Many of the wonders are human, or human-like. If they are all somehow *different* from a "normal" human like the intended reader, what is the text's implied definition of a normal human?

Editorial Notes

The text, in Old English, is written in a simple style that this translation attempts to replicate. There are places, though, where the grammar or meaning of the Old English is unclear. Most punctuation and capitalization is added, as the manuscript does not contain such markers. Occasional words not present in the Old English text have been inserted for clarity, based on other copies of the Old English text.

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ASM

THE WONDERS OF THE EAST

Translated by ASA SIMON MITTMAN and SUSAN M. KIM

That colony is five hundred of the smaller miles, which are called stadia, and three hundred and sixty eight of the greater, which are called leagues, away from Antimolima. On that island there is a great host of sheep. And it is a hundred and sixty eight of the lesser miles, stadia, and a hundred and fifteen of the greater miles called leagues from there to Babylonia.

That colony is full of merchants. There sheep are born as big as oxen and they live there up to the city of the Medes. The name of that city is Archemedon, and it is the greatest city next to Babylonia. To there from Archemedon it is in the lesser miles, stadia, three hundred and in the greater, called leagues, two hundred.

There are the great wonders, the works which the great Macedonian Alexander ordered to be built. That land is two hundred of the lesser miles, stadia, and of the greater, called leagues, one hundred and thirty and a half miles in length and in breadth. There is a certain place, as one travels towards the Red Sea, which is called Lentibelsinea, where hens like our own red hens are born. If any person wishes to take hold them or ever touches them, they at once burn up all of his body. Those are inconceivable witchcrafts.

Wild beasts are also born there. When they hear the voice of a person, those beasts flee far. Those beasts have eight feet and the eyes of Valkyries and two heads. If any person wishes to seize them, they set fire to their bodies. They are inconceivable beasts.

This place has serpents. The serpents have two heads and eyes that shine at night as brightly as lanterns. In a certain land, in the greatest wilderness in the southern half of Babylonia, asses are born which have horns as big as oxen's. They live next to the Red Sea because in those places there is a multitude of serpents called Corsias. They have horns as big as rams'. If they strike any person or ever touch him, he dies at once. There is an abundance of pepper in those lands. The serpents zealously guard that pepper. One takes the pepper by lighting that place on fire: the snakes then flee down into the earth. Because of that the pepper is black. It is eight hundred of the lesser miles, which are called stadia, and six hundred and twenty three and a half of the greater miles, which are called leagues, from Babylonia to the city of Persia, where the pepper grows. That place is barren because of the multitude of serpents.

And there half-hounds, which are called Conopenas, are also born. They have horses' manes and boars' tusks and dogs' heads, and their breath is like fire. These lands are near the cities which are filled with all worldly wealth; that is in the south half of the Egyptian land.

In a certain land people are born who are six feet tall. They have broad beards down to their knees and hair to their heels. They are called Homodubii, that is, "doubtful people," and they live on raw fish, which they eat.

In that same place, which is called Gorgoneus, that is, Valkyrie, the river is called Capi. There ants as big as dogs are born. They have feet like grasshoppers'. They are red and black. The ants dig gold up from the earth from before night until the fifth hour of the day. People who are bold enough to take that gold lead with them camel mares with their foals and stallion. They tie up the foals before they travel over the river. They load the gold on the mares and seat themselves, and they leave the stallion there. When the ants find them, while the ants are busy with the stallion, the people with the mares and with the gold travel over the river. They travel over the river so quickly that people imagine that they are flying.

Between these two rivers is a settlement called Locotheo, set between the Nile and the Bryxontes. The Nile is the chief of full rivers, and it flows from the land of the Egyptians. They call that river Archoboleta, that is "great water." In these places a great multitude of camels is born.

There people are born who are fifteen feet tall, and they have white bodies and two noses on one head, very red feet and knees, long noses and dark hair. When they wish to reproduce, they travel on ships to India, and there they bring their progeny into the world.

That land is called is called Ciconia, in Gallia. There people are born in three colours: their heads are maned like lions' heads and they are twenty feet tall and they have a great mouth like a fan. If they perceive or see any person in those lands or if any person is following them, they flee far, and they sweat blood. These are imagined/transformed people.

Beyond the river Brixontes, east from there, big and tall people are born. They have feet and legs twelve feet long, and

sides with breasts seven feet long. They are called Hostes. Certainly, any person they catch, they eat.

Then there are wild beasts which are called Lertices. They have ass's ears and sheep's wool and bird's feet. Then there are other islands south from Brixontes on which exist people without heads. They have their eyes and mouth on their breasts. They are eight feet tall and eight feet broad. There dragons are born. They are a hundred and fifty feet long. They are as massive as great stone pillars. Because of the abundance of dragons, no person can easily travel in that land. In the lesser miles, called stadia, three hundred and twenty three and in the greater, called leagues, two hundred and fifty three, plus one, from this place, there is another kingdom in the south half of the sea. There Homodubii are born, which are doubtful people. They have human shapes up to the navel and below that they are like an ass, and they have long legs like birds and gentle voices. If they perceive or see any person in those lands, they flee far.

Then there is another place in which there are barbarous people, and they have kings under them, of whom it is reckoned there are one hundred. Those are the worst people and the most barbarous. And there are two lakes. One is the lake of the sun, and the other of the moon. The lake of the sun is hot by day and cold by night, and the lake of the moon is hot by night and cold by day. They are two hundred of the lesser miles, stadia, and one hundred thirty two and a half of the greater, called leagues, broad.

In this place there are trees which are similar to laurel and to olive trees. From those trees, balsam, the most precious oil is produced. That place is a hundred and fifty one of the lesser miles, called stadia, and fifty two of the greater, which are called leagues.

Then there is a certain island in the Red Sea where there is a race of people that is, among us, called Donestre. They are grown like soothsayers from the head to the navel, and the other part is like a human, and they know human speech. When they see a person of foreign race they call out to him and his kinsmen the names of familiar men and with false words they seduce him and seize him and after that they eat him, all except the head. And then they sit and weep over that head.

Then east from there people are born that are fifteen feet tall and ten feet broad. They have a great head and ears like fans. They spread one ear over themselves at night, and they cover themselves with the other. Their ears are very light, and their bodies are as white as milk. If they see or perceive anyone in that land, they take their ears in their hands and flee so quickly that one might imagine they were flying.

Then there is a certain island on which people are born whose eyes shine as brightly as if one lit up a great lamp in the dark night. Then there is a certain island that is in length and in breadth three hundred and sixty of the lesser miles, called stadia, and a hundred and ten of the greater, called leagues. There, in the days of Beles and Job, a temple was built from iron works and pressed glass. And in that same place, at the rising of the sun, is the place of Quietus, the most gentle bishop, who would taste no other food but sea oysters and who lived on them.

Then, at the rising of the sun, there is a golden vineyard which has hundred and fifty foot berries. From those berries precious gems are produced.

Then there is another kingdom in the lands of Babylon. There is the greatest mountain between the mountains of the Medes and Armenia. There there are proper men who have the Red Sea as a kingdom and dominion. There Sarogi are produced.

Around this place women are born who have beards down to their breasts, and they put on horse hides as clothing. They are called very great huntresses, and instead they raise tigers and lions and lynxes that are the boldest beasts. And they hunt for all the kinds of wild beasts that are born on that mountain with their.... Then there are other women who have boar's tusks and hair to their heels and ox's tails on their loins. These women are thirteen feet tall, and their bodies are the colour of marble, and they have camel's feet and ass's teeth. Because of their greatness, they were killed by the great Macedonian Alexander. He killed them when he could not capture them alive, because their bodies are shameless and contemptible.

By the sea there is a species of wild beasts that are called Catinos. There are very beautiful beasts, and there are men who live on raw flesh and honey.

In the left part of the kingdom where the Catinos are, there are hospitable men, kings who have many tyrants under them. Their boundaries are near the sea. From there, from the leftmost side, there are many kings. This race of men lives many years, and they are generous men. If anyone comes to visit them, they give him a woman before they let him go. The Macedonian Alexander, when he came to them, wondered at their humaneness. He did not wish to kill them or do them any harm.

Then there is a kind of tree on which the most precious stones are produced and on which they grow. There the race of people is of a dark colour. One calls them Sigelwara.

DONESTRE, HUNTRESS, AND BOAR-TUSKED WOMEN

Critical Introduction

The illustrations to the *Beowulf* Manuscript's version of the *Wonders of the East* are strange, difficult images. They do not always make immediate sense, and though closely related to the text, they rarely seem to illustrate it in any straightforward way. Instead, text and image differ in provocative ways that invite our contemplation and speculation. Among the more puzzling monsters in the *Wonders* is the Donestre, a creature that appears in no other known text. The top image on this folio (the term used for a page in a medieval manuscript) is the balsam tree, which produces precious oil. The bottom image is the fearsome, psychic, lying, homophagic (person-eating) Donestre. He stands beside a female victim, and the foot he proudly holds aloft is hers: her left foot is clearly cut off at the ankle. She is therefore immobilized and stares out at us in wide-eyed terror. The blood-red background to the scene intensifies the sense of violence and horror. Despite the generally human features and his male sex (he is emphatically male, which adds an additional sense of threat to the female victim), the Donestre's head is bestial, if ambiguously so. This figure, like many in the manuscript, is somewhat awkward, with legs that seem to emerge from his chest, without a lower torso between. The figure is therefore both like and unlike a human.

In general, medieval monsters are assumed to be male, so for example, the Donestre is not identified as a *male* Donestre, but merely as *a* Donestre, and therefore it is assumed

to be male. On folio 105v of the *Beowulf* Manuscript, though, the two monstrous people are explicitly identified as female. The upper image presents a hunter, which was an exclusively male occupation. This female hunter, then, is based on the notion of inversions of expectations. The figure is woman—as is clear from her ankle-length dress and flowing hair—but bears a long beard. To intensify the sense of the “world turned upside-down,” a common medieval description of deviation from expected rolls, this “huntress” uses cats rather than dogs to track animals. Below the “huntress” is a deeply hybrid figure, a woman with “boar’s tusks and hair to their heels and ox’s tails on their loins,” as well as “camel’s feet and ass’s teeth.” They are thirteen feet tall and white as marble. The image is an odd mix of the grand and the goofy, providing as much confusion as clarity about the nature of these inconceivable beings.

Viewing Questions

Read the passages of text describing the monsters illustrated on these folios. What seems to be the same in text and image? What is different? And what simply cannot be the same, given how differently texts and images work?

ASM

BEOWULF (INTRODUCTION, FIGHT WITH GREDEL, THE ATTACK BY GREDEL'S MOTHER, FIGHT WITH GREDEL'S MOTHER, AND FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON)

Translated by ROY LIUZZA

Critical Introduction

Beowulf is mysterious. Scholars are unsure of its date of composition (anywhere between 750 CE and 1050 CE), and its author is unknown. There is strong textual evidence that the *Beowulf*-poet, as he has come to be called, did not invent the story but that it existed much earlier as part of an oral tradition. However, the two great characters—Beowulf and Grendel—have no literary history that scholars have been able to discover, so they seem to have entered into English literary history *ex nihilo*. Finally, the poem exists in only one extant manuscript, Cotton Vitellius A.xv. Although it is now considered the crown jewel of Old English literature, *Beowulf* does not seem to have been particularly distinguished in its own time or even in more recent history. (It was not transcribed and published until 1815.)

Part of that lack of respect was no doubt due to the importance of monsters to the story. The manuscript of which it is a part contains other monster-themed texts (*The Life of Saint Christopher* and *Wonders of the East*, for example), but monsters were not of great interest to the monastic centers which largely controlled the production of texts. Little changed in the poem's early critical history: those who studied it seemed embarrassed by its focus on monsters, and it was not until 1936 that J.R.R. Tolkien ("*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*") broke through the morass and made *Beowulf's* monsters acceptable for study.

The structure of the poem follows Beowulf's fight with the three great monsters: Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon. Beowulf's purposes in these fights never change, as he is intent on gaining glory and honour; the monsters' reasons for violence, however, vary in each circumstance, ranging from Grendel's apparent evil, to Grendel's mother's revenge, to the dragon's greed. This gives the monsters themselves, perhaps, a greater depth of character than the hero for whom the poem is named. For all the attention paid to the monsters, however, we never get a clear description or image of them. Grendel and his mother are shaped like humans, and the dragon is black and snake-like; beyond that, the monsters are shrouded in shadow. Despite a century of study and criticism, *Beowulf* is still mysterious.

Reading Questions

As noted in the introduction, very little detailed information on the monsters' appearances is given. Go through and collect what physical descriptions you can, and try to create a mental image from them. Compare yours to the images in this book and to those of your classmates. How are they different? Does the evidence from the poem disprove any of them? And, finally, why would the poet leave three of the most important characters in the poem as sort of blank slates? What effect could it have on readers?

Is Beowulf himself a monster? Look closely at how "normal" warriors are supposed to fight in this cultural context, how Beowulf fights, and how Grendel fights. Do you think he is closer to a typical warrior or to Grendel in his manner of battle? Does it change over time? How might your answers to these two questions affect whether or not you think he is a hero or monster? (Or can he be both?)

Editorial Notes

The translation provided here is that of R. M. Liuzza. We have followed the formatting of that edition. Where we have omitted material, a short synopsis in italics serves to orient the reader.

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BEOWULF
(Introduction, Fight with Grendel, the Attack
by Grendel's Mother, Fight with Grendel's Mother,
and Fight with the Dragon)

Translated by ROY LIUZZA

Listen!

We have heard of the glory in bygone days
of the folk-kings of the spear-Danes,
how those noble lords did lofty deeds.

Often Scyld Scefing¹ seized the mead-benches
from many tribes, troops of enemies,
struck fear into earls. Though he first was
found a waif, he awaited solace for that—
he grew under heaven and prospered in honour
until every one of the encircling nations
over the whale's-riding² had to obey him,
grant him tribute. That was a good king!
A boy was later born to him,
young in courts, whom God sent
as a solace to the people—he saw their need,
the dire distress they had endured, lordless,
for such a long time. The Lord of Life,
Wielder of Glory, gave him worldly honour;
Beowulf,³ the son of Scyld, was renowned,
his fame spread wide in Scandinavian lands.
Thus should a young man bring about good
with pious gifts from his father's possessions,
so that later in life loyal comrades
will stand beside him when war comes,
the people will support him—with praiseworthy deeds
a man will prosper among any people.

Scyld passed away at his appointed hour;
the mighty lord went into the Lord's keeping;
they bore him down to the brimming sea,
his dear comrades, as he himself had commanded
while the friend of the Scyldings⁴ wielded speech—
the dear land-ruler had long held power.

1 The name means "Shield, Son of Sheaf (i.e., of grain)." The mysterious origins of Scyld, who seems to arrive providentially from nowhere and is returned to the sea after his death, have occasioned much critical speculation.

2 A condensed descriptive image of the sea—the riding-place of whales. Elsewhere the sea is the "gannet's bath" and the "swan's riding."

3 Not the monster-slaying hero of the title, but an early Danish king. Many scholars argue that the original name was Beow.

4 The Scyldings are the Danes, "sons of Scyld."

In the harbour stood a ring-prowed ship,
icy, outbound, a nobleman's vessel;
there they laid down their dear lord,
dispenser of rings, in the bosom of the ship,
glorious by the mast. There were many treasures
loaded there, adornments from the distant lands;
I have never heard of a more lovely ship
bedecked with battle-weapons and war-gear,
blades and byrnies.⁵ In its bosom lay
many treasures, which were to travel
far with him into the keeping of the flood.
With no fewer gifts did they furnish him there,
the wealth of nations, than those did who
at his beginning first sent him forth
alone over the waves while still a small child.⁶
Then they set a golden ensign
high over his head, and let the waves have him,
gave him to the sea with grieving spirits,
mournful in mind. Men do not know
how to say truly—not trusted counsellors,
nor heroes under the heavens—who received that cargo.

Then Beowulf Scylding, beloved king,
was famous in the strongholds of his folk
for a long while—his father having passed away,
a lord from earth—until after him arose
the great Healfdene, who held the glorious Scyldings
all his life, ancient and fierce in battle.
Four children, all counted up,
were born to that bold leader of hosts:
Heorogar, Hrothgar, and Halga the good,
I heard that... was Onela's queen,⁷
dear bedfellow of the Battle-Scylfing.

Then success in war was given to Hrothgar,
honor in battle, so that his beloved kinsmen
eagerly served him, until the young soldiers grew

5 A *byrn* is a coat of ring-mail.

6 Scyld was found destitute—this statement is an example of litotes, or ironic understatement, not uncommon in Anglo-Saxon poetry.

7 A name is missing from the manuscript here; it has been conjectured from parallel sources that it should be Yrse, or Ursula.

into a mighty troop of men. It came to his mind
 that he should order a hall-building,
 have men make a great mead-house
 which the songs of men should remember forever;⁸
 and there within he would share everything
 with young and old that God had given him,
 except for the common land and the lives of men.
 Then the work, as I've heard, was widely proclaimed
 to many nations throughout this middle-earth,
 to come adorn the folk-stead. It came to pass
 swiftly among men, and it was soon ready,
 the greatest of halls; he gave it the name "Heorot,"⁹
 he whose words were heeded far and wide.
 He remembered his boast; he gave out rings,
 treasure at table. The hall towered
 high and horn-gabled—it awaited hostile fires,
 the surges of war; the time was not yet at hand
 when the sword-hate of sworn in-laws
 should arise after ruthless violence.¹⁰

A bold demon who waited in darkness
 wretchedly suffered all the while,
 for every day he heard the joyful din
 loud in the hall, with the harp's sound,
 the clear song of the scop.¹¹ He who knew
 how to tell the ancient tale of the origin of men
 said that the Almighty created the earth,
 a bright and shining plain, by seas embraced,
 and set, triumphantly, the sun and moon
 to light their beams for those who dwell on land,
 adorned the distant corners of the world
 with leaves and branches, and made life also,
 all manner of creatures that live and move.
 —Thus this lordly people lived in joy,
 blessedly, until one began
 to work his foul crimes—a fiend from hell.
 This grim spirit was called Grendel,
 mighty stalker of the marches, who held
 the moors and fens; this miserable man
 lived for a time in the land of giants,
 after the Creator had condemned him

⁸ Or "a greater mead-hall / than the sons of men had ever heard of."

⁹ "Hart." An object recovered from the burial-mound at Sutton Hoo, perhaps a royal insignia, is surmounted by the image of a hart.

¹⁰ The hall Heorot is apparently fated to be destroyed in a battle between Hrothgar and his son-in-law Ingeld the Heathobard, a conflict predicted by Beowulf in 2024–69. The battle itself happens outside the action of the poem.

¹¹ A *scop* is a poet-singer. this is the first of several self-reflexive scenes of poetic entertainment in the poem.

among Cain's race—when he killed Abel
 the eternal Lord avenged that death.¹²
 No joy in that feud—the maker forced him
 far from mankind for his foul crime. 70 110
 From thence arose all misbegotten things,
 trolls and elves and the living dead,
 and also the giants who strove against God
 for a long while¹³—He gave them their reward for that.

When night descended he went to seek out
 the high house, to see how the Ring-Danes
 had bedded down after their beer-drinking.
 He found therein a troop of nobles
 asleep after the feast; they knew no sorrow
 or human misery. The unholy creature, 80 120
 grim and ravenous, was ready at once,
 ruthless and cruel, and took from their rest
 thirty thanes;¹⁴ thence he went
 rejoicing in his booty, back to his home,
 to seek out his abode with his fill of slaughter.
 When in the dim twilight just before dawn
 Grendel's warfare was made known to men,
 then lamentation was lifted up after the feasting,
 a great morning-sound. Unhappy sat
 the mighty lord, long-good nobleman; 90 130
 he suffered greatly, grieved for his thanes,
 once they beheld that hostile one's tracks,
 the accursed spirit; that strife was too strong,
 loathsome and long.

It was no long wait,
 but the very next night he committed
 a greater murder, mourned not at all
 for his feuds and sins—he was too fixed in them.
 Then it was easy to find a thane
 who sought his rest elsewhere, farther away,
 a bed in the outbuildings,¹⁵ when they pointed out— 140
 truly announced with clear tokens—
 that hall-thane's hate; he who escaped the fiend
 held himself afterwards farther away and safer.

¹² The story of Cain and Abel is told in Genesis 4:1–16.

¹³ The poet lists a collection of Germanic, classical, and biblical horrors; all are ultimately traced to their biblical roots, though the characters in the poem are not aware of this.

¹⁴ A "thane" is a retainer, one of the troop of companions surrounding a heroic king in Germanic literature.

¹⁵ Hrothgar's hall is apparently surrounded by smaller buildings, including the women's quarters (see lines 662–65, 920–24). Under normal circumstances the men sleep together in the hall, ready for battle (1239–50).

So he ruled, and strove against right,
 one against all, until empty stood
 the best of houses. and so it was for a great while—
 for twelve long winters the lord of the Scyldings
 suffered his grief, every sort of woe,
 great sorrow, when to the sons of men
 it became known, and carried abroad
 in sad tales, that Grendel strove
 long with Hrothgar, bore his hatred,
 sins and feuds, for many seasons,
 perpetual conflict; he wanted no peace
 with any man of the Danish army,
 nor ceased his deadly hatred, nor settled with money,
 nor did any of the counsellors need to expect
 bright compensation from the killer's hands,¹⁶
 for the great ravager relentlessly stalked,
 a dark death shadow, lurked and struck
 old and young alike, in perpetual night
 held the misty moors. Men do not know
 whither such whispering demons wander about.

Thus the foe of mankind, fearsome and solitary,
 often committed his many crimes,
 cruel humiliations; he occupied Heorot,
 the jewel-adorned hall, in the dark nights—
 he saw no need to salute the throne,
 he scorned the treasures; he did not know their love.¹⁷
 That was deep misery to the lord of the Danes,
 crushing his spirit. Many a strong man sat
 in secret counsel, considered advice,
 what would be best for the brave at heart
 to save themselves from the sudden attacks.
 At times they offered honour to idols
 at pagan temples, prayed aloud
 that the soul-slayer¹⁸ might offer assistance
 in the country's distress. Such was their custom,
 the hope of heathens—they remembered hell
 in their minds, they did not know the maker,
 the Judge of deeds, they did not know the Lord God,
 or even now to praise the heavenly Protector,

¹⁶ Germanic and Anglo-Saxon law allowed that a murderer could make peace with the family of his victim by paying compensation, or *wergild*. The amount of compensation varied with the rank of the victim.

¹⁷ This is a much-disputed passage; my reading follows a suggestion made by Fred C. Robinson in "Why is Grendel's Not Greeting the *gifstol* a *wræc micel*?" and repeated in Mitchell and Robinson's *Beowulf*.

¹⁸ I.e., the Devil. In the Middle Ages the gods of the pagans were often regarded as demons in disguise.

Wielder of glory. Woe unto him
 who must thrust his soul through wicked force
 in the fire's embrace, expect no comfort,
 no way to change at all! It shall be well for him
 who can seek the Lord after his deathday
 and find security in the Father's embrace.

150 *In the intervening action, Beowulf, a Geat, has heard of the Danes' woes and has ventured forth to help. After he arrives, he has a tense stand-off with the Danish coast-guard, is welcomed by Hrothgar, and has another tense war of words with Unferth, a Danish warrior.*

Then Hrothgar and his troop of heroes, 662
 protector of the Scyldings, departed the hall;
 the war-chief wished to seek Wealhtheow,
 his queen's bedchamber. The glorious king¹⁹
 had set against Grendel a hall-guardian
 —as men had heard said—who did special service
 for the king of the Danes, kept guard against a giant.
 Surely the Geatish prince greatly trusted
 his mighty strength, the Maker's favor, 670

when he took off his iron byrnie,
 undid his helmet, and gave his decorated sword,
 most excellent iron, to his servant
 and bid him hold his battle-gear.
 The good man, Beowulf the Geat,
 spoke a few boasting words before he lay down:
 "I consider myself no poorer in strength
 and battle-deeds than Grendel does himself;
 and so I will not kill him with a sword,
 put an end to his life, though I easily might; 680
 he knows no arts of war, no way to strike back,
 hack at my shield-boss, though he be brave
 in his wicked deeds; but tonight we two will
 forego our swords, if he dare to seek out
 a war without weapons—and then let the wise Lord,
 the holy God, grant the judgment of glory
 to whichever hand seems proper to Him."

Battle-brave, he lay down; the bolster took
 the earl's cheek, and around him many 690
 a bold seafarer sank to his hall-rest.
 None of them thought that he should thence
 ever again seek his own dear homeland,
 his tribe or the town in which he was raised,
 for they had heard it said that savage death
 had swept away far too many of the Danish folk
 in that wine-hall. But the Lord gave

¹⁹ Or "King of Glory," i.e., God?

a web of victory to the people of the Weders,
 comfort and support, so that they completely,
 overcame their enemy through one man's craft,
 by his own might. It is a well-known truth
 that mighty God has ruled mankind
 always and forever.

In the dark night he came
 creeping, the shadow-goer. The bowmen slept
 who were to hold that horned hall—
 all but one. It was well-known to men
 that the demon foe could not drag them
 under the dark shadows if the Maker did not wish it;
 but he, wakeful, keeping watch for his enemy,
 awaited, enraged, the outcome of battle.
 The from the moor, in a blanket of mist,
 Grendel came stalking—he bore God's anger;
 the evil marauder meant to ensnare
 some of human-kind in that high hall.
 Under the clouds he came until he clearly knew
 he was near the wine-hall, men's golden house,
 finely adorned. It was not the first time
 he had sought out the home of Hrothgar,
 but never in his life, early or late,
 did he find harder luck or a hardier hall-thane.
 To the hall came that warrior on his journey,
 bereft of joys. The door burst open,
 fast in its forged bands, when his fingers touched it;
 bloody-minded, swollen with rage, he swung open
 the hall's mouth, and immediately afterwards
 the fiend strode across the paved floor,
 went angrily; in his eyes stood
 a light not fair, glowing like fire.
 he saw in the hall many a soldier,
 a peaceful troop sleeping all together,
 a large company of thanes—and he laughed inside;
 he meant to divide, before day came,
 this loathsome creature, the life of each man
 from his body, when there befell him
 the hope of a feast. But it was not his fate
 to taste any more of the race of mankind
 after that night. The kinsman of Hygelac,
 mighty one, beheld how that maneater
 planned to proceed with his sudden assault.
 Not that the monster²⁰ meant to delay—

²⁰ The Old English (OE) word *æglæca*, which literally means “awesome one” or “terror,” is elsewhere applied to the dragon-slaying Sigemund (line 893, where it is translated “fierce creature”) and to Beowulf himself. Its translation here is admittedly tendentious. The word appears elsewhere, variously translated, in lines 159, 433, 556, 732, etc.

he seized at once at his first pass
 a sleeping man, slit him open suddenly,
 bit into his joints, drank the blood from his veins,
 gobbled his flesh in gobbets, and soon
 had completely devoured that dead man,
 feet and fingertips. He stepped further,
 and took in his hands the strong-hearted
 man in his bed; the monster reached out
 towards him with his hands—he quickly grabbed him
 with evil intent, and sat up against his arm.²¹
 As soon as that shepherd of sins discovered
 that he had never met on middle-earth,
 in any region of the world, another man
 with a greater handgrip, in his heart he was
 afraid for his life, but none the sooner could he flee.
 His mind was eager to escape to the darkness,
 seek out a host of devils—his habit there
 was nothing like he had ever met before.
 The good kinsman of Hygelac remembered then
 his evening speech, and stood upright
 and seized him fast. His fingers burst;
 the giant turned outward, the earl stepped inward.
 The notorious one meant—if he might—
 to turn away further and flee, away
 to his lair in the fen; he knew his fingers
 were held in a hostile grip. That was an unhappy journey
 that the harm-doer took to Heorot!
 The great hall resounded; to the Danes it seemed,
 the city's inhabitants and every brave earl,
 like a wild ale-sharing. Both were angry,
 fierce house-wardens—the hall echoed.
 It was a great wonder that the wine-hall
 withstood their fighting and did not fall to the ground,
 that fair building—but it was fastened
 inside and out with iron bands,
 forged with skill. From the floor there flew
 many a mead-bench, as men have told me,
 gold-adorned, where those grim foes fought.
 The Scylding elders had never expected
 that any man, by any ordinary means,
 could break it apart, beautiful, bone-adorned,
 or destroy it with guile, unless the embrace of fire
 might swallow it in flames. The noise swelled
 new and stark—among the North-Danes was
 horrible terror, in each of them
 who heard through the wall the wailing cry—

²¹ It is not entirely clear who grabs whom—apparently Grendel reaches out to Beowulf, who is lying down; the hero then grabs Grendel's arm and sits up against it.

God's adversary shrieked a grisly song
of horror, defeated, the captive of Hell
bewailed his pain. He pinned him fast,
he who was the strongest of might among men
in those days of this life.

Not for anything would that protector of earls
let that murderous visitor escape alive—
he did not consider his days on earth
of any use at all. Many an earl
in Beowulf's troop drew his old blade,
longed to protect the life of his liege-lord,
the famous captain, however they could.
But they did not know as they entered the fight,
those stern-minded men of battle,
and thought to strike from all sides
and seek his soul, that no sword,
not the best iron anywhere in the world,
could even touch that evil sinner,
for he had worked a curse on weapons,
every sort of blade. His separation from the world
in those days of this life
would be a wretched work, and that alien spirit
would travel far into the keeping of fiends.
Then he discovered, who had done before
so much harm to the race of mankind,
so many crimes—he was marked by God—
that his body could bear it no longer,
but the courageous kinsman of Hygelac
had him in hand—hateful to each
was the life of the other. The loathsome creature felt
a great pain in his body; a gaping wound opened
in his shoulder-joint, his sinews sprang apart,
his joints burst asunder. Beowulf was given
glory in battle—Grendel was forced
to flee, fatally wounded, into the fen,
seek a sorry abode; he knew quite surely
that the end of his life had arrived,
the sum of his days. The wishes of the Danes
were entirely fulfilled in that bloody onslaught!
He who had come from afar had cleansed,
wise and stout-hearted, the hall of Hrothgar,
warded off attack. He rejoiced in his night-work,
his great deed of courage. The man of the Geats
had fulfilled his boast to the East-Danes,
and entirely remedied all their distresses,
the insidious sorrows they had suffered
and had to endure from sad necessity,
no small affliction. That was a clear sign
when the battle-brave one laid down the hand,
arm and shoulder—there all together
was Grendel's claw—under the curved roof.

In the intervening action, Hrothgar and the Danes are delighted. A group of warriors track Grendel's blood trail to a mere, but nothing more is found of him. At the banquet that evening, Hrothgar richly rewards Beowulf, coming within a hair's breadth of offering the kingship to the outsider. As the night falls, however, all things are not well.

790 They sank into sleep—one paid sorely
for his evening rest, as had often happened
When Grendel guarded that gold-hall,
committed his wrongs until he came to his end,
died for his sins. It was soon all too clear,
obvious to all men, that an avenger still
lived on after that enemy for a long time
after that grim battle—Grendel's mother,
monstrous woman, remembered her misery,
she who dwelt in those dreadful waters, 1260
the cold streams, ever since Cain
killed with his blade his only brother,
his father's kin; he fled bloodstained,
marked for murder, left the joys of men,
dwelled in the wasteland. From him awoke
many a fateful spirit—Grendel among them,
hateful accursed foe, who found at Heorot
810 a wakeful warrior waiting for battle.
When the great beast began to seize him,
he remembered his mighty strength, 1270
the ample gifts which God had given him,
and trusted the Almighty for mercy,
favor and support; thus he overcame the fiend,
subdued the hellish spirit. He went away wretched,
deprived of joy, to find his place of death,
mankind's foe. But his mother—greedy,
grim-minded—still wanted to go
820 on her sad journey to avenge her son's death.
She reached Heorot, where the Ring-Danes
slept throughout the building; a sudden upset 1280
came to men, when Grendel's mother
broke into the hall. The horror was less
by as much as a maiden's strength,
a woman's warfare, is less than an armed man's
when a bloodstained blade, its edges strong,
hammer-forged sword, slices through
the boar-image on a helmet opposite.²²
830 Then in the hall was the hard edge drawn,
swords over seats, many a broad shield
raised in hands—none remembered his helmet 1290
or broad mail-shirt when that terror seized them.

²² In fact Grendel's mother is a much more dangerous opponent for Beowulf; the point of these lines is not clear.

She came in haste and meant to hurry out,
 save her life, when she was surprised there,
 but she quickly seized, fast in her clutches,
 one nobleman when she went to the fens.
 He was the dearest of heroes to Hrothgar
 among his comrades between the two seas,
 mighty shield-warrior, whom she snatched from his rest,
 a glorious thane. Beowulf was not there,
 but another place had been appointed 1300
 for the famous Geat after the treasure-giving.
 Heorot was in an uproar—she took the famous hand,
 covered in gore; care was renewed,
 come again to the dwellings. That was no good exchange,
 that those on both sides should have to bargain
 with the lives of friends.

Then the wise old King,
 Grey-bearded warrior, was grieved at heart
 when he learned that he no longer lived—
 the dearest of men, his chief thane, was dead.
 Quickly Beowulf was fetched to the chambers, 1310
 victory-blessed man. Just before dawn
 that noble champion came with his companions,
 went with his men to where the old king waited
 wondering whether the Almighty would ever
 work a change after his tidings of woe.
 Across the floor walked the worthy warrior
 with his small troop—the hall-wood resounded—
 and with his words he addressed the wise one,
 lord of the Ingwines, asked him whether
 the night had been agreeable, after his urgent summons. 1320

Hrothgar spoke, protector of the Scyldings:
 “Ask not of joys! Sorrow is renewed
 for the Danish people. Æschere is dead,
 elder brother of Yrmenlaf,
 my confidant, my counsellor,
 my shoulder-companion in every conflict
 when we defended our heads when the footsoldiers clashed
 and struck boar-helmets. As a nobleman should be,
 always excellent, so Æschere was!
 In Heorot he was slain by the hand 1330
 of a restless death-spirit; I do not know
 where that ghoul went, gloating with its carcass,
 rejoicing in its feast. She avenged that feud
 in which you killed Grendel yesterday evening
 in your violent way with a crushing vice-grip,
 for he had diminished and destroyed my people
 for far too long. He fell in battle,
 it cost him his life, and now another has come,
 a mighty evil marauder who means to avenge
 her kin, and too far has carried out her revenge, 1340

as it may seem to many a thane
 whose spirit groans for his treasure-giver,
 a hard heart’s distress—now that hand lies dead
 which was wont to give you all good things.

I have heard countrymen and hall-counsellors
 among my people report this:
 they have seen two such creatures,
 great march-stalkers holding the moors,
 alien spirits. The second of them, 1350
 as far as they could discern most clearly,
 had the shape of a woman; the other, misshapen,
 marched the exile’s path in the form of a man,
 except that he was larger than any other;
 in bygone days he was called ‘Grendel’
 by the local folk. They knew no father,
 whether before him had been begotten
 any more mysterious spirits. That murky land
 they hold, wolf-haunted slopes, windy headlands,
 awful fenpaths, where the upland torrents 1360
 plunge downward under the dark crags,
 the flood underground. It is not far hence
 —measured in miles—that the mere stands;
 over it hangs a grove hoar-frosted,
 a firm-rooted wood looming over the water.
 Every night one can see there an awesome wonder,
 fire on the water. There lives none so wise
 or bold that he can fathom its abyss.
 Though the heath-stepper beset by hounds,
 the strong-horned hart, might seek the forest,
 pursued from afar, he will sooner lose 1370
 his life on the shore than save his head
 and go in the lake—it is no good place!
 The clashing waves climb up from there
 dark to the clouds, when the wind drives
 the violent storms, until the sky itself droops,
 the heavens groan. Now once again all help
 depends on you alone. You do not yet know
 this fearful place, where you might find
 the sinful creature—seek it if you dare!
 I will reward you with ancient riches 1380
 for that feud, as I did before,
 with twisted gold, if you return alive.”

Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow:
 “Sorrow not, wise one! It is always better
 to avenge one’s friend than to mourn overmuch.
 Each of us must await the end
 of this world’s life; let him who can
 bring about fame before death—that is best
 for the unliving man after he is gone.
 Arise, kingdom’s guard, let us quickly go 1390
 and inspect the path of Grendel’s kin.

I promise you this: he²³ will find no protection—
not in the belly of the earth nor the bottom of the sea,
nor the mountain groves—let him go where he will!

For today, you must endure patiently
all your woes, as I expect you will.”

The old man leapt up, thanked the Lord,
the mighty God, for the man’s speech.

Then for Hrothgar a horse was bridled
with plaited mane. The wise prince
rode in full array; footsoldiers marched
with shields at ready. The tracks were seen
far and wide on the forest paths,
a trail through the woods, where she went forth
over the murky moor, bore the young man’s
lifeless body, the best of all those
who had held watch over Hrothgar’s home.
The son of nobles crossed over
the steep stone cliffs, the constricted climb,
a narrow solitary path, a course unknown,
the towering headlands, home of sea-monsters.
He went before with just a few
wise men to see the way,
until suddenly he saw mountain-trees,
stunted and leaning over gray stone,
a joyless wood; the water went under
turbid and dreary. To all the Danes,
the men of the Scyldings, many a thane,
it was a sore pain at the heart to suffer,
a grief to every earl, when on the seacliff
they came upon the head of Æshcere.
The flood boiled with blood—the folk gazed on—
and hot gore. At times a horn sang
its eager war-song. The footsoldiers sat down.
They saw in the water many kinds of serpents,
strange sea-creatures testing the currents,
and on the sloping shores lay such monsters
as often attend in early morning
a sorrowful journey on the sail-road,
dragons and wild beasts. They rushed away
bitter, enraged; they heard the bright noise,
the sound of the battle-horn. A Geatish Bowman
cut short the life of one of those swimmers
with a bow and arrow, so that in his body stood
the hard war-shaft; he was a slower swimmer
on the waves, when death took him away.
At once in the water he was assailed

²³ The hero does not note carefully enough the gender of Grendel’s mother, or else the pronoun *he* refers to OE *magan* “kinsman,” a masculine noun.

with the barbed hooks of boar-pikes,
violently attacked and dragged ashore,
the strange wave-roamer; the men inspected
this grisly visitor. 1440

In the intervening action, Beowulf equips himself and gives a short speech commending himself to God and instructing his companions. Unferth, once belligerent, offers Beowulf his sword for use against Grendel’s Mother.

the surging sea received
the brave soldier. It was the space of a day²⁴
before he could perceive the bottom.
Right away she who held that expanse of water,
bloodthirsty and fierce, for a hundred half-years,
grim and greedy, perceived that some man
was exploring from above that alien land. 1500
She snatched at him, seized the warrior
in her savage clutches, but none the sooner
injured his sound body—the ring-mail encircled him,
so that she could not pierce that war-dress,
the locked coat of mail, with her hostile claws.
Then that she-wolf of the sea swam to the bottom,
and bore the prince of rings into her abode,
so that he might not—no matter how strong—
wield his weapons, but so many wonders
set upon him in the water, many a sea-beast
with battle-tusks tearing at his war-shirt,
monsters pursuing him.²⁵ 1510

Then the earl perceived
that he was in some sort of battle-hall
where no water could harm him in any way,
and, for the hall’s roof, he could not be reached
by the flood’s sudden rush—he saw a fire-light,
a glowing blaze shining brightly.
Then the worthy man saw that water-witch,
a great mere-wife; he gave a mighty blow
with his battle-sword—he did not temper that stroke— 1520
so that the ring-etched blade ran out on her head
a greedy battle-song. The guest discovered then
that the battle-flame would not bite,
or wound her fatally—but the edge failed
the man in his need; it had endured many
hand-to-hand meetings, often sheared through helmets,
fated war-garments. It was the first time
that the fame of that precious treasure had failed.

Again he was stalwart, not slow of zeal,

²⁴ Or “it was daylight.”

²⁵ Or “attacked their adversary.” The OE word *æglæcan* may refer here to Beowulf or the sea-monsters.

mindful of glory, that kinsman of Hygelac—
 that angry challenger threw away that etched blade,
 wrapped and ornamented, so that it lay on the earth,
 strong, steel-edged. He trusted his strength,
 the might of his handgrip—as a man should do
 if by his warfare he thinks to win
 long-lasting praise: he cares nothing for his life.
 The man of the War-Geats grabbed by the shoulder
 Grendel's mother—he had no regret for that feud;
 battle-hardened, enraged, he swung her around,
 his deadly foe, so she fell to the ground. 1530
 Quickly she gave him requital for that
 with grim grasp, and grappled him to her—
 weary, he stumbled, strongest of warriors,
 of foot-soldiers, and took a fall.
 She set upon her hall-guest²⁶ and drew her knife,
 broad, bright-edged; she would avenge her boy,
 her only offspring. On his shoulders lay
 the linked corselet; it defended his life,
 prevented the entrance of point and blade.
 there the son of Ecgtheow would have ended his life 1540
 under the wide ground, the Geatish champion,
 had not his armoured shirt offered him help,
 the hard battle-net, and holy God
 brought about war-victory—the wise Lord,
 Ruler of the heavens, decided it rightly,
 easily, once he stood up again.
 He saw among the armour a victorious blade,
 ancient giant-sword strong in its edges,
 worthy in battles; it was the best of weapons,
 except that it was greater than any other man 1550
 might even bear into the play of battle,
 good, adorned, the work of giants.²⁷
 The Scyldings' champion seized its linked hilt,
 fierce and ferocious, drew the ring-marked sword
 despairing of his life, struck in fury
 so that it caught her hard in the neck,
 broke her bone-rings; the blade cut through
 the doomed flesh—she fell to the floor,
 the sword was bloody, the soldier rejoiced.
 The flames gleamed, a light glowed within 1560
 even as from heaven the firmament's candle
 shines clearly. He looked around the chamber,
 passed by the wall, hefted the weapon
 hard by its hilt, that thane of Hygelac,
 angry and resolute—nor was the edge useless
 to that warrior; but he quickly wished
 to pay back Grendel for the many battle-storms
 which he had wrought on the West-Danes
 much more often than on one occasion,
 when Hrothgar's hall-companions 1580
 he slew in their beds, devoured sleeping
 fifteen men of the Danish folk
 and made off with as many more,
 a loathsome booty. He paid him back for that,
 the fierce champion, for on a couch he saw
 Grendel lying lifeless,
 battle-weary from the wound he received
 in the combat at Heorot. His corpse burst open
 when he was dealt a blow after death,
 a hard sword-stroke, and his head chopped off. 1590
 Soon the wise troops saw it,
 those who kept watch on the water with Hrothgar—
 all turbid were the waves, and troubled,
 the sea stained with blood. The graybearded
 elders spoke together about the good one,
 said they did not expect that nobleman
 would return, triumphant, to seek
 the mighty prince; to many it seemed
 that the sea-wolf had destroyed him.
 The ninth hour came; the noble Scyldings 1600
 abandoned the headland, and home went
 the gold-friend of men. The guests²⁸ sat
 sick at heart, and stared into the mere;
 they wished, but did not hope, that they would
 see their lord himself.
 Then the sword began,
 that blade, to dissolve away in battle-icicles
 from the war-blood; it was a great wonder
 that it melted entirely, just like ice
 when the Father loosens the frost's fetters,
 unwraps the water's bonds—He wields power 1610
 over times and seasons; that is the true Maker.
 The man of the Geats took no more precious treasures
 from that place—through he saw many there—
 than the head, and the hilt as well,
 bright the gems; the blade had melted,
 the ornamented sword burned up; so hot was the blood
 of the poisonous alien spirit who died in there.
 Soon he was swimming who had survived in battle
 the downfall of his enemies, dove up through the water;
 the sea-currents were entirely cleansed, 1620

²⁶ Some translations read "sat down upon"; the meaning of OE *ofsæt* is disputed.

²⁷ Old, highly praised weapons are often called "the work of giants"—whether this is meant to connect the sword to the giants "who fought against God" is not clear.

²⁸ I.e., the Geats who had come to Heorot with Beowulf.

the spacious regions, when that alien spirit
gave up life-days and this loaned world.

The defender of seafarers came to land,
swam stout-hearted; he rejoiced in his sea-booty,
the great burden which he brought with him.
that splendid troop of thanes went towards him,
thanked God, rejoiced in their prince,
that they might see him safe and sound.
Then from that bold man helmet and byrnie
were quickly unstrapped. Under the clouds 1630
the mere stewed, stained with gore.
They went forth, followed the trail,
rejoicing in their hearts; they marched along the road,
the familiar path; proud as kings
they carried the head from the sea-cliff
with great trouble, even for two pairs
of stout-hearted men; four of them had to
bear, with some strain, on a battle-pole
Grendel's head to the gold-hall,
until presently fourteen proud 1640
and battle-hardy Geats came to the hall,
warriors marching; the lord of those men,
mighty in the throng, trod the meadhall-plain.

In the intervening action, another banquet is thrown for Beowulf and he is again richly rewarded. He then returns to his native Geatland and recounts his adventures to his own king, Hygelac. The text then jumps a number of years into the future. After Hygelac has died in a raid that only Beowulf survived and the princes have died on the throne, Beowulf becomes the natural heir to the kingdom.

Then came the broad kingdom
into Beowulf's hands; he held it well
for fifty winters—he was then a wise king,
old guardian of his homeland—until 2210
in the dark nights a dragon began his reign,
who guarded his hoard in the high heaths
and the steep stone barrows; the path below
lay unknown to men. Some sort of man
went inside there, found his way to
the heathen hoard—his hand...
inlaid with jewels.²⁹ He³⁰ got no profit there,
though he had been trapped in his sleep
by a thief's trickery: the whole nation knew,

²⁹ The manuscript is damaged here and some text is unreadable. Among many conjectural restorations one thing is clear—a cup is taken from the dragon's hoard.

³⁰ I.e., the thief; "he" in the following line refers to the dragon. These lines are nearly illegible, and other readings have been proposed.

and all the people around them, that he was enraged. 2220
Not for his own sake did he who sorely harmed him
break into that worm-hoard, or by his own will,
but in sad desperation some sort of slave³¹
of a warrior's son fled the savage lash,
the servitude of a house, and slipped in there,
a man beset by sins. Soon he gazed around
and felt the terror of that evil spirit;
yet...³²

... made...
... when the terror seized him 2230
he snatched a jewelled cup.

The intervening lines give the treasure's backstory and the supposed curse placed upon it.

An old beast of the dawn 2270
found that shining hoard standing open—
he who, burning, seeks the barrows,
a fierce and naked dragon, who flies by night
in a pillar of fire; people on earth
fear him greatly. It is his nature to find
a hoard in the earth, where, ancient and proud,
he guards heathen gold, though it does him no good.³³

Three hundred winters that threat to the people
held in the ground his great treasury,
wondrously powerful, until one man 2280
made him boil with fury; he³⁴ bore to his liege-lord
the plated cup, begged for peace
from his lord. Then the hoard was looted,
the hoard of rings fewer, a favour was granted
the forlorn man; for the first time
his lord looked on that ancient work of men.

When the dragon stirred, strife was renewed;
he slithered along the stones, stark-hearted he found
his enemy's footprint—he had stepped too far
in his stealthy skill, too close to the serpent's head. 2290
Thus can an undoomed man easily survive
wreck and ruin, if he holds to the Ruler's
grace and protection!³⁵ The hoard-guardian
searched along the ground, greedy to find

³¹ The word is illegible in the manuscript; the translation follows most editions.

³² The manuscript is unreadable at this point.

³³ The association of dragons and hoarded treasure is ancient and proverbial.

³⁴ I.e., the thief.

³⁵ This is the narrator's version of Beowulf's comment at lines 572–73.

the man who had sorely harmed him while he slept;
 hot, half-mad, he kept circling his cave
 all around the outside, but no one was there
 in that wilderness to welcome his warfare
 and the business of battle. Soon he returned to his barrow,
 sought his treasure; he soon discovered 2300
 that some man had disturbed his gold,
 his great wealth. The hoard-guardian waited
 impatiently until evening came;
 the barrow's shepherd was swollen with rage,
 the loathsome foe would repay with fire
 his precious drinking-cup. Then day was departed
 to the delight of that worm; he did not linger
 on the barrow wall, but took off burning
 in a burst of flames. The beginning was terror
 to the people on land, and to their ring-giving lord 2310
 the ending soon would be sore indeed.

Then that strange visitor began to spew flames
 and burn the bright courts; his burning gleams
 struck horror in men. That hostile flier
 would leave nothing alive.
 The worm's warfare was widely seen,
 his ferocious hostility, near and far,
 how the destroyer hated and harmed
 the Geatish people, then hastened to his hoard,
 his dark and hidden hall, before the break of day. 2320
 He had surrounded the people of that region with fire,
 flames and cinders; he took shelter in his barrow,
 his walls and warfare—but that trust failed him.

To Beowulf the news was quickly brought
 of that horror—that his own home,
 best of buildings, had burned in waves of fire,
 the gift-throne of the Geats. To the good man that was
 painful in spirit, greatest of sorrows;
 the wise one believed he had bitterly offended
 the Ruler of all, the eternal Lord, 2330
 against the old law; his breast within groaned
 with dark thoughts—that was not his custom.
 The fire-dragon had razed that fortress,
 the folk-stronghold, with searing flames
 within and without; for that the war-king,
 prince of the Weders, devised revenge.
 Then the lord of men bade them make,
 protector of warriors, a wondrous war-shield,
 all covered with iron; he understood well
 that wood from the forest would not help him, 2340
 linden against flames. The long-good nobleman
 had to endure the end of his loaned days,
 this world's life—and so did the worm,
 though he had held for so long his hoarded wealth.

Then that prince of rings scorned to seek out

the far-flung flier with his full force of men,
 a large army; he did not dread that attack,
 his strength or valor, because he had survived
 many battles, barely escaping alive
 in the crash of war, after he had cleansed, 2350
 triumphant hero, the hall of Hrothgar,
 and crushed Grendel and his kin in combat,
 the loathsome race.

The intervening lines give some background on Beowulf's rule, his past exploits, and the geopolitical situation in which Geatland exists.

Grim and enraged, the lord of the Geats
 took a dozen men to seek out the dragon;
 he had found out by then how the feud arose,
 the baleful violence; the precious vessel
 had come to him through the thief's hands.
 He was the thirteenth man among that troop,
 who had brought about the beginning of that strife,
 a sad-minded captive—wretched and despised
 he led the way to that plain. He went against his will
 to where he alone knew the earth-hall stood, 2410
 an underground cave near the crashing waves,
 the surging sea; inside it was full
 of gems and metal bands. A monstrous guardian,
 eager for combat, kept his gold treasures
 ancient under the ground; getting them
 was no easy bargain for any man.

The battle-hardened king sat down on the cape,
 then wished good health to his hearth-companions,
 the gold-friend of the Geats. His heart was grieving,
 restless, ripe for death—the doom was immeasurably near 2420
 that was coming to meet that old man,
 seek his soul's treasure, split asunder
 his life and his body; not for long was
 the spirit of that noble king enclosed in its flesh.

In the intervening action, Beowulf reflects on his past glory and speaks wise words to the troop he has assembled.

Beowulf spoke, said boasting words 2510
 for the very last time: "I have survived
 many battles in my youth; I will yet,
 an old folk-guardian, seek out a feud
 and do a glorious deed, if only that evildoer
 will come out to me from his earth-hall."
 Then for the last time he saluted
 each of the soldiers, his own dear comrades,
 brave in their helmets: "I would not bear a sword
 or weapon to this serpent, if I knew any other way

I could grapple with this great beast³⁶
 after my boast, as I once did with Grendel;
 but I expect the heat of battle-flames,
 steam and venom; therefore shield and byrnie
 will I have on me. From the hoard's warden
 I will not flee a single foot, but for us
 it shall be at the wall as *wyrd* decrees,
 the Ruler of every man. My mind is firm—
 I will forego boasting against this flying foe.
 Wait on the barrow, protected in your byrnies,
 men in war-gear, to see which of the two of us
 after the bloody onslaught can better
 bear his wounds. This is not your path,
 nor proper for any man except me alone
 that he should match his strength against this monster,
 do heroic deeds. With daring I shall
 get that gold—or grim death
 and fatal battle will bear away your lord!"

Then that brave challenger stood up by his shield,
 stern under his helmet, bore his battle-shirt
 under the stone-cliffs, trusted the strength
 of a single man—such is not the coward's way.
 He saw then by the wall—he who had survived
 a great many conflicts, good in manly virtues,
 the crash of battles when footsoldiers clashed—
 stone arches standing, and a stream
 shooting forth from the barrow; its surge
 was hot with deadly flames, and near the hoard
 he could not survive for very long
 unburnt, for the dragon's flaming breath.
 Enraged, the ruler of the Weder-Geats
 let a word burst forth from his breast,
 shouted starkly; the sound echoed,
 resounding battle-clear under the gray stone.
 Hate was stirred-up—the hoard-warden recognized
 the voice of the man; there was no more time
 to sue for peace. First there issued
 the steam of that great creature out of the stone,
 hot battle-sweat; the earth bellowed.
 The warrior in the barrow turned his shield-board
 against the grisly stranger, lord of the Geats,
 when the writhing beast's heart was roused
 to seek combat. The war-king
 had drawn his sword, its edges undulled,
 an ancient heirloom; each of the two
 hostile ones stood in horror of the other.
 He stood stouthearted behind his steep shield,
 beloved commander, when the worm coiled itself

2520 swiftly together—he waited in his war-gear.
 Then coiled, burning, slithering he came,
 rushing to his fate. The shield defended well 2570
 the life and limb of the famous lord
 for less time than he might have liked;
 there on that day for the first time
 he faced the outcome,³⁷ and Fate did not
 grant victory in battle. The lord of the Geats
 raised his hand, struck that mottled horror
 with his ancient sword, so that the edge failed,
 2530 bright against the bony scales, bit less strongly
 than the king of that nation needed it to do,
 hard-pressed in battle. Then the barrow-warden 2580
 was more savage after that stroke,
 and spit out gruesome fire; wide sprang
 the battle-flames. The gold-friend of the Geats
 did not boast of his glorious victories; his bare sword
 failed at need, as it should never have done,
 that ancient good iron. It was no easy journey
 when the great offspring of Ecgtheow
 had to give up ground in that place;
 2540 he was forced, against his will, to find
 a place of rest elsewhere—just as every one of us 2590
 must give up these loaned days.
 It was not long
 until those two great creatures³⁸ came together again.
 The hoard-guard took heart, his breast swelled with breath
 once again; he³⁹ suffered anguish,
 trapped by flames, he who had once ruled his folk.
 His comrades, hand-chosen, sons of noblemen,
 2550 did not take their stand in a troop around him
 with warlike valour—they fled to the woods
 and saved their lives. The spirit rose up in sorrow
 in the heart of one of them; nothing can overrule 2600
 kinship at all, in one who thinks well.
 He was called Wiglaf, Weohstan's son,
 a worthy shield-warrior, a prince of the Scylfings,⁴⁰
 kinsman of Ælfhere. He saw his liege-lord
 suffer heat under his war-helmet;
 he recalled the honours he had received from him,
 2560 the wealthy homestead of the Waegmundings,

³⁷ Or "if he could have controlled the outcome for the first time."

³⁸ OE *æglæcan* again, here referring to Beowulf and the dragon together.

³⁹ I.e., Beowulf.

⁴⁰ Wiglaf's nationality is in question—he is both a Swede and a Waegmunding (like Beowulf; see lines 2813–14). His father fought on the Swedish side in their feuds with the Geats. Tribal allegiance is more fluid than modern nationality.

³⁶ The OE word *æglæcan* is here used to refer to the dragon.

every folk-right that his father had possessed;
 he could not hold back—his hand seized
 the pale linden shield, and he drew his old sword. 2610

The intervening lines give the lineage of Wiglaf's sword (which doubles as his own lineage and foreshadowing of his mettle).

He hurried through the deadly fumes, bore his helmet
 to the aid of his lord, spoke little:
 "Dear Beowulf, do all well,
 as in your youth you said you would,
 that you would never let in your whole life
 your fame decline; now firm in deeds,
 single-minded nobleman, with all your strength
 you must protect your life—I will support you."

After these words the worm came angrily,
 terrible vicious creature, a second time, 2670
 scorched with surging flames, seeking out his enemies,
 he hated men. The hot flames rolled in waves,
 burned the shield to its rim; the byrnie was not
 of any use to the young soldier,
 but he showed his courage under his kinsman's shield,
 the young warrior, when his own was
 charred to cinders. Still the battle-king
 remembered his glory, and with his mighty strength
 swung his warblade with savage force,
 so that it stuck in the skull. Nægling shattered— 2680
 the sword of Beowulf weakened in battle,
 ancient and gray. It was not granted to him
 that iron-edged weapons might ever
 help him in battle; his hand was too strong,
 he who, I am told, overtaxed every blade
 with his mighty blows, when he bore to battle
 a wound-hardened⁴¹ weapon—it was no help to him at all.

Then that threat to the people for a third time,
 fierce fire-dragon, remembering his feud,
 rushed on the brave man, hot and bloodthirsty, 2690
 when he saw the chance, seized him by the neck
 in his bitter jaws; he was bloodied
 by his mortal wounds—blood gushed in waves.
 Then, I have heard, in his king's hour of need
 the earl⁴² beside him showed his bravery,
 the noble skill which was his nature.
 He did not heed that head when he helped his kinsman;
 that brave man's hand was burned, so that
 he struck that savage foe a little lower down,
 the soldier in armour, so that his sword plunged in 2700
 bejewelled and bloody, so that the fire began

to subside afterwards. The king himself
 still had his wits, drew the war-dagger,
 bitter and battle-sharp, that he wore in his byrnie;
 the protector of the Weders carved
 through the worm's midsection.

They felled their foe—their force took his life—
 and they both together had brought him down,
 the two noble kinsmen; a thane at need,
 as a man should be! But that, for the prince, was
 his last work of victory, by his own will, 2710
 of worldly adventures.

When the wound
 which the earth-dragon had worked on him
 began to burn and swell, he soon realized
 that in his breast was an evil force,
 a poison welling; then the nobleman went,
 still wise in thought, so that he sat
 on a seat by the wall. On that work of giants he gazed,
 saw how stone arches and sturdy pillars
 held up the inside of that ancient earth-hall.
 Then with his hands the thane, immeasurably good, 2720
 bathed with water his beloved lord,
 the great prince, splattered with gore,
 sated with battle, and unstrapped his helmet.
 Beowulf spoke—despite his wound,
 that deadly cut—he knew clearly
 that his allotted life had run out,
 and his joys in the earth; all gone
 was his portion of days, death immeasurably near:

In the concluding action, the Geats lament the loss of their leader and best warrior, worrying that surrounding kingdoms will now see them as weak and wish to take advantage of them. The dragon's corpse is unceremoniously pushed into the sea, whereas Beowulf's body is burned on a pyre along with the treasure from the dragon's hoard. The poem ends by praising Beowulf's kindness and desire for glory.

41 Or "wondrously hard"; the OE text is unclear.

42 I.e., Wiglaf.



Figure 3a. J. H. Frederick Bacon, *The demon of evil, with his fierce ravening, greedily grasped them*, 1910, 22 cm. Published in M. I. Ebbutt, *Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race* (London, G. G. Harrap & company, 1916).

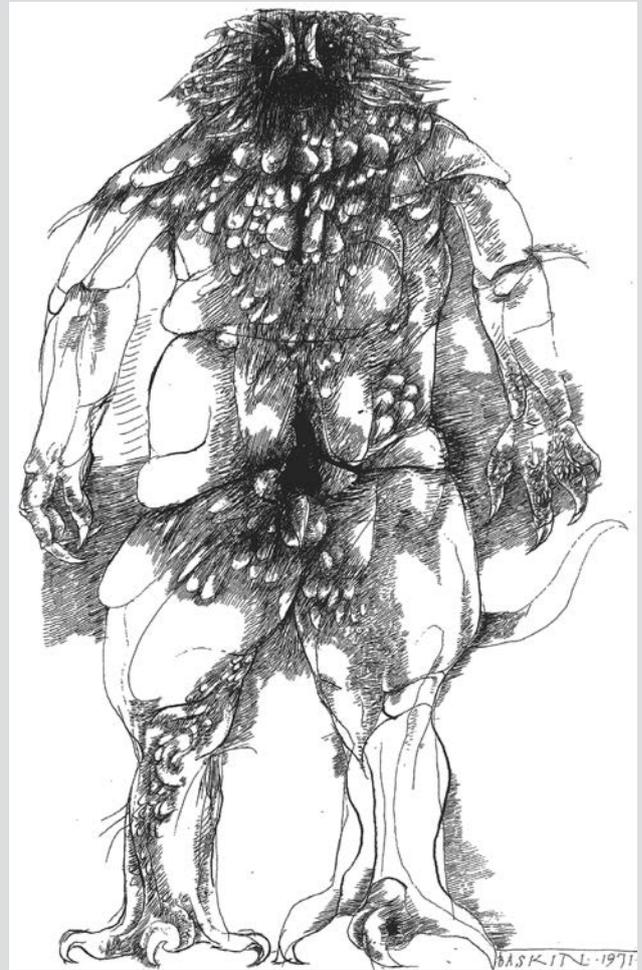


Figure 3c. Leonard Baskin, *Grendel*, 1971



Figure 3b. Julio Castro, *Grendel*, 1965. Published in José Luis Herrera and Julio Castro, *Beowulfo* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1965), Colección "El Globo de Colores" Mitos y Leyendas.

MODERN IMAGES OF GRENDEL (Twentieth Century)



Figure 3d. Gareth Hinds, *Grendel*, 1999.
Published in Gareth Hinds, *Beowulf*
(Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2007).

Critical Introduction

Grendel looms large in the narrative of *Beowulf* and in many modern critical discussions of the epic poem. The monster is called a “mearcstapa” in the poem, which literally means “border-walker.” This monster, who lives with his mother in an underground cave, has been of such interest that there is a novel retelling the story from his perspective (**John Gardner’s *Grendel***), an opera (*Grendel*, directed by Julie Taymor, which premiered in New York in 2006), and even an Australian animated television miniseries (*Grendel Grendel Grendel*, 1981, directed by Alexander Stitt). Given all this modern interest, it might be something of a surprise to learn that there is virtually no physical description of Grendel within the poem. It tells us a few things: he is shaped like a man, but larger, has glowing eyes, has hair, and bears talons. This is about all that we can glean about his appearance from the text, and while the *Wonders of the East* in the same manuscript is heavily illuminated, there are no images to accompany *Beowulf*, which survives in only this one medieval copy. Many modern illustrators, though, have taken up the challenge of visualizing Grendel. Here are four attempts, spanning the twentieth century from 1910 to 1999. Given the scant visual details in the poem, it is not surprising that they are quite different, but their differences are interesting and reveal assumptions about the monster, and about the humans who fight it.

Viewing Questions

How do these four artists grapple with the information provided in the poem? Are there similarities among the images? How do the images differ?

ASM

MARIE DE FRANCE, *BISCLAVRET* Translated by GLYN BURGESS

Critical Introduction

Marie de France is among the most prominent authors of Old French texts and a rare female author whose name is known to us from the Middle Ages. Her *Lais* are a series of short narrative poems of romance and adventure. She wrote in twelfth-century England, where French was the language of the aristocracy, and she tells us that one of her goals is to preserve oral Breton tales—in the local dialect of Brittany—which she has translated into French, with some notes in English to clarify points of difficulty in the translations. Beyond her texts, we know little or nothing about Marie (“Marie de France” is actually a name given to her long after her death); the texts, however, attest to her literacy in multiple languages, and her sophistication is made clear in the complexity and humour of the *Lais*.

The *Lais* often focus on animals, but a few centre on monsters. *Yonec* is the tale of a hawk-man, and *Bisclavret*, the lay featured here, is a werewolf tale. She explains that “bisclavret” is the Breton term for what is, in Old French, “garulf,” that is, “man-wolf.” He is a lycanthrope, a person who can or must take on animal form. This is the tale of a baron who has wealth, status, and a loving wife, but also a secret: he periodically turns into a wolf. Perhaps surprisingly, the baron views this as a source of joy rather than a curse. This is an example of what are called “sympathetic werewolf” narratives in which the werewolf, whether he feels pleased with his transformations or cursed by them, is the hero of the narrative.

Bisclavret does not *physically* become a hybrid man-wolf being, as do most werewolves in modern narratives. When he transforms, it is into a wolf, albeit one who “possesses understanding and intelligence.” He remains, it seems, fully in control of his actions when in his wolf form, which Marie informs us is quite unusual for a werewolf. In this story, full of intrigue, romance, and violence, the basic wonder that the baron can transform himself into a wolf is taken in stride. The focus is as much on marital (often misogynist) and feudal relationships among the characters.

Reading Questions

Where do Marie de France’s sympathies lie in this story, and how can you tell? What does this werewolf story demonstrate about class and gender roles in the period?

By the end of the story, who is the monster: Bisclavret or his wife? Why?

Editorial Notes

While the original Old French text is a poem, the translation is presented here in prose form for clarity and ease of reading.

Further Reading

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ASM

MARIE DE FRANCE, *BISCLAVRET*

Translated by GLYN BURGESS

IN MY EFFORT to compose lays I do not wish to omit *Bisclavret*—for such is its name in Breton, while the Normans call it *Garwaf*. In days gone by one could hear tell, and indeed it often used to happen, that many men turned into werewolves and went to live in the woods. A werewolf is a ferocious beast which, when possessed by this madness, devours men, causes great damage and dwells in vast forests. I leave such matters for the moment, for I wish to tell you about *Bisclavret*.

In Brittany there lived a baron whom I have heard greatly praised. He was a good and handsome knight who conducted himself nobly. He was one of his lord's closest advisers and was well loved by all his neighbours. As his wedded wife he had a woman who was worthy and attractive in appearance. He loved her and she returned his love. But one thing caused her great worry: each week he was absent for three full days without her knowing what became of him or where he went, and no one in the household knew what happened to him. One day, when he had returned home in high spirits, she questioned him: "Lord," she said, "my dear, sweet love, I would gladly ask you something, if only I dared; but there is nothing I fear more than your anger." When he heard this, he embraced her, drew her towards him and kissed her. "Lady," he said, "come, ask your question! There is nothing you can ask which I shall not tell you, if I know the answer." "In faith," she said, "I am relieved to hear this. Lord, I am so fraught with anxiety the days you are apart from me, my heart is so heavy and I have such a fear of losing you that I shall surely die shortly from this unless I soon get help. Please tell me where you go, what becomes of you and where you stay. I think you must have a lover and, if this is so, you are doing wrong." "Lady," he said, "in God's name, have mercy on me! If I tell you this, great harm will come to me, for as a result I shall lose your love and destroy myself."

When the lady heard what he said, she thought it was no laughing matter. She questioned him repeatedly and coaxed him so persuasively that he told her his story, keeping nothing secret. "Lady, I become a werewolf: I enter the vast forest and live in the deepest part of the wood where I feed off the prey I can capture." When he had related everything to her, she asked him whether he undressed or remained clothed. "Lady," he said, "I go about completely naked." "Tell me, in the name of God, where do you leave your clothes?" "That I will not tell you,

for if I lost them and were discovered in that state, I should remain a werewolf forever. No one would be able to help me until they were returned to me. That is why I do not wish this to be known." "Lord," the lady replied to him, "I love you more than the whole world. You must not hide anything from me or doubt me in any way. That would not seem like true love. What have I done wrong? What sin have I committed that you should doubt me in any way? Do tell me—you will be acting wisely." She tormented and harried him so much that he could not do otherwise but tell her. "Lady," he said, "beside the wood, near the path I follow, stands an old chapel which often serves me well. There beneath a bush is a broad stone, hollowed out in the centre, in which I put my clothes until I return home." The lady heard this remarkable revelation and her face became flushed with fear. She was greatly alarmed by the story, and began to consider various means of parting from him, as she no longer wished to lie with him. She sent a messenger to summon a knight who lived in the region and who had loved her for a long time, wooed her ardently and served her generously. She had never loved him or promised him her affection but now she told him what was on her mind. "Friend," she said, "rejoice: without further delay I grant you that which has tormented you; never again will you encounter any refusal. I offer you my love and my body; make me your mistress." He thanked her warmly and accepted her pledge, whereupon she received his oath and told him of her husband and what became of him. She described the path he took to the forest and sent him for her husband's clothes. Thus was *Bisclavret* betrayed and wronged by his wife. Because he was often missing, everyone thought that this time he had gone away for good. They searched and inquired for him a long while but, as no trace of him was found, they had to let the matter drop. Then the knight married the lady he had loved for so long.

A whole year passed by until one day the king went hunting and headed straight for the forest in which *Bisclavret* was living. When the hounds were unleashed they came upon *Bisclavret* and the dogs and hunters spent the whole day in pursuit until they were just about to capture him, tear him to pieces and destroy him. As soon as he saw the king he ran up to him and begged for mercy. He took hold of his stirrup and kissed his foot and his leg. The king saw him and was filled with dread. He summoned all his companions. "Lords,"

he said, "come forward! See the marvellous way this beast humbles itself before me! It has the intelligence of a human and is pleading for mercy. Drive back all the dogs and see that no one strikes it! The beast possesses understanding and intelligence. Hurry! Let us depart: I shall place the creature under my protection, for I shall hunt no more today."

The king then left with Bisclavret following him. He kept very close to the king, as he did not want to be separated from him and had no wish to abandon him. The king, who took him straight to his castle, was delighted and overjoyed at what had happened, for never before had he seen such a thing. He considered the wolf to be a great wonder and loved it dearly, commanding all his people to guard it well for love of him and not to do it any harm. None of them was to strike it and plenty of food and water must be provided for it. His men were happy to look after the creature and each day it would sleep amongst the knights, just by the king. It was loved by everyone and so noble and gentle a beast was it that it never attempted to cause any harm. Wherever the king might go, it never wanted to be left behind. It accompanied him constantly and showed clearly that it loved him.

Now hear what happened next. The king held court and all his barons and those who held fiefs from him were summoned so that they could help him celebrate the festival and serve him all the better. Amongst them, richly and elegantly attired, was the knight who had married Bisclavret's wife. He did not realize and would never have suspected that Bisclavret was so close by. As soon as he arrived at the palace, Bisclavret caught sight of the knight and sped towards him, sinking his teeth into him and dragging him down towards him. He would soon have done the knight serious harm if the king had not called him and threatened him with a stick. On two occasions that day he attempted to bite him. Many people were greatly astonished at this for never before had he shown signs of such behaviour towards anyone he had seen. Throughout the household it was remarked that he would not have done it without good reason. The knight had wronged him somehow or other, for he was bent on revenge. On this occasion that was the end of the matter, until the festival came to a close and the barons took their leave and returned home. The knight whom Bisclavret attacked was one of the very first to go, I believe. No wonder Bisclavret hated him.

Not long afterwards, as I understand it, the king, who was wise and courtly, went into the forest where Bisclavret had been discovered. Bisclavret accompanied him and on the way home that night the king took lodging in that region. Bisclavret's wife learnt of this and, dressing herself elegantly, went next day to speak to the king, taking an expensive pres-

ent for him. When Bisclavret saw her approach, no one could restrain him. He dashed towards her like a madman. Just hear how successfully he took his revenge. He tore the nose right off her face. What worse punishments could he have inflicted on her? From all sides he was threatened and was on the point of being torn to pieces, when a wise man said to the king: "Lord, listen to me. This beast has lived with you and every single one of us has seen him over a long period and has been with him at close quarters. Never before has he touched a soul or committed a hostile act, except against this lady here. By the faith I owe you, he has some grudge against her and also against her husband. She is the wife of the knight you used to love so dearly and who has been missing for a long time without our knowing what became of him. Question the lady to see if she will tell you why the beast hates her. Make her tell you, if she knows! We have witnessed many marvels happening in Brittany." The king accepted his advice. Holding the knight, he took the lady away and subjected her to torture. Pain and fear combined made her reveal everything about her husband: how she had betrayed him and taken his clothes, about his account of what happened, what became of him and where he went. Since his clothes had been taken he had not been seen in the region. She was quite convinced that the beast was Bisclavret. The king asked her for the clothes and, whether she liked it or not, made her bring them and return them to Bisclavret. When they were placed before him, Bisclavret took no notice of them. The man who gave the advice earlier called to the king: "Lord, you are not acting properly: nothing would induce him to put on his clothing in front of you or change his animal form. You do not realize the importance of this; it is most humiliating for him. Take him into your bedchamber and bring him the clothes. Let us leave him there for a while and we shall soon see if he turns into a man." The king himself led the way and closed all the doors on the wolf. After a while he returned, taking two barons with him. All three entered the room. They found the knight sleeping on the king's own bed. The king ran forward to embrace him, and kissed him many times. It was not long before he restored his land to him; he gave him more than I can tell and banished the woman from the country, exiling her from the region. The man for whom she betrayed her husband went with her. She had a good many children who were thereafter recognizable by their appearance. Many of the women in the family, I tell you truly, were born without noses and lived noseless.

The adventure you have heard actually took place, do not doubt it. The lay was composed about Bisclavret to be remembered for ever more.

VÖLSUNGA SAGA (THE SAGA OF THE VOLSUNGS) — Selections Translated by LARISSA TRACY

Critical Introduction

Völsunga saga (ca. 1200–1270) is one of the medieval Icelandic *fornaldarsögur*—legendary sagas—populated by mythical heroes, heroines, gods, and otherworldly entities like dwarves, valkyries, and shape-shifters who assume the form of wolves, otters, and dragons. The story of Sigurd's defeat of Fafnir pre-dates the prose *Völsunga saga*. The various Eddic poems about Sigurd establish him as the dragon-slaying hero who falls in love with a valkyrie, learns the knowledge of runes from her and the prophecy of his own betrayal and demise, fulfills that prophecy, and is murdered. Sigurd the Dragonslayer was among the most popular figures in Scandinavian tradition. He is singled out from an early age as a great hero from a long line of heroes battling both human foes and monsters, most famously the dragon, Fafnir, who was once a man but shapeshifts into dragon-form to guard his stolen treasure. But there are many heroes in the *Völsunga saga*, some of whom more closely resemble the monsters they fight, like Sigmund and Sinfjotli who transform into werewolves, exhibiting a savagery that may have more to do with their human qualities. This text had widespread appeal in the Middle Ages, and has inspired numerous adaptations in the modern era: its dragon, Fafnir, and its cursed ring, the centrepiece of an accursed treasure hoard, are reflected in Richard Wagner's *Ring Cycle* and **J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*** and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Reading Questions

Is Sigmund and Sinfjotli's savagery caused by the wolfskins, or are they savage to begin with? Could Sigurd have performed his heroic feats without the intervention of Odin? If not, then what makes him heroic? What is the significance of Sigurd's conversation with Fafnir?

Editorial Notes

Völsunga saga survives in one manuscript, Ny kgl. Saml. 1824b 4^{vo} (ca. 1400) and this translation is based on the transcription available online: <http://www.voluspa.org/sagas.htm>. This transcription includes a facing page English translation by William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon (London, 1870), which was consulted in conjunction with the excellent translation by Jesse Byock (Berkeley, 1990). Spelling and the tenses have been normalized, adjusting the text in places for easier reading.

Further Reading

Byock, Jesse L. *Viking Language*. 2 vols. Pacific Palisades, CA: Jules William Press, 2015.

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VÖLSUNGA SAGA (THE SAGA OF THE VOLSUNGS)

Selections

Translated by LARISSA TRACY

Chapter 8

It is said that Sigmund thought Sinfjotli¹ was too young to seek vengeance with him, and he would now accustom him to hardship; they would now spend the summer in the forest and kill people to get money for themselves. Sigmund thought him very much like the race of the Volsungs and yet thought that he was the son of King Siggeir, and thought he had the evil of his father but the courage of Volsung. Sigmund did not think him very careful of kinsmen, for he reminded Sigmund often of his sorrows and urged him a lot to kill King Siggeir.

Now they went back into the wood to win wealth, and they found a certain house and two men asleep in the house with big, gold rings. They had been put under a spell; there were wolfskins² hanging over them. Only on the tenth day could they come out of them. They were the sons of kings. Sigmund and Sinfjotli donned the skins and they would not come off, and the supernatural power accompanied them just as it already had, letting out the wolf's voice. They both knew that voice. Now they lay themselves there a boundary marker and each went their way. They made an oath between them

1 Sinfjotli is the son of Signy and Sigmund, though Sigmund does not know it. Signy, Sigmund's twin sister, sends two of her sons by King Siggeir, whom she is forced to marry, to Sigmund to test their strength, a test that they both fail. Signy realizes that in order to produce a son capable of avenging her father (whom Siggeir killed) she has to contrive to conceive a son whose bloodline is pure Volsung. So she exchanges shapes with a sorceress in the woods and seduces Sigmund. When she sends Sinfjotli to Sigmund, Sinfjotli passes the initial tests: he does not flinch when she sews his cuffs to his wrists and rips them away, and he does not flinch at making bread from a bag of flour that moves (it has a venomous serpent inside, but he just pounds it to dust without realizing it).

2 Shape-changing is common in *Völsunga saga*, but it is generally an ability that the hero possesses rather than something effected by a magical object. In this instance, the wolfskins turn both Sigmund and Sinfjotli into wolves with human awareness. They are technically werewolves because they are men who have changed into wolves, but they look and behave like wolves. In the Norse tradition, someone who commits secret murder (murder that is hidden and uncompensated) could be declared an outlaw or *morð vargr*—"killer wolf" and exiled from the community. See Byock, *Saga of the Volsungs*, 111–12 notes 4–5.

that they should risk seven men and not more, and the one attacked by men would let out his wolf's voice.

"Do not break from this," said Sigmund, "for you are young and full of daring. Many men will think to hunt you."

Now they each went their own way. And when they parted company, Sigmund found seven men and let out his wolf's voice. And Sinfjotli heard that and he came at once and killed them all. They separated again. Before Sinfjotli had gone very far in the woods, he came upon eleven men and he fought with them, and in the end he killed them all. Sorely wounded, he went to an oak and rested there. Before long, Sigmund came and said: "Why didn't you ask for me?" He spoke to Sigmund, "You accepted aid to kill seven men, and I am a child compared to you, and I killed eleven men and did not call for help." Sigmund leapt at him so hard he stepped back and fell. Sigmund bit him in the windpipe. That day they could not come out of the wolfskins. Sigmund laid him over his back and bore him home to their hut, sat over him and bade the trolls³ to take the wolfskins. Sigmund saw one day where two weasels were and one bit the other on the windpipe and it ran into the forest and returned with a leaf and placed it over the wound, and the weasel sprang up healed. Sigmund went out and saw a raven flying with a leaf that it gave to him. He laid it over Sinfjotli's wound, and he sprang up entirely healed as if he had never been wounded. After that they went back to their earth house and lived there until that time when the wolfskins unbound them. They took them and burned them in a fire and asked that no one else be harmed. In that uncouth guise, that magic spell allowed them to perform their exploits in the kingdom of the powerful King Siggeir.

When Sinfjotli was grown up, Sigmund thought he had tested him completely. Now it was not long before Sigmund wanted to try to make an attempt at avenging his father, if

3 Trolls are "monstrous, evil-disposed" beings that may take a humanoid form but "do not belong to the human race." See Geir R. Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 442. They are said to dwell in caves or deep in the mountains, far away from human habitation and, in some legends, are said to turn to stone in sunlight. Trolls are common in Norse literature and a popular curse is "the trolls take you".

possible. Now they left by the road from their underground room on a certain day and came to the farm of King Siggeir just around evening and went into the entrance hall that was there in front of the hall; inside they hid behind the ale casks that were there. The queen knew where they were and she wished to find them; they met and made a plan to avenge their father at dark.

Signy and the king had two young children; together they played on the hall floor with a gold toy, running down the floor and then running along the hall-floor after it. One gold ring rolled out of the hall, where Sigmund and his companion were hiding, and the boy ran over the floor seeking the ring. Now he saw where the two men were sitting great and grim, in long helmets and shining byrnies. He ran into the hall to his father and told him what he saw. The king suspected treason against him. Signy heard what the child told his father. She stood up and took both children out to the entrance hall to them and said, "You must know this, that they have told on you, and I advise the two of you to kill them." Sigmund said, "I will not kill your children, even though they have told on me." But Sinfjotli was not faint-hearted and drew his sword and killed both children and threw them into the hall in front of King Siggeir.

The king stood up and called to his men to seize these men who had been hiding in the entrance hall all evening. Now men leapt out thither and wished to lay their hands on them. They defended themselves well, manfully, and he who was nearest thought for a longtime that he had the worst. But at last it happened that they were seized by overwhelming force and they were bound and set in shackles and there they sat all night.

Now the king thought to himself, what sort of death he should give them so that they would feel it the longest. When morning came, the king had built a great mound of stones and turf, and when this mound was built they set a large stone in the middle of the burial mound so that one edge of the stone pointed up and the other pointed down. It was so big that it reached both sides and no one could get around it. Then he had Sigmund and Sinfjotli taken and each one set on his own side because he thought it would be worse for them not to be together, but they could hear one another. When they were covering the mound with turf, Signy came with straw in her arms and she cast it in the mound to Sinfjotli and told the slaves to conceal this from the king. They agreed and, after, they closed up the mound.

When night came, Sinfjotli said to Sigmund, "I do not suspect either of us will want food for a while; here has the queen

thrown bacon into the grave mound wrapped outside in straw." And he groped with his hand for the bacon and found thrust into it Sigmund's sword; he recognized it by the hilt. In the darkness of the grave mound, he told Sigmund; they both rejoiced. Now Sinfjotli threw the sword point up over the stone and pulled hard; the sword bit the stone. Sigmund took the sword point now and sawed the stone in between them and did not stop until he finished sawing. As it is said:

They cut with great power the great stone
Sigmund, with his sword, and Sinfjotli.

And then they were both loose together in the grave mound, and they cut both rock and turf and came out of the grave mound. They went back to the hall; all the men were asleep. They bore wood to the hall and lit the wood on fire. The men woke up with the smoke and the fact that the hall was blazing above them. The king asked who set the fire. "I am here with Sinfjotli, my sister-son," said Sigmund, "and we now want you to know that not all the Volsungs are dead." He bade his sister come out and receive esteem and great honour from him, and in this way he wished to compensate her grief. She answered, "Now shall you know whether I remember how King Siggeir killed King Volsung. I let both my children be killed when they seemed too slow to avenge my father, and I came to you in the forest in the shape of a seeress⁴ and Sinfjotli is our son. From this, he has great courage, because he is the child of both a son and a daughter of King Volsung. I have done all these things so that King Siggeir should take his death; I have done so much work to achieve vengeance that my life is worth nothing. I shall now die with King Siggeir willingly, whom I married unwillingly."

Then she kissed her brother Sigmund and Sinfjotli and went into the fire and bade them farewell; then she suffered death with King Siggeir and all his men.

The kinsmen then journeyed by ship, and Sigmund kept his course to his ancestral realm. He drove from the land that king who settled himself there after King Volsung. Sigmund became a splendid, wise, daring king of the realm. He married a wife, called Borghild. They had two sons. One was called Helgi, the other Hámund. When Helgi was born, the Norns⁵

⁴ *Völva*. One of the earliest poems of the Elder Edda is the *Völuspá* (*Prophecy of the Seeress*) a cosmogony that explains the origins of the Norse world as well as prophesying Rágnarök—the Doom of the Gods. The poem is told as a question and answer session between Odin and the *völva* as he searches for wisdom.

⁵ The Norse Fates, three sisters who weave the tapestry of men's

came, spoke to him, and granted him a prophecy that he should become the most famous of kings. Sigmund returned from battle and went with a garlic⁶ to meet his son, gave him the name Helgi, and as name-fastening⁷ gifts gave him Hringstaði, Sólfjöll,⁸ and a sword. He bade him to distinguish himself well and to be worthy of the race of the Volsungs. Helgi grew to be munificent and popular and surpassed most other men in all achievements. It is said that he went plundering when he was fifteen years old. Helgi was king of the people and Sinfjotli was asked to go with him and both commanded troops.

Chapter 13

It is now said, Hjördís⁹ gave birth to a son and the boy was brought before King Hjálpreki. The king was glad when he saw his sharp gaze¹⁰ in his head, and he told him there was no man of like worth or equal to him. Then he was sprinkled with water and named Sigurd, of whom all men say one thing: no one was his match in conduct and growth. He was brought up there with King Hjálpreki in great honour. And when all the renowned men and kings are named in ancient sagas, Sigurd goes first of all for prowess, spirit and valour. And he was lifted higher than any man from the north region of the world.

Sigurd grew up there with Hjálpreki and he was one loved child. Hjálpreki betrothed Hjördís to King Alf and spoke for her hand.

lives. In *Njal's saga*, before the battle of Clontarf, Ireland in 1014 between Norse and Irish allies and a separate contingent of Norse, a man named Dorrud has a vision of the Norns weaving the outcome of the battle: "Men's heads were used for weights, men's intestines for the weft and the warp, a sword for the sword beater, and an arrow for the pin beater" (303).

6 Byock translates *laukr* as leek and explains that in many cultures both garlic and leeks are believed to have magical or medicinal properties (114 note 26).

7 Ceremony of giving a name.

8 Hringstaði may refer to Hringstead or Ringstead, a royal Danish residence on the island of Zealand. Sólfjöll or Solfell means "mountains of the sun."

9 This is Sigmund's last wife. She conceives their son Sigurd either on the battlefield as he is dying, or right before his last battle (depending on the version). Hjördís is taken in by King Hjálpreki. In older versions of this story, like that mentioned in *Beowulf*, Sigmund is the one who slays the dragon with the help of Sinfjotli (Fitela in *Beowulf*). But in *Völsunga saga*, Sigurd is Sigmund's heir and takes over his role as dragon slayer.

10 Could also be translated as "keen glare"; in either case, indicating serpent's eyes.

Sigurd's foster-father was called Regin, son of Hreiðmar. He taught him feats, games of tables,¹¹ runes, and to speak many tongues, as was usual for kings' sons and the lot of many others. One time when they were both together, Regin asked Sigurd if he knew how much wealth his father had or who kept it.¹² Sigurd answered and said, the kings kept it.

Regin asked: "Do you trust them very well?"

Sigurd answered: "It is fitting that they keep it there until it suits me, and they can better guard it than I."

Another time, Regin came to speak with Sigurd and said: "It is strange that you are willing to be the kings' horseboy or go around like a runaway."

Sigurd answered: "That is not so, for I advise them in all things and I have a right to whatever I wish."

Regin said: "Ask them to give you a horse."

Sigurd answered: "That will be mine at once, when I wish it."

Sigurd went to see the kings. One of the kings said to Sigurd: "What would you have of us?"

Sigurd answered: "I will accept a horse from you for my amusement."

The king said: "Select a horse for yourself, and anything else we have as it pleases you."

One day after, Sigurd went into the forest and met an old man with a long beard.¹³ He was unknown to him. He asked where Sigurd would go. He answered: "I shall select a horse. Advise me on this."

He said: "We will go and drive them to the river called Busiltjörn."

They drove the horses out to the deep-water of the river and all swam back to land except one horse. Sigurd chose him. He was grey to look at and young in age, great in growth, and handsome. No man had come onto his back. The bearded man said: "This horse comes from Sleipnir,¹⁴ and he must be carefully fed, for he will be the best of all horses."

11 Chess.

12 Sigmund's treasure was kept in trust for Sigurd until he was older.

13 This is Odin, the Norse All-father, or father of all the gods. He is the chief of the Æsir, the air gods, who rule in Asgard and keep the hall of Valhalla where the valiant dead who are chosen by the Valkyrie ("Choosers of the Slain" who are also referred to as "Odin's Daughters") feast and fight until they are needed for the final battle of Rágnarök. Odin shows up frequently in Norse literature to either aid his heroes or to signal the end of their usefulness. He appears on the battlefield at Sigmund's last battle to let Sigmund know his time has come. He usually appears as an old man with one eye, a long, grey beard, a grey floppy hat and cloak, and a staff. Sometimes he is accompanied by his two ravens Huginn (Thought) and Muninn (Memory).

14 Odin's eight-legged horse, born to Loki while he was in the form

The man vanished then. Sigurd called the horse Grani, and he was the best of all horses. Sigurd had met Odin. Regin spoke again to Sigurd: “You have too little property. It grieves me that you leap about like a peasant boy, but I can say where there is great wealth to be won and more than that, great reputation and honour if you acquire it.” Sigurd asked where it was hidden and who guarded it.

Regin answered: “He is called Fafnir and he lies a short distance away, at a place called the Gnita-heath. And when you come there you might say: you have never seen more gold standing in one place, and you will not want more though you were the oldest and most famous of all kings.”

Sigurd answered: “I am young, but I know this kind of worm,¹⁵ how no one dares to go against him because of his huge size and cruelty.”

Regin answered: “That isn’t so. His size is no bigger than other heather eels¹⁶ and a great tale is made of it. Your kinsmen thought as much. And though you are of the Volsung line, you don’t seem to have their temperament, told first in all distinguished deeds.”

Sigurd answered: “Truly, I may not have their great zeal and prowess, but there is no need to taunt me when I am little past childhood. Why do you egg me on in this manner?”

Regin answered: “There is a saga I must tell you.”

Sigurd said: “Let me hear it.”

Chapter 14

“This saga begins with my father, who was called Hreiðmar, a great and wealthy man. He had a son called Fafnir, another called Otr, and I was the third, the least of them all in prowess and honour. But I knew how to work with iron, silver and gold from which I could make some things of use. My brother Otr had a different skill and nature. He was a great fisher, greater than all other men. He had an otter’s likeness by day and was always in the river bringing up fish in his mouth. He brought his haul to our father and was of great assistance to him. He mostly kept himself in the likeness of an otter, then he’d come home and doze and eat alone for he might not see anything there. By far, Fafnir was the greatest and grimmest, and it was agreeable to him to lay claim to everything.”

of a mare.

¹⁵ *Worm* or *wyrm* means *dragon* but it can also mean *serpent*.

¹⁶ Snakes. Regin is downplaying Fafnir’s size to try and convince Sigurd to kill him, suggesting that he is no more than a little serpent.

“There was a dwarf called Andvari,” said Regin. “He was always in a waterfall, called Andvari’s Fall, in the likeness of a pike and got his meals there, for there were a great number of fish in the fall. My brother, Otr, was always in that waterfall, and he brought up fish in his mouth and lay them one by one on the land. Odin, Loki,¹⁷ and Hœnir¹⁸ went their way and came to Andvari’s Fall. Otr had taken a salmon and eaten it, dozing on the bank of the river. Loki took a stone and loosed it, killing the otter. The Æsir thought it was great luck, and they flayed the skin off the otter. That evening they came to Hreiðmar’s and showed him their catch. We laid hands on them and demanded as their payment and ransom that they fill the skin with gold and cover the outside with red gold. They sent Loki after the gold. He came to Ránar,¹⁹ got her net, went to Andvari’s Fall and cast the net for the pike, and it leapt into the net. Then Loki said:

‘What is that fish
that runs in the river,
but knows not to avoid danger?
You must ransom your head
From being accursed
And find me the flame of the waters.’

‘Andvari is my name.
Call Óinn,²⁰ my father.
I have fared over numerous falls.
A miserable Norn
determined in days of yore
that I should wade in water.’

¹⁷ Loki is a trickster. He is usually in the company of the Æsir, but he also sides with the giants occasionally. He often creates difficult situations or makes difficult situations worse, but often in the service of Fate. He shapeshifts regularly and orchestrates the death of Baldr at the hands of Baldr’s blind brother, Hod. His punishment is to sit chained to the base of the World Tree, Yggdrasil, while the dragon Nidhogg drips venom on his head. Loki’s wife Sigyn collects the venom in a goblet until its full, and when she moves the cup to empty it he wails in pain. Loki is known for fathering (and mothering) a host of supernatural figures. With the giantess Angrboda, Loki fathered Hel—the goddess of the Underworld whose name should not be confused with the Christian concept of Hell; the wolf Fenrir; and the world serpent Jörmungand. In the shape of a mare, Loki gave birth to Odin’s eight-legged horse Sleipnir.

¹⁸ Hœnir is one of the lesser-known Æsir. He appears in the *Völuspá* and is associated with the creation of humans.

¹⁹ Goddess of the sea.

²⁰ Óin is the name of a dwarf.

Loki saw the gold that was Andvari's. When Andvari gave up the gold, he had one ring left, but Loki took it from him. The dwarf went into the stones and said that gold, indeed *all* the gold, should be the bane of all men who own it."

"The Æsir rode to Hreiðmar's with the treasure and filled up the otterskin and set it on its feet. The Æsir had to cover it entirely with gold on the outside. When that was done, Hreiðmar went up to it and saw one whisker and bade them cover it. Then Odin drew the ring, Andvaranaut,²¹ from his hand and covered the hair. Then Loki said:

Your gold is now paid
and you have your tribute
much for my head.
But you and your son
are not fated to be fortunate;
it shall be the bane of you both."

"Then Fafnir killed his father," said Regin, "murdered him, and I got none of the treasure. Fafnir grew so evil that he started lying out in the wild, and he begrudged no one to have benefit of the treasure but himself. And now he is the worst of worms, and he lies upon the treasure hoard."

"After, I went to the king and became his smith. This is my story of how I lost the inheritance from my father and the *wergild*²² for the death of my brother. Ever since, the gold is called Otr's Gold and it is talked of as such."

Sigurd answered, "Much have you lost and exceedingly evil have your kinsmen been. Go now and with your skill in handicraft, make a sword so that its equal cannot be found and I may do great deeds with it if my courage holds, and if you wish, I will kill this great dragon."

Regin said, "Trust me well and with that same sword you may kill Fafnir."

Chapter 15

Regin now made a sword and gave it into Sigurd's hand. He took the sword and said:

"Behold, this is your smithing, Regin," and he struck an anvil and the sword broke. He cast the broken blade at

²¹ This ring makes its way through the saga, inspiring vengeance and bloodshed. It is the primary piece of the cursed Volsung treasure.

²² *wergild*: man-price: the value, in gold, of a person's life. In Norse society there was a complex system of tariffs dictating how much people's lives or limbs were worth. Generally, if *wergild* was paid for someone who was killed, then the death could not be avenged and a blood feud could be avoided.

him and bid him to smith another, better one. Regin forged another sword and gave it to Sigurd. He looked at it.

Regin said, "you will like this one, though you are a hard master to smith for."

Sigurd tested the sword and broke it like the first. Then Sigurd said to Regin, "you perform very much like your former kinsmen and are untrustworthy."

Sigurd went now to his mother. She welcomed him well; they talked now with each other and drank. Then Sigurd said: "Have I heard right, that King King Sigmund gave you the two halves of the sword Gram?"²³

She answered, "that is true."

Sigurd said, "give them into my hands. I wish to have them."

She said he had a favourable look and gave him the sword. Sigurd now went to Regin and bid him to make a sword from the pieces. Regin was angry, but he went to the smithy with the broken sword. He thought Sigurd too demanding about metal work. Regin now made the sword, and as he bore it out of the smithy, it seemed to the apprentice smiths that it burned with fire on its edges. He bid Sigurd now to take the sword and said that he did not know how to make a sword if this one broke. Sigurd struck the anvil with it and cleaved it down to the base, and it neither burst nor broke. He praised the sword greatly. Then he went to the river with a tuft of wool and cast it in the flow; he cut it asunder with the sword. Sigurd went home content.

Regin said: "I have made your sword; now you must fulfill your vow and meet with Fafnir."

Sigurd answered, "I will, but first I must avenge my father." The older Sigurd grew, the more he was beloved by all; all people and every child loved him.

Chapter 18

Now Sigurd and Regin rode up the heath tracking where Fafnir was accustomed to creep to drink water. It is said that this precipice was thirty fathoms²⁴ high at the spot where he drank. Then Sigurd said, "You said, Regin, that this dragon

²³ Gram (Wrath) was Sigmund's sword, given to him by Odin who thrust it into the tree, Barnstokk, that grew in the middle of Siggeir's hall, during Signy and Siggeir's wedding feast. Odin proclaims that whoever draws the sword from the tree will receive that gift from him. All the men try to withdraw it, but only Sigmund succeeds. Odin (in disguise) breaks it at Sigmund's last battle when Sigmund attacks him and Hjördis saves the pieces so that it can be reformed for Sigurd.

²⁴ Approximately 180 feet or 55 metres.

was no bigger than a heather-snake, but his tracks appear exceedingly large.”

Regin said, “Dig a pit and sit in it. And when the worm creeps to the water, strike him in the heart and kill him thus. You will earn great fame.”

Sigurd said, “What will happen if I am in the way of the dragon’s blood?”

Regin answered, “No one can counsel you if you are afraid of everything. You are little like your kinsmen in spirit.”

Now Sigurd rode to the heath, and Regin went away, abundantly afraid.

Sigurd dug one pit. While he was working, an old man with a long beard came and asked what he did there. Sigurd told him.

The old man answered him: “That is madness. Dig many pits and let the blood run there, then you sit in there and strike the heart of the worm.”

Then the man vanished away.

Then Sigurd dug the pit just as he had said. And when the worm crept to the water, there was a great earthquake: all the earth’s surface in proximity shook. He snorted poison all over the path as he went forward. Sigurd was not frightened, nor did he dread that din. When the worm crept over the pits, Sigurd struck with his sword under his left shoulder so it sank up to the hilt. Sigurd leapt up out of the pit and pulled the sword back and heaved it so that his entire arm was smeared in blood up to the shoulder.

When the great worm knew he had his death-wound, he loosed his head and his tail so that he burst everything asunder.

So when Fafnir had his death-wound, he spoke: “Who are you, or who is your father, or who are your kin, you who are so daring to bear weapons against me?”

Sigurd answered: “I am unknown to men. I am called the honourable beast,²⁵ and I have no father nor mother, and I have journeyed alone.”

Fafnir answered: “If you have no father nor mother, under what wonder were you born? And though you will not say your name on my death day, truly you are now lying.”

He answered: “I am called Sigurd and my father is Sigmund.”

Fafnir answered: “Who provoked you to this work, and why did you let yourself be egged on? Have you not heard

how all people are afraid of me and my Helm of Terror?²⁶ Sharp-eyed boy, you had a keen father.”

Sigurd answered, “A hardy heart sharpened me for this deed, and a strong hand and keen sword, which you now know and few are hard in old age, who were soft in the days of childhood.”

Fafnir said, “I know that if you had grown up with your kinsmen, you could point with a weapon in anger, but it is more of a wonder that a prisoner abducted in war should have the heart to fight me, for few captives are bold enough to fight.”

Sigurd said: “Will you insult me because I am far from my kinsmen? Though I was captured in war, I was not in fetters, and you have found me free enough.”

Fafnir answered: “You take everything I say as a feud. But my gold that I have owned shall be your bane as well.”

Sigurd answered: “All want to have property until that one day, but we all shall die someday.”

Fafnir said: “You will not heed my counsel, but you will drown if you venture carelessly on the sea, and I bid you remain on land until it is calm.”

Then Sigurd said: “You say that, Fafnir, but if you are so wise, who are the Norns who choose the lot of mothers’ sons?”

Fafnir answered: “There are many and they are scattered; some are the kin of the Æsir; some are elven kin, some are the daughters Dvalin.”

Sigurd said: “What is the name of the island where Surt and the Æsir battle in blood?”²⁷

Fafnir answered: “It is called Óskaptr.”

And then, Fafnir said: “Regin, my brother, has the power of my death, and it makes me laugh that he has the power of your death and all will be as he wills.”

Then said Fafnir: “I bore a Helm of Terror before all people, after I lay on my brother’s inheritance, and I snorted poison all around to keep everyone off and I feared no weap-

²⁵ In this instance, Sigurd—like Odysseus in *The Odyssey*—does not want to reveal his name to his enemy in case it gives Fafnir power over him, so like Odysseus, he essentially says that he is “Nobody.”

²⁶ There is some question over whether the *Ægishjálmr* refers to a physical object or whether, as Morris and Magnusson suggest, it simply refers to the dragon’s terrifying “countenance.” Byock translates this as “Helm of Terror”, a physical and probably magical object, and since Sigurd will later remove this object from Fafnir’s hoard, I prefer to follow Byock.

²⁷ Surt is a fire *jötun*, a giant, who will fight the gods on Rágnarök. This is clearly a reference to that final battle when the gods will be defeated by the giants, but then the world and Asgard will be reborn with the return of Odin and Frigg’s beautiful son Baldr. After that battle, Surt will cover the world with fire.

ons. I never had such a great number of men before me that I did not think myself stronger, and all were afraid of me.”

Sigurd said: “This Helm of Terror of which you speak, gives victory to few, for whomever comes in the company of many will find that no one is the boldest.”

Fafnir answered: “I counsel you, take your horse and ride away as fast as you can, for it often happens that he who has a death-wound can still avenge himself.”

Sigurd said: “I am unable to follow your counsel. I must ride now to your lair and take for myself the great gold hoard of your kinsmen.”

Fafnir answered: “Ride there if you must; you will find great amounts of gold to suffice all your days, but that same gold will be your bane and that of all others who own it.”

Sigurd then stood up and said: “I would ride home and lose this great treasure if I thought I should not die, but all brave men want that treasure until that one day. And you, Fafnir, lie in your death struggle until Hel has you.”

And then Fafnir died.

Chapter 19

After that, Regin came to Sigurd and said: “Hail, my lord, you have won a great victory; you have killed Fafnir where none were as bold before to dare to sit in his path. And that famous feat will live on as long as the world stands.”

Now Regin stood by himself staring at the ground a long while. And after, he said with great emotion: “You have killed my brother, and I am hardly innocent in this work.”

Now Sigurd took his sword, Gram, and dried it on the grass and said to Regin: “You went far when I set about that work. And I proved that keen sword with my hand and my strength against the power of the worm. In the meantime, you lay in a heather bush; and you were not certain of whether it was heaven or earth.”

Regin answered: “This worm might have lain in his lair a long time if you had not enjoyed this sword that I made with my own hand. Neither you nor any other would have performed this deed.”

Sigurd answered: “When men come to fight, a brave heart is better for men than a sharp sword.”

Then said Regin to Sigurd with great anxiety: “You killed my brother, and I am hardly innocent in this work.”

Then Sigurd carved out the heart of the worm with the sword called Ridill. Then Regin drank Fafnir’s blood and said: “Do me a favour, a little thing for you to do: go to the fire with the heart, roast it, and give it to me to eat.”

Sigurd went to roast it on a spit. When it began to froth he took his finger and tested whether the heart was roasted. He burned his finger and put it in his mouth. When the heart-blood of the worm came onto his tongue, he could understand bird-speech. He heard the *igður*²⁸ chirping in the brush beside him:

“There sits Sigurd roasting Fafnir’s heart. He should eat it himself. Then he might be wiser than any man.”

Another said: “There lies Regin, and he will betray the one who trusts him.”

Then said the third: “He should strike off Regin’s head, and he alone would govern that great hoard of gold.”

Then said the fourth: “Sigurd would be very wise if he would follow that counsel and, after, ride to Fafnir’s lair and take that great gold. And after that, ride up to Hindarfjall where Brynhild sleeps, and there he might acquire great wisdom. He would be wise if he followed your counsel and thought of his own needs. I expect a wolf when I see the ears.”

Then said the fifth: “I do not think he is that wise, if he spares Regin when he has killed his brother.”

Then said the sixth: “That would be wise counsel if he killed him and took charge of the treasure.”

Then Sigurd said, “I do not wish for Regin to be my bane. Rather shall both brothers go down one path.”

Now he drew his sword, Gram, and cut off Regin’s head.

After that, he ate some of the worm’s heart and he kept some; he leapt on his horse and rode along Fafnir’s track to his lodgings and found that it was open. All the doors were made of iron, and all the door fasteners and all the beams of the house were iron and it was dug down into the earth. There, Sigurd found an immense store of gold and the sword Hrotta. And he took the Helm of Terror²⁹ and the golden byrnie and many precious things. He found such a great amount of gold that he thought he might not bear it without two horses or three. He now took all the gold and bore it in two great chests to the horse, Grani. The horse would not go, and whipping did not work. Sigurd figured out the horse’s will, and he leapt on his back; his spurs gleamed, and the horse ran as though he were free.

²⁸ It is unclear what kind of bird *igður* refers to. Morris and Magnusson translate it as “woodpeckers” while Byock translates it as “nut-hatches” (66).

²⁹ A physical object in the hoard—so not his countenance.

THE LIFE OF SAINT CHRISTOPHER

Translated by SUSAN M. KIM

Critical Introduction

The fragmentary Old English *Life of Saint Christopher* is bound with four other texts (*Beowulf*, *Judith*, the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, and the *Wonders of the East*) in the late tenth/early eleventh century compilation often called the *Beowulf* Manuscript, or the Nowell Codex, part of the British Library's Cotton Vitellius A.xv. In this text, the saint is called "worst beast" and is described as being twelve cubits tall, clearly suggesting a perception of excess and otherness in his body. Other Anglo-Saxon texts, such as that drawn from *An Old English Martyrology*, detail a perhaps more spectacular feature. The Saint Christopher known to the Anglo-Saxons was not only a giant but also a cynocephalus; that is, in addition to being unnaturally tall, he also had the head of a dog. The three saint's lives reproduced here thus provide readers with the opportunity to consider, in the figure of Christopher, the coincidence of two kinds of extraordinary bodies: the body of the saint and the body of the monster. At the same time, the texts also guide their readers to consider their own embodiment and its relationship to both textuality and salvation, as these narratives' conclusions emphasize the saint's power to heal the wounded body. They encourage the reader to respond to them with an outpouring of tears from his or her own body.

Reading Questions

Perhaps the first question the life of a saint who has the head of a dog might raise is about how the dog's head makes the saint *different* from other saints. Is the difference a difference in kind, or does the coincidence of the saint's body and the monstrous body suggest an exaggeration but an underlying *similarity*?

A second question involves the function of the saint's body and the monstrous body. Both kinds of extraordinary bodies signify: they point to a meaning and power located elsewhere. But both are powerful because they are also available—and wondrous—in themselves. Christopher's prayers in fact emphasize that many miracles of healing will involve contact with any part of his body or any trace of his bodily suffering. How does this *Life* then ask its readers to conceptualize how signifying language might work? Finally, then, how does the *Life* reflect or create a kind of reader, in the "reader with tears" who might approach texts in a new way?

Editorial Notes

The first selection is taken from George Herzfeld's *An Old English Martyrology*, a catalogue of Christian martyrs. We have preserved Herzfeld's translation, only adding paragraph breaks and regularizing the Latinized "Christophorus." The second selection comes from the Anglo-Saxon Nowell Codex. The translation here works with the edition provided by Stanley Rypins (cited below) and preserves rather than "corrects" moments of apparent incoherence in the Old English text, even when these moments are likely the result of eyeskip and other transmission errors. These moments are marked with asterisks in the text. Doubling of near-synonyms are reduced, and modern punctuation and paragraph division has been supplied. The final selection comes from the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Varagine; the translation comes from one of the first English versions, produced by William Caxton in 1453. We have taken liberties to substitute vocabulary ("you" for "thee," etc.) to modernize it for the reader. Syntax remains largely unchanged.

Further Reading

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THE LIFE OF SAINT CHRISTOPHER

Translated by SUSAN M. KIM

Old English Martyrology

April 28. St. Christopher.

On the same day is the martyrdom of St. Christopher, the great martyr. In the days of the emperor Decius,¹ he² came into the town called Samos³ from the nation where men have the head of a dog and from the country where men devour each other. He had the head of a dog, his locks were exceedingly thick, his eyes shone as brightly as the morning-star, and his teeth were as sharp as a boar's tusk. In his heart he believed in God, but he could not speak like a man. When he prayed to God to give him human speech, a man in a white robe stood near him and breathed into his mouth; after that he could speak like a man. The emperor then sent two hundred soldiers to conduct him to him: if he would not come to him, they were to slay him and to bring him his head that he might see what it was like. When the soldiers came to him, they dared not approach him, and yet he set out with them.

As he came to the emperor and he saw his countenance, he was so astonished that he fell from his royal throne. Then the emperor offered him gold and silver in order to seduce him from the belief in Christ. As he would not submit to this, he ordered him to be tormented with various tortures. When he could not thereby overcome him, he ordered him to be led to execution. Then Christopher offered up a prayer to God and asked God not to condemn in their sins any of the people who might have one of his relics, nor that God's anger might come over them, nor that they might have scarcity of wheat or other worldly goods. There came a voice from heaven which said: "It will be just as thou askest; and verily I tell thee: if any man in great distress is mindful of thee, and if he invokes to his help thy worthy name, then I shall help the man in his trouble." After this Christopher ended his martyrdom. A bishop,

¹ The Roman emperor Maximinus II (305–312 CE) was a Dacian from Eastern Europe and one of the more notorious persecutors of Christians. In these stories, he is variously referred to as Decius and Dagnus.

² Christopher.

³ A Greek island. Unlike other versions that place Christopher's homeland far away in the east, this is not nearly as exotic (though it may well have been to Anglo-Saxons).

Petrus by name, bought his body for money and brought it to his town and put it down near a lake from which formerly a flood had gone forth and overturned the town; and since the town was protected from the flood to the glory of God.

Old English Life of St. Christopher

... of my lord Christ the saviour but you, who do not fear the Lord who is the creator of all things, are foolish and unwise."

The king then became angry and ordered that his hands and his feet be bound. He ordered him to be beaten with iron rods and he ordered three men to be set on his head.⁴ Then the warriors who were beating Christopher said to the king, "Dagnus, you would be blessed if you were never born, you who so cruelly order the torture of such a warrior of God." That king then became angry and ordered those men to be killed with Christopher.

The holy Christopher called to the king and said, "If you have greater punishments intended for me, do them quickly. For your tortures are sweeter to me than a honeycomb of honey."

The king then commanded that an iron stool which was twelve cubits long, as tall as that man, be placed in the middle of the town, and he ordered that the holy Christopher be bound there. He ordered that the most immense fire be kindled underneath him, and because he wanted the heat to be even more furious and even more cruel against the holy man, he ordered ten pitchers full of oil to be poured out when the fire was at its hottest.

The holy Christopher then in the middle of the cruelest and the most excessive fire called out to the lord with a clear voice. He said to that king, "I will never fear your punishments or your anger, on my own account. But these torments that you order for me will come upon your nation and will bring

⁴ The Nowell Codex suffered damage from a fire in 1731 and the beginning of this text was lost. It, therefore, picks up mid-narrative. This is one of a few moments of apparent incoherence in the Old English text that are preserved here rather than "corrected."

about your destruction." When the saint said this, from in the middle of the fire, the iron stool melted like wax imprinted against him.

Dagnus the king saw the holy Christopher standing in the middle of the fire, and he saw that his face was like just like the bloom of a rose. When he saw that, he was astonished at that great courage and was so terrified that he fell on the earth and lay there from the first hour of the day until the ninth. When the holy Christopher saw that, he ordered him to arise. Dagnus, when he rose, said to him, "You, worst beast, how long do you presume to lead the people away from me and to keep them from offering sacrifice to my gods?"

The holy Christopher answered him, "Now already a great many folk believe through me in my lord Christ the saviour. And so will you yourself."

The king then answered him mockingly, "Do you expect that you can deceive me so that I will worship your god and forsake mine? Know then that tomorrow at this same time I will avenge the insult. I will cause you to be abandoned. I will blot out your name from this life and from memory, and you will be an example for all those who through you believed in your god."

The next day the king ordered the holy Christopher to be led to him and said to him, "Understand my words. Worship my gods so that you do not perish in the many torments that are prepared for you."

The saint answered him, "I will always loathe your gods and do injury to them because I hold inviolate the faith which I received in baptism."

The king then ordered that a tree of immense size, as tall as that holy man, be set before that hall, and he ordered him to be fastened there. He ordered three warriors to shoot him with their arrows until he was killed. The warriors shot him from the first hour of the day until evening. The king thought that all the arrows would be stuck his body. But not even one had touched his body, for the power of God was suspended in the wind at the holy man's right side. And then after the setting of the sun the king sent for those warriors and ordered them to keep him carefully bound because he expected that the Christian people would wish to free him the next day.

Then the king went out to the holy Christopher and said to him, "Where is your god? Why didn't he come and deliver you from my hands and from these terrible arrows?" As soon as he said these words two barbs from those arrows flew into the king's eyes, and he was blinded.

When the holy Christopher saw that, he said to him, "Cruel and foolish one, know that tomorrow at the eighth hour of

the day I will receive my victory. The Lord himself has shown me that Christian men will come and take hold of my body and set it in a place which the Lord has shown to them. Come then to my body and take up the loam of the earth on which I was martyred. Mix it with my blood, and put it on your eyes. Then, if you believe in God with all your heart, at that time you will be healed from the blindness of your eyes. Know that the time approaches when Christopher, God's chosen one, will receive the reward for his struggles and, quickened, will travel to the Lord."

On the next day, before he was killed by the warriors, with these words he began to pray, "Almighty God, you who turned me from error and taught me good wisdom, I, your servant, now pray to you that in whatever place any part of my body might be there will not be poverty or the terror of fire, and if any unwell men are nearby, and they come to your holy temple and there pray to you with all their hearts and for the sake of your name they call out my name, heal them from whatever illness hinders them."

And at that same time a voice was heard saying, "Christopher, my servant, your prayer is heard. Although your body might not be in that place, whatever devout men call your name in their prayers will be healed from their sins and whatever they rightly ask for they will receive, for the sake of your name and for your merit."

When this glorious speech was heard from the heavens, Christopher was quickly killed by the warriors, and he travelled in the greatest bliss and in unspeakable glory to Christ. And to the people whom the holy Christopher through his teaching gained for God, who numbered eight and four thousand men and a hundred and fifteen, that was a wonder.

On another day the king said to his thanes, "Let us go and see where the warriors have placed him." And when they came to that place where the holy body was, the king called out with a great voice, "Christopher, show me now the truthfulness of your god and I will believe in him," and he took a piece of that earth that the martyr of Christ suffered on and a little of the blood and mixed them together. He set them on his eyes and said, "I do this in the name of the god of Christopher." And at that same time, suddenly his eyes were opened and he received sight.

He called out with a great voice before all the people, "Glorious and great is the God of Christian men, the God of glorious work no human skills can conquer. From this day forth I send my command throughout all my kingdom that no man under my authority will dare in any way to act against the will of the heavenly God whom Christopher served. If any

man is deceived through the cunning of the devil so that he dares to do so, he will be punished with the sword. I now truly know that no earthly or perishable power exists at all outside of his alone.”

And so it was come about through God’s might and through the merit of the blessed Christopher that the king, who had once been full of the devil’s will, believed.

All the glorious works of the blessed Christopher are too long to recount now, those which the Lord worked through him for the praise of his name—and to this day still works: now the saint’s prayers blossom and grow and there is obedience to the Lord with peace and joy for all, and Christ is adored, the son of the living God, who rules with the father and with the son⁵ and with the holy ghost ever without end.

The holy Christopher from the last time before he sent forth his ghost also prayed, “Lord, my God, give a good reward to him who writes my suffering and the eternal reward to him who reads it with tears.”

Golden Legend

Christopher, before his baptism, was named *Reprobus*,⁶ but afterwards he was named Christopher, which is as much to say “bearing Christ,” as he bore Christ in four manners. He bore him on his shoulders by conveying and leading, in his body by making it lean, in mind by devotion, and in his mouth by confession and predication.

Christopher was of the lineage of the Canaanites,⁷ and he was of a great stature, and had a terrible and fearful temper and countenance. And he was twelve cubits of length,⁸ and as it is read in some histories that, when he served and dwelled with the king of Canaan, it came in his mind that he would seek the greatest prince that was in the world, and him would he serve and obey. And so far he went that he came to a right great king, of whom the renown generally was that he was the greatest of the world. And when the king saw him, he received him into his service and made him to dwell in his court.

⁵ This seems to be duplicative, but is preserved as it stands in the original text.

⁶ An unobtrusive reminder of Christopher’s life before conversion. In Latin, the term means “false” and is the root of the English “reprobate.”

⁷ Canaanites were the original inhabitants of the Promised Land; they fought against—and were exterminated by—the ancient Israelites. Since Christopher’s story obviously takes place after these events, we might best understand the term as a slightly derogatory term for someone from the East.

⁸ About eighteen feet or five and a half metres.

Upon a time, a minstrel sang before him a song in which he named the devil, and the king, who was a Christian man, when he heard him name the devil, immediately made the sign of the cross in his visage. And when Christopher saw that, he had great marvel what sign it was, and why the king made it, and he demanded an answer of him. And because the king would not say, he said: “If you tell me not, I shall no longer dwell with you,” and then the king told to him, saying: “Always when I hear the devil named, I fear that he should have power over me, and I garnish myself with this sign that he grieve nor trouble me.” Then Christopher said to him: “You fear the devil, lest he hurt you? Then is the devil mightier and greater than you are. I am then deceived of my hope and purpose, for I had supposed I had found the most mighty and the greatest Lord of the world, but I commend you to God, for I will go seek him to be my Lord, and I his servant.” And then departed from this king, and hastened him for to seek the devil.

And as he went by a great desert, he saw a great company of knights; out of them, a knight cruel and horrible came to him and demanded where he went, and Christopher answered him and said: “I seek the devil to be my master.” And he said: “I am he whom you seek.” And then Christopher was glad, and bound himself to be his servant perpetual, and took him for his master and Lord. And as they went together by a common way, they found there a cross, erect and standing. And as soon as the devil saw the cross he was afraid and fled, and left the right way, and brought Christopher about by a sharp desert. And after, when they were past the cross, he brought him to the highway that they had left. And when Christopher saw that, he marvelled, and demanded why he feared, and had left the high and fair way, and had gone so far about by so desolate a desert. And the devil would not tell him. Then Christopher said to him: “If you will not tell me, I shall immediately depart from you and shall serve you no more.” Because of this, the devil was constrained to tell him, and said: “There was a man called Christ who was hung on the cross, and when I see his sign I am sore afraid and flee from it wherever I see it.” To which Christopher said: “Then he is greater and mightier than you, when you are afraid of his sign, and I see well that I have laboured in vain, when I have not found the greatest Lord of the world. And I will serve you no longer; go your way then, for I will go seek Christ.”

And when he had long sought and demanded where he should find Christ, at last he came into a great desert, to a hermit who dwelt there, and this hermit preached to him of Jesus Christ and informed him in the faith diligently, and said

to him: "This king whom you desire to serve, requires the service that you must often fast." And Christopher said to him: "Require of me some other thing, and I shall do it, for that which you require I may not do." And the hermit said: "You must then wake and make many prayers." And Christopher said to him: "I know not what it is; I may do no such thing." And then the hermit said to him: "Do you know such a river, in which many perish and are lost?" To which Christopher said: "I know it well." Then said the hermit, "Because you are noble and high of stature and strong in your limbs, you will reside by that river, and you will bear over all them that pass there, which will be a thing pleasing to our Lord Jesus Christ whom you desire to serve, and I hope he will show himself to you." Then said Christopher: "Certainly, this service may I well do, and I promise him to do it."

Then went Christopher to this river, and made there an abode for himself, and bore a great pole in his hand instead of a staff, by which he sustained him in the water, and bore over all manner of people without ceasing. And there he lived, thus doing, many days. And in a time, as he slept in his lodge, he heard the voice of a child which called him and said: "Christopher, come out and bear me over. Then he awoke and went out, but he found no man. And when he was again in his house, he heard the same voice, and he ran out and found nobody. The third time he was called and came to it, and found a child beside the shore of the river, which asked him kindly to bear him over the water. And then Christopher lifted up the child on his shoulders, and took his staff, and entered into the river to cross. And the water of the river arose and swelled more and more; and the child was heavy as lead, and always as he went farther the water increased and grew more, and the child more and more waxed heavy, so much that Christopher had great anguish and was afraid to be drowned. And when he escaped with great pain, and passed the water, and set the child aground, he said to the child: "Child, you have put me in great peril; you weigh almost as if I had all the world upon me; I might bear no greater burden." And the child answered: "Christopher, marvel at nothing, for you have not only borne all the world upon yourself, but you have borne him that created and made all the world, upon thy shoulders. I am Jesus Christ the king, whom you serve in this work. And because you know that I say to be the truth, set your staff in the earth by your house, and you will see tomorrow morning that it will bear flowers and fruit, and immediately he vanished from his eyes. And then Christopher set his staff in the earth, and when he arose on the morning, he found his staff like a palm plant bearing flowers, leaves and dates.

And then Christopher went into the city of Lycia⁹ and did not understand their language. Then he prayed our Lord that he might understand them, and so he did. And as he was in this prayer, the judges supposed that he had been a fool, and left him there. And then when Christopher understood the language, he covered his visage and went to the place where they martyred Christian men, and comforted them in our Lord. And then the judges smote him in the face, and Christopher said to them: "If I were not Christian I should avenge my injury. And then Christopher pitched his rod in the earth and prayed to our Lord that to convert the people it might bear flowers and fruit, and immediately it did so. And then he converted eight thousand men.

And then the king sent two knights to bring him to the king, and they found him praying, and dared not tell him so. And soon after, the king sent as many more, and they immediately sat down to pray with him. And when Christopher arose, he said to them: "What do you seek?" And when they saw his face, they said to him: "The king has sent us, that we should lead you bound to him." And Christopher said to them: "If I wished it, you should not lead me to him, bound or unbound." And they said to him: "If you will go your way, go off, wherever you wish. And we shall say to the king that we have not found you." "It shall not be so," said he, "but I shall go with you."

And then he converted them in the faith, and commanded them that they bind his hands behind his back and lead him so bound to the king. And when the king saw him he was afraid and fell down off the throne, and his servants lifted him up and revived him again. And then the king inquired his name and his country; and Christopher said to him: "Before I was baptized I was named Repobus, and after, I am Christopher; before baptism, a Canaanite, now, a Christian man." To which the king said: "You have a foolish name, that is, since Christ was crucified, which he could not help himself, he may not help you. How therefore, you cursed Canaanite! Why will you not sacrifice to our gods?" To which Christopher said: "You are rightfully called Dagnus, for you are the death of the world, and fellow of the devil, and your gods are made by the hands of men." And the king said to him: "You were nourished among wild beasts, and therefore you may say nothing but wild language, and words unknown to men. And if you will now sacrifice to the gods, I shall give to you great gifts and great honours, and if not, I shall destroy you and consume you with great pains and torments." But, for all this, he would

⁹ A city in the Anatolian region; over the centuries it was variously under the sway of the Greeks, Persians, Romans, and Ottomans.

in no way do sacrifice, wherefore he was sent to prison, and the king beheaded the other knights whom he had sent for him, whom he had converted.

And after this he sent to the prison to St. Christopher two fair women, of whom one was named Nicæa and the other Aquilina, and promised to them many great gifts if they could draw Christopher to sin with them. And when Christopher saw that, he set himself down in prayer, and when he was constrained by them that embraced him to move, he arose and said: "What do you seek? For what cause have you come here?" And they, who were afraid of his temper and the clearness of his visage, said: "Holy saint of God, have pity on us so that we may believe in the God that you preach." And when the king heard that, he commanded that they should be let out and brought before him. To whom he said: "You are deceived, but I swear to you by my gods that, if you do no sacrifice to my gods, you will immediately perish by evil death." And they said to him: "If you desire that we shall sacrifice, command that the places may be made clean, and that all the people may assemble at the temple." And when this was done, they entered the temple, and took their girdles, and put them about the necks of their gods, and drew them to the earth, and broke them all to pieces, and said to those who were there: "Go and call physicians and leeches to heal your gods." And then, by the commandment of the king, Aquilina was hanged, and a great and heavy stone was hanged at her feet so that her limbs were piteously broken. And when she was dead, and passed to our Lord, her sister Nicæa was cast into a great fire, but she issued out without harm all whole, and then he made to smite off her head, and so she suffered death.

After this, Christopher was brought before the king, and the king commanded that he should be beaten with rods of iron, and that there should be set upon his head a cross of iron, red hot and burning, and then after, he made a seat or stool of iron, and bound Christopher to it, and after, set fire under it, and cast in pitch. But the seat or settle melted like wax, and Christopher issued out without any harm or hurt. And when the king saw that, he commanded that he be bound to a strong stake and that he should be shot through with arrows by forty archers. But none of the knights might hit him, for the arrows hung in the air about, near him, without touching. Then the king thought that he had been shot through with the arrows of the knights, and made ready to go to him. And one of the arrows returned suddenly from the air and smote him in the eye, and blinded him. To whom Christopher said: "Tyrant, I shall die tomorrow morning: make a little clay, with my blood tempered, and anoint your eye with it, and you

will receive health." Then by the commandment of the king he was led to be beheaded, and then, he made his orison,¹⁰ and his head was smitten off, and so he suffered martyrdom. And the king then took a little of his blood and laid it on his eye, and said: "In the name of God and of St. Christopher!" and was immediately healed. Then the king believed in God and gave the commandment that if any person blamed God or St. Christopher, he should immediately be slain with the sword.

Ambrose says in his preface thus, of this holy martyr: "Lord, you have given to Christopher so great plenty of virtues, and such grace of doctrine, that he called from the error of paganism forty-eight thousand men, to the honour of the Christian faith, by his shining miracles. And Nicæa and Aquilina, who long had been common at the brothel, under the stench of lechery, he called and made them serve in the habit of chastity, and recruited them to take a crown of martyrdom. And with this, he being strained and bound in a seat of iron, and great fire put under, was unperturbed by the heat. And all a whole day during, stood bound to a stake, yet he might not be pierced with the arrows of all the knights. And with that, one of the arrows smote out the eye of the tyrant, for whom the blood of the holy martyr re-established his sight, and enlightened him in taking away the blindness of his body, and adopted the Christian mind and pardon, and he also received of you by prayer the power to put away sickness and sores from those who remember his passion and figure."

Then let us pray to St. Christopher that he pray for us, etc.

¹⁰ "orisons": prayers

ILLUMINATION OF SAINT CHRISTOPHER

Critical Introduction

In the most popular accounts of *The Life of Saint Christopher*, such as the Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, Christopher is a giant of great strength. He seeks to pledge himself to the strongest leader he can, first starting with a tyrannical king he rejects because the king fears the devil. He then tries to follow the devil, but rejects him because the devil fears a cross. A hermit convinces him to follow Christ and baptizes him. A giant saint is an interesting mix of the monstrous and the holy, but a few versions of the story add another monstrous element, giving Christopher a dog's head and thereby turning him into a cynocephalus, one of the most fearsome creatures of the *Wonders of the East*. There are only a few illustrations of Christopher that include his dog's head. One of the most dramatic is found in a German martyrology—a manuscript that contains a series of stories about Christian martyrs and saints, arranged by the order of their feast days. In this image, Christopher is absolutely massive, towering over the many-tiered fantasy architecture of a city. People that would fit in his palm of his hand gaze upon him in wonder, though not in apparent fear. The image is somewhat playful, with Christopher's feet poking out through two city gates. He faces us directly, staring out at us. His face is perhaps as leonine as canine, but in either case, his expression is friendly. This monster is, after all, a saint, as indicated by his halo, as well as his presence in this catalogue of martyrs.

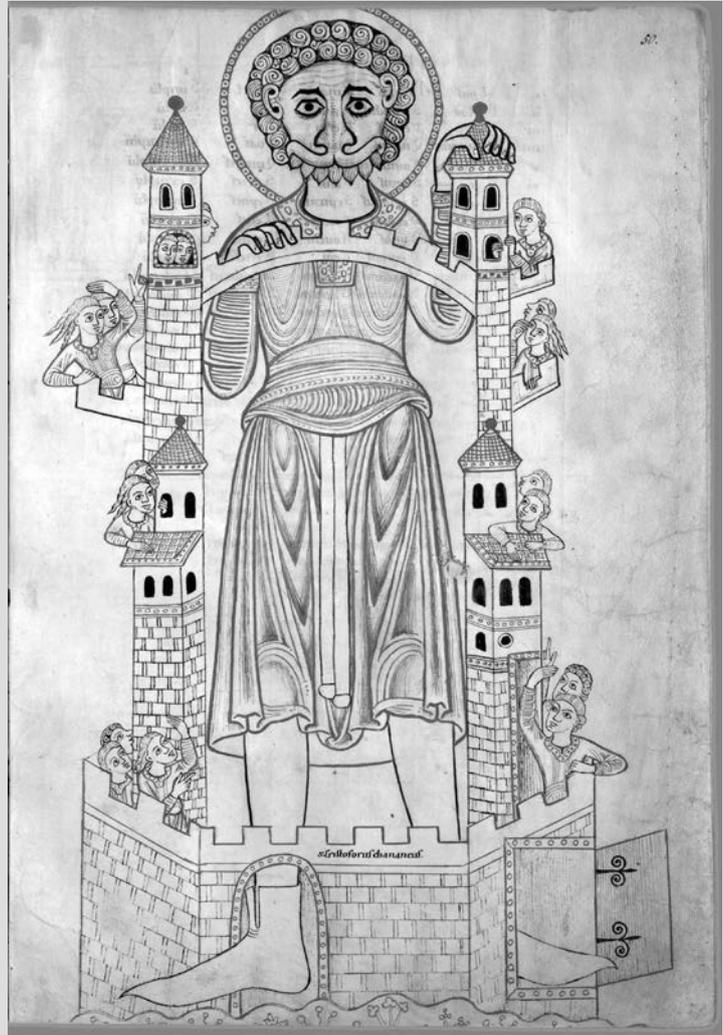


Figure 4. Illumination of Saint Christopher,
Germany, twelfth century, 31cm. Württembergische
Landesbibliothek, Hist. fol. (1). 415, 50r

Viewing Questions

How has the artist worked to present this figure as *both* saint *and* monster? How has the artist suggested that Christopher is different from but still connected with the people of his city?

ASM

THE ALLITERATIVE MORTE ARTHURE — Selections

Translated by RENÉE WARD

Critical Introduction

The 4,346 line poem known as the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* survives in only one copy: Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript 91, which is typically referred to as the Thornton Lincoln manuscript after its compiler, Robert Thornton. Although Thornton prepared his collection around 1440, the tale itself dates to the late fourteenth century. Given the dates of its composition and compilation—both of which fall during a period of war with France and intense socio-political upheaval for Britain—it is no surprise that the text demonstrates a specific interest in imperial matters, especially through its use of the crusading motif to recount the conflict between Arthur and Lucius, the Emperor of Rome, to whom Arthur refuses to pay tribute. Both rulers are expansionist and headstrong (their opposition, highlighted particularly through the themes of race and religion, results in continental warfare), and the poem overall offers brutally realistic and detailed descriptions of battle and its aftermath, paying particular attention to bodily injury. Amidst these descriptions, the poet scatters dangerous and monstrous beings, from bears and dragons within dream sequences to giants amassed on the battlefield. These monsters typically reflect back upon the individuals and communities with which they are associated, thus engaging in complex cultural work. Perhaps the most famous sequence of the poem is the one excerpted here: Arthur's battle against the giant of Mont-Saint-Michel. Arthur's defeat of the giant is the pinnacle expression of his martial skill, identifying him as an experienced campaigner and just Christian king. It also highlights the negative impact of war and gestures towards the problems surrounding the brute force employed as much by Arthur as the giant. Despite temporal distance, the text's concern over Eastern and non-Christian others speaks to twenty-first-century concerns.

Reading Questions

Examine how the narrator and the characters describe the physical attributes and behaviours of the giant. What qualities render him monstrous? Why? Consider also how the narrative connects the giant to his surroundings, especially the natural world, as well as how he operates as the antithesis of the kingdoms he harries. What do these relationships suggest? What can we learn about Arthur's identity and status from his battle against the giant, or from his relationships with and treatment of his own people, from the civilians to the warriors?

Editorial Notes

The *Morte Arthure* participates in the alliterative revival of the mid- to late-fourteenth century and employs a line structure similar to that of Old English poetry: two half lines linked by alliteration, with the alliteration typically falling upon stressed syllables. Difficulty thus arises in the practice of translation, as poetic value frequently conflicts with grammatical correctness, and the modern English equivalents do not often provide alliterative patterns equal to those of the Middle English. This translation seeks a balanced approach, but, at times, makes sacrifices in either direction. The excerpt draws upon both Mary Hamel's and Larry D. Benson's editions, following Hamel primarily for original text, and Benson for punctuation and variations. Where material has been omitted, a short synopsis in italics serves to orient the reader.

Further Reading

- Beal, Rebecca S. "Arthur as the Bringer of Civilization: The Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, ll. 901–19." *Arthuriana* 5.4 (1995): 33–44.
- Benson, Larry D. and rev. Edward E. Foster, eds. *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthure and Alliterative Morte Arthure*. TEAMS: Middle English Texts Series. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994.
- Hamel, Mary. *Morte Arthure: A Critical Edition*. New York: Garland, 1984.
- Matthews, William. *The Tragedy of Arthur*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960.

THE ALLITERATIVE MORTE ARTHURE

Selections

Translated by RENÉE WARD

After numerous martial conquests, Arthur and his court celebrate Christmas at Carlisle, but are interrupted on New Year's Day when a messenger arrives from Lucius, emperor of Rome, demanding that the king pay tribute. Arthur refuses. Instead, he mobilizes his troops against the emperor and, entrusting his kingdom to his nephew Mordred, he sails to Normandy. En route, Arthur has a prophetic dream in which a dragon defeats a bear, and once he arrives on the continent, he discovers that the kingdom is besieged by a cannibalistic giant, whom he decides to seek out.

By the time they had taken the land and erected tents 840
Came a Templar¹ quickly and drew near to the king;
"There is a tyrant nearby that torments your people,
A great giant of Genoa,² begotten by demons;
He has feasted on folk more than five hundred,
And as many infants of free-born³ children.
This has been his sustenance through these seven winters,
And yet is that sot⁴ not sad, so much he enjoys it!
In the country of Constantine⁵ no family has he left
Without siege towers, enclosed within the walls,
That he has not fully destroyed all the male children, 850
And carried them to the crag and wholly devoured.
The Duchess of Brittany today he has taken,
Besides Rennes⁶ as she rode with her noble knights,
Led her to the mountain there that loathsome lout
To lie with that lady ever while her life lasts.
We followed from afar more than five hundred
Of soldiers and of freemen and young noblemen,

But he covered⁷ the crag; she cried so loud
The care of that creature recover shall I never.
She was the flower of all France or of five realms, 860
And one of the fairest that formed was ever,
The most gentle jewel judged by lords
From Genoa to Gironne⁸ by Jesus in Heaven!
She was your wife's cousin, if it pleases you to know,
Born of the noblest that rule the earth;
As you are the righteous king, take pity on your people
And try to avenge those that are thus injured!"

"Alas," said Sir Arthur, "so long have I lived!
Had I known of this, well would I have accomplished it.
I am not lucky but am unfortunate of fate 870
That thus this fair lady this fiend has destroyed!
I would rather than all of France this fifteen winter
I had been from that villain a furlong away⁹
When he that lady had seized and led to the mountains;
I would have lost my life before she had suffered harm.
But would you show me on which peak that fierce one resides,
I would go to that coast and speak with him,
To treat with that tyrant for treasure of lands
And make a truce for a time until it may be better."

"Sir, see you over there the headland with those two fires? 880
There lurks that devil, endeavour when you like,
Upon the crest of the crag by a cold spring
That encloses the cliff with the clear streams;
There you may find bodies dead without number,
More florins,¹⁰ in faith, than there are in France,
And more treasure untruly that traitor has amassed
Than in Troy was, as I tell truly, that time that it was won."

Then roars the noble king for pity of the people,
Rushes right to a tent and rests no longer;
He writhes, he wrestles, he wrings his hands; 890
There was no one of his world that knew what he meant.

¹ A religious military order created in the early twelfth century for the protection of pilgrims and sacred sites, and closely connected to the Crusades.

² A coastal town in northwest Italy.

³ Typically someone born outside of the system of indenture. In the later Middle Ages this could include higher ranking members of the third estate (all those outside of the nobility and clergy, which are the second and first estates), especially as monetary economies supplanted feudal relations and social mobility increased.

⁴ "Sot" is a derogatory term, often used in place of "wretch, rascal, villain." See *Middle English Dictionary (MED)*, "sot" n. 1.b.

⁵ A peninsula in France, in the northwestern region of Normandy.

⁶ The capital of Brittany, a northwestern coastal region of France.

⁷ "covered": traversed, reached the summit.

⁸ A city in northeastern Spain in the Catalonia region.

⁹ A furlong constitutes "the eighth part of an English mile," or approximately 660 feet (201 metres). See *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, "furlong" n.

¹⁰ A florin was a type of coin identified by the emblem of a lily stamped upon it.

He called Sir Kay that of the cup served
 And Sir Bedivere¹¹ the bold that bore his noble blade:
 "Look you by the end of Even-Song¹² to be fully armed
 On horses by the nearby thicket, by the nearby gentle stream,
 For I will pass in pilgrimage privately thereafter,
 At supper-time, when lords are being served,
 For to seek a saint by that salt stream,
 In Saint Michel Mount, where miracles are revealed."¹³

After Evensong Sir Arthur himself 900
 Went to his wardrobe and wrenched off his clothes
 Armed himself in a quilted jacket with richly embroidered trim;
 Over that, a cloth tunic of Acres¹⁴ overtop;
 Over that a jacket of elegant mail,
 A tunic of Jerodine¹⁵ slashed in strips;
 He pulls on a helmet of burnished silver
 The best that was in Basel,¹⁶ with borders rich;
 The crest and the circlet enclosed so fair
 With clasps of clear gold, set with gems;
 The visor, the aventail,¹⁷ furnished so beautifully, 910
 Opening without flaw, with windows of silver;
 His gloves brightly gilt¹⁸ and engraved around the hems
 With gems and goblets,¹⁹ glorious of colour.
 He straps on a broad shield and he asks for his blade,
 Summons to him a brown steed and on the grass waits;

11 The names here are regularized from "sir Cayous" and "sir Bedvere" to the more recognizable modern cognates. Both knights are common in variants of Arthurian myth: Kay usually has a familial relationship with Arthur (foster-brother) and is known for his unwavering loyalty; Bedivere often appears at Arthur's death, and is typically tasked with throwing Arthur's sword Excalibur into a nearby lake.

12 The evening prayer, beginning at sunset and running until mid-evening.

13 Mont-Saint-Michel lies off the northwestern coast of Normandy, and was, by the time of this poem's creation, a well-established site of pilgrimage.

14 A city in the Middle East and a site of military siege and conflict especially during the First Crusade. The mention of the city associates Arthur himself with intense military campaigns.

15 A type of cloth, perhaps linked to a region based on the capitalization of the word and following the pattern established with Acre.

16 A city in northwest Switzerland, along the Rhine River.

17 An "aventail" typically refers to the piece of chain mail that connects to the lower part of the helmet, covering the neck and the upper chest.

18 "gilt": decorated with gold.

19 The hems are engraved with gems and ornamental images of goblets (embroidered gold chalices, for instance).

He leaps into his stirrup and mounts the horse,
 Works him skilfully and stirs him well,²⁰
 Spurs the bay steed and to the thicket rides,
 And there his knights him awaited properly arrayed.

Then they rode by that river that ran so swiftly, 920
 There the trees overreach with majestic branches;
 There the doe and the deer recklessly run,
 In bushes and roses to amuse themselves;
 The forests were flourishing with many types of flowers,
 With falcons and pheasants of marvellous hues;
 All the fowl there flashes that flies with wings,
 For there called the cuckoo on copses very loud;
 With all kinds of mirth they make themselves merry;
 Of the nightingale notes the noise was sweet;
 They competed with the thrushes three hundred at once! 930
 That swift sound of water and singing of birds,
 It might save him of wound that never was sound!²¹

Then dismount this folk lightly to the ground,
 Fastening their fair steeds at a distance from each other;
 And then the king sternly commanded his knights
 To wait with their horses and travel no further;
 "For I will seek this saint by myself alone
 And speak with this master man that this mount rules,²²
 And then shall you make offerings, one after the other
 Respectfully at Saint Michel, full mighty with Christ." 940

The king covers the crag with steep cliffs,
 To the crest of the cliff he climbs up high,
 Casts up his visor and sharply he looks,
 Caught of the cold wind²³ to comfort himself.
 Two fires he finds flaming full high;
 The fourth of a furlong between them he walks;
 The way by the sea streams he wandered himself
 To know of the warlock, where that he dwells.
 He walks to the first fire and even there he finds
 A weary woeful widow wringing her hands, 950
 And grieving with grisly tears on a grave,
 Newly marked on the earth, since midday it seemed.
 He greets that sorrowful woman with seemly words
 And asks after the demon quickly thereafter.

20 Arthur is warming up his horse, establishing the rider-horse relationship necessary for action.

21 "It might save him of wound that never was sound!": it might heal him who never was healthy.

22 Arthur says he will seek out the head of the religious community atop Mont-Saint-Michel as part of his (feigned) pilgrimage.

23 Arthur pauses to catch his breath before he continues, and then surveys his surroundings.

Then this woeful wife sorrowfully him greets,
 Got up upon her knees, and claps her hands,
 Saying, "Careful, man, you speak too loud!
 If that warlock knows, he will attack us all!
 Accursed be the man ever that stole your wit from you,
 That makes you to wander here in these wild lakes! 960
 I warn you, for worship,²⁴ you seek after sorrow!
 Where travel you, man? Ill-fated you seem!
 Knowest you how to beat him with your noble sword?
 Were you fiercer than either Wade or Wawain,²⁵
 You would win no honour, I warned you before.
 You crossed yourself uncertainly to summit these mounts;
 Six such as you would be too feeble to battle with him alone,
 For when you see him with your eyes, you will lose heart
 To cross yourself securely, so huge he seems.
 You are free and fair and in your first flush of youth, 970
 But you are ill-fated, by my faith, and that grieves me!
 Were there fifty such as you on a field or on a fair earth,
 The fiend would with his fist fell you at once.
 Lo! Here the duchess dear— today was she taken—
 Deep buried and dead, buried in the earth.
 He has murdered this mild woman by midday were rung.²⁶
 Without mercy on earth, I know not what it means;
 He has forced and defiled her and she is left dead;
 He slew her roughly and slit her to the navel.²⁷
 And here I have embalmed her and buried thereafter. 980
 For sorrow of the helpless, glad be I never!
 Of all the friends she had there followed none after
 But I, her foster mother, of fifteen winters.
 To hasten off this headland try shall I never,
 But here be found on field until I be fated to die."

Then answers Sir Arthur to that old woman:
 "I am come from the conqueror, courteous and gentle,
 As one of the worthiest of Arthur's knights,
 Messenger to this foul creature, for the vindication of the people
 To deal with this monstrous man that here this mount rules, 990
 To treat with this tyrant for treasure of lands
 And make a truce for a time, until it may be better."²⁸

"Aye, but your words are wasted," said this wife then,
 "For he sets little store in both lands and lives;
 Of neither rents nor riches he never has need,
 For he will live outside the law, as he thinks fit,
 Without license and leave, as lord is his own.
 But he has a coat on, cut especially for him,
 That was spun in Spain by special maidens
 And then sewn in Greece²⁹ readily together; 1000
 It is covered all with hair, fully all over
 And bordered with beards of noble kings,
 Curled and combed that men may know
 Each king by his colour, in the country he dwells.
 Here the tribute he seizes of fifteen realms,
 For each Easter Eve, however that it falls,
 They send it to him truly for the sake of the people,
 Without fail at the season with certain knights.³⁰
 And he has asked for Arthur's beard all these seven winters;
 Therefore he dwells here to outrage these people 1010
 Until the Britons' king has shaved his lips
 And sent his beard to that bold one with his best men;
 Unless you have brought that beard proceed you no further,
 For it is no relief from sorrow if you offer anything else,
 For he has more treasure to take when he likes
 Than ever had Arthur or any of his elders.
 If you have brought the beard he might be more glad
 Than if you gave him Burgundy³¹ or Great Britain;
 But look now, for charity, you chasten your lips
 That from you no words escape, whatever happens. 1020
 See that your offering be at hand and press him but little,
 For he is at his supper; he will easily be angered.
 And you my counsel take, you take off your clothes
 And kneel in your kirtle³² and call him your lord.
 He sups all this season on seven male children,
 Chopped up in a platter of chalk-white silver,
 With pickle and powder of precious spices,
 And spiced wine full plenty of Portuguese wines;
 Three sorrowful noblewomen his spits they turn,
 That bide his bedtime, his bidding to work,³³ 1030

²⁴ The warning suggests that Arthur's desire for fame or glory (one of the reasons knights undertake quests or adventures) will result in sorrow.

²⁵ Wade is a god in Germanic mythology. Wawain is a cognate for Gawain. For purposes of alliteration, his name has not been regularized.

²⁶ "by midday were rung": by the time the midday bells were rung.

²⁷ The imagery here is unsettling: the giant rapes the maiden so forcefully that he splits her body apart.

²⁸ Until a better time arises, perhaps suggesting that Arthur will bide his time before combat, which is ultimately untrue.

²⁹ Greece and Spain were associated with the exoticized and/or othered "east" during the medieval period, especially Spain, which was heavily influenced by Islamic culture.

³⁰ Each year the kings of fifteen realms pay a tribute to the giant by shaving their beards and sending them to him.

³¹ A duchy in eastern-central France, which, until annexed in the late medieval period, had considerable independent political power.

³² "kirtle": a tunic or outer garment.

³³ The overtones of this line are that while the women prepare his bed they also tend his needs once he is in bed.

Such four should be dead within four hours³⁴
 Before his sin were satisfied by what his flesh desires.”

“Yes, I have brought the beard,” he said, “the better me likes;³⁵
 From here will I continue and bear it myself
 But, dear, would you tell me where that devil dwells?
 I shall commend you, if I live, Our Lord so help me!”

“Hasten fast to the fire,” she said, “that flames so high;
 There that fiend fills himself, test him when you like.
 But you must seek more south, sidling a little,
 For he will catch the scent himself within six miles.”³⁶ 1040

To the south of the smoke he sought by the shortest route,
 Crossed himself with certainty, with certain words,
 And to one side of the man the sight he had reached
 How unseemly that sot sat glutting himself!
 He lay stretched out, lodging unpleasantly,³⁷
 The thigh of a man’s body lifted up by the haunch;
 His back and his buttocks and his broad loins
 He bakes at the bale-fire and without breeches he seemed;³⁸
 There were barbarous roasts and wretched meats,
 Men and beasts skewered together, 1050
 A vat crammed full of Christened children,
 Some as roasts spitted and noble maidens turned them.

And then this noble king, because of his people,
 His heart bleeds for sorrow on the field where he stands;
 Then he straps on his shield, hesitates no longer,
 Brandishes his broad sword by the bright hilt,
 Rushes toward that man directly with a fierce will
 And loudly hails that hulk with haughty words:
 “Now, Almighty God that we all worship
 Give you sorrow and grief, sot, there where you lay, 1060
 For the foulest creature that ever was formed!
 Foully you feed yourself! The Devil have your soul!
 Here is unclean cuisine, churl, by my truth,
 Worthless of creatures all, you cursed wretch!

³⁴ The numbers seem odd here, as the previous lines reference three, not four women. Perhaps it is a conscious scribal error, one that serves alliteration.

³⁵ “the better me likes”: as it suits me. The irony here, of course, is that Arthur is himself present, and thus so is his beard.

³⁶ The old woman advises Arthur to skirt the edges of the giant’s camp so that the giant will not detect his scent. She therefore renders the giant animalistic and predatory.

³⁷ Mary Hamel suggests that the use of “lodging” contributes to the animalization of the giant given the word’s associations with a buck “safe in its lair.” See Hamel, 292, n.1045.

³⁸ The giant’s lack of clothing or nudity is a sign of uncivilized nature.

Because you have killed these Christened children,
 You have martyrs made and brought out of life
 That here are roasted in the field and dismembered with your hands,
 I shall serve you your reward as you have much served,
 Through the might of Saint Michel that this mount rules!
 And for this fair lady that you have left dead 1070
 And thus forced on the ground for your sinful desires,
 Prepare you now, dog-son; the devil have your soul!
 For you shall die this day through dint of my hands!”

Then the glutton filled with dread and glowered unseemly;
 He grinned as a greyhound with grisly tusks;
 He gaped, he groaned fast with grudging countenance
 For grief of the good king that him with anger greeted.
 His hair and his brow were tangled together
 And out of his face foam a half foot long;³⁹
 His front and his forehead, all was it over 1080
 As the skin of a frog and spotted it seemed;
 Hook-nosed as a hawk, and a hoary beard,
 And hair to the eye-holes with hanging brows;⁴⁰
 Harsh as a hound-fish, fiercely as it looks,
 So was the hide of that hulk wholly all over;
 Massive ears he had and ugly to see
 With eyes fully horrible and fiery in truth;
 Flat-mouthed as a fluke⁴¹ with grimacing lips,
 And the flesh in his front teeth filthy as a bear’s;
 His beard was brothy⁴² and black and reached to his chest; 1090
 Fattened as a sea-swine⁴³ with many carcasses
 And all quivered the flesh in his foul lips,
 Each fold as a wolf’s head writhed about at once!
 Bull-necked was that beast and broad in the shoulders,
 Badger-chested as a boar with bristles full large,
 Stout arms as an oak with textured sides,⁴⁴
 Limb and loins loathsome, believe you for it is true;
 Shovel-footed was that monster and scabby he seemed,
 With legs unshapely shoving together;
 Thick thighs as a demon and thicker in the haunch, 1100
 As fat as a pig, full hideous he looks!
 Who the length of the man faithfully accounts,
 From the face to the foot was five fathom long!⁴⁵

³⁹ Saliva. The giant foams at the mouth like a rabid beast.

⁴⁰ The giant’s beard is so bushy that it reaches up to his eyes and meets his eyebrows, which are also excessively long.

⁴¹ “fluke”: a type of fish.

⁴² “brothy”: covered by the broth of his meal.

⁴³ “sea-swine”: perhaps the sea-cow or manatee.

⁴⁴ The giant’s arms are rough, like bark (extending the comparison of him to an oak tree).

⁴⁵ 6 feet or 1.8 metres.

Then up he stands sturdily on two stiff legs,
 And soon he catches him a club all of pure iron;
 He would have killed the king with this deadly weapon,
 But through the craft of Christ yet the churl failed;
 The crest and the coronal,⁴⁶ the clasps of silver,
 Cleanly with his club he crashes down at once!

The king casts up his shield and covers himself well, 1110
 And with his stately sword a blow he delivers him;
 Full butt in the face⁴⁷ the monster he hits
 That the burnished blade to the brain runs;
 He clears his face with his foul hands
 And beats vigorously at his face fiercely thereafter!
 The king changes his footing, withdraws a little;
 Nor has he escaped that blow, evil has achieved;
 He follows in fiercely and fastens a blow
 High up on the haunch with his hard weapon
 That he conceals the sword⁴⁸ half a foot deep; 1120
 The hot blood of the hulk unto the hilt runs;
 Even into the intestines the giant he hits
 Just to the genitals and cut them asunder!

Then he roams and roars and roughly he strikes
 Eagerly at Arthur and on the earth hits;
 A sword-length within the turf he strikes at once
 That nearly knocks out the king for the sound of his blows!
 But yet the king deftly quickly he toils,
 Thrusts in with the sword that it the abdomen shattered;
 Both the guts and the gore gush out at once. 1130
 That all makes the grass sullied on the ground where he stands!

Then he cast away the club and seizes the king;
 On the crest of the crag he catches him in his arms,
 And encloses him firmly to crush his ribs;
 So hard holds he that noble one that his heart nearly bursts!
 Then the sorrowful maidens fall to the earth,
 Kneeling and crying and clapping their hands;
 "Christ comfort this knight and keep him from sorrow,
 And never let that fiend rob him of his life!"

Even though that warlock is so strong, he throws him over; 1140
 Angrily they writhe and wrestle together,
 Tosses and turns over within those bushes,
 Tumbles and turns fast and tears at their clothes
 Untenderly from the top they fight together,
 At times Arthur over and other while under;⁴⁹

⁴⁶ "coronal": a decorative circlet worn around the helmet, often encrusted with precious gems.

⁴⁷ Squarely in the face.

⁴⁸ He slides it so far into the giant that it is hidden.

⁴⁹ Sometimes Arthur is on top (as they fight), and at other times

From the height of the hill unto the hard rock,
 They never cease before they fall at the flood marches;
 But Arthur with a dagger eagerly strikes
 And repeatedly sinks it into the hulk up to the hilt.
 The thief at the agony so vigorously he strikes 1150
 That three ribs in his⁵⁰ side he breaks apart!

Then Sir Kay the keen unto the king starts,
 Said: "Alas! We are lost! My lord is confounded,
 Over-come by a fiend! We are foul-fated!
 We must be undone, in faith, and banished forever!"

They lift up his hawberk⁵¹ then and placed hands underneath
 His hide and his haunch also up high onto the shoulders,
 His flank and his tendons and his fair sides,
 Both his back and his breast and his bright arms.
 They were glad that they found no flesh opened 1160
 And for that journey made joy, these gentle knights.

"Now certainly," says Sir Bedivere, "it seems, by my Lord,
 He seeks saints but seldom, the more securely he grips,
 That thus seized this saintly body out of these high cliffs,
 To carry forth such a churl enclose him in silver;⁵²
 By Michel, of such a man I have much wonder
 That ever our sovereign Lord suffers him in heaven!
 And all saints be such that serve our Lord
 I shall be a saint never, by my father's soul!"

Then jests the bold king at Bedivere's words: 1170
 "This saint have I sought, so help me our Lord!
 Immediately brandish your blade and pierce him to the heart;
 Be certain of this sergeant; he has me sore harmed!
 I fought not with such a creature this fifteen winter;
 But in the mountains of Araby⁵³ I met such another;
 He was fiercer by far than any I had before found;
 If my fortune had not been fair, I would not have lived!
 At once strike off his head and stake it thereafter;
 Give it to your squire, for he is well horsed,

the giant.

⁵⁰ "his": Arthur's.

⁵¹ "hawberk": coat of mail or plate armour.

⁵² Bedivere realizes Arthur's deceit, and jokes that the giant's body should be treated as saint-like, given his king's feigned pilgrimage to the mount.

⁵³ Benson identifies Araby specifically as "the Aran mountains in Wales" (270). However, it is worth noting that this word also appeared in Anglo-Norman as "Arabie" and generally referred to individuals or items of eastern origins. Given the emphasis on the east in this text, the latter meaning should not be excluded.

Bear it to Sir Howell⁵⁴ that is in bonds of hardship 1180
 And bid him hearten himself; his enemy is destroyed!
 Then bear it to Barfleur⁵⁵ and cast it in iron
 And set it on the barbican⁵⁶ to show the people.
 My sword and my broad shield upon the field lie,
 On the crest of the crag where we first met,
 And the club nearby, all of pure iron,
 That many Christians has killed in Constantine's lands;
 Hasten to the summit and fetch me that weapon
 And go find our fleet in water where it lies.
 If you desire any treasure, take what you like; 1190
 I will have the kirtle and the club, I desire nothing else."

Now they climb to the crag, these comely knights,
 And bring him the broad shield and his bright weapon,
 The club and the coat also, Sir Kay himself,⁵⁷
 And goes with the conqueror the kings to show.
 That in the court the king held close to himself⁵⁸
 While a clear day climbed in the sky.⁵⁹

By that time to court came a massive clamour,
 And before the comely king they knelt all at once;
 "Welcome, our liege lord, too long have you dwelled!⁶⁰ 1200
 Governor under God, most prepared and noble,
 To whom grace is granted and given at His will
 Now your seemly arrival has comforted us all!
 You have in your royalty revenged the people!
 Through the help of your hand your enemy is destroyed,
 That has your ranks overrun and robbed of their children;
 Was never realm disarrayed so readily relieved!"

Then the conqueror Christianly says to his people:
 "Thank God," he said, "for this grace and no-one else,
 For it was never man's deed, but the might of Himself 1210
 Or a miracle of his Mother, that mild is to all!"

He summoned then the shipmen sharply thereafter,
 To set out with the shire-men to shift the goods:
 "All the vast treasure that traitor had won
 To the commons of the country, clergy and other,
 Look it be done and dealt to my dear people
 That none complain of their part on pain of your lives."

He commanded his cousin, with knightly words,
 To make a church on the crag, where the body lies
 And a convent therein, Christ for to serve, 1220
 In mind of that martyr⁶¹ that in the mount rests.

54 Sir Howell's exact identity is unclear in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, but in other texts he has a familial relationship with the woman captured and killed by the giant, usually her father or her husband.

55 A port in northwestern France, in Normandy, used frequently in the Middle Ages for travel between Britain and the continent.

56 "barbican": fortified outer gate or bridge of a city or castle.

57 Sir Kay specifically brings Arthur the coat and the club.

58 Kay rides with Arthur to court, where Arthur's closest companions (other kings) await.

59 Two readings are possible here: with Arthur's victory, the weather improves and the clouds clear, or, given that they set out at Evensong, Arthur's battle lasted all night and it is dawn of the following day.

60 Arthur has been away too long.

61 The woman raped and killed by the giant.

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT — Selections

Translated by CHRISTINA M. McCARTER

Critical Introduction

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is an anonymous Middle English poem written in the Northwest of England in the late fourteenth century. It is set at Camelot, in the court of King Arthur and features many of the characters familiar from Arthurian literature—including Arthur and his queen, Guinevere. Arthurian romances are stories of daring adventure and chivalry (the moral codes that guide knights). They often feature dangerous monsters that exist largely to test the mettle and might of Arthur's Knights of the Round Table.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is framed by two Christmas feasts. At the first, Arthur and his knights have been celebrating and competing merrily when a strange figure enters the hall. He is massive, a “half giant,” well-formed and handsome, armed with a huge battle ax, and “entirely emerald green” in his body and clothes. He challenges the knights to a game: he and any knight bold enough will swap one blow with his ax. He offers to take the first, with the promise to give back a stroke equal to that which he has received. This seems like some sort of trick—if a knight uses the ax to cut off the Green Knight's head, he should be safe from having to receive a blow in return—and indeed it is. When Sir Gawain rises to the challenge, he gets a monstrous surprise.

This game is in fact a test of the knight's chivalry, bravery, and (surprisingly) chastity, demonstrating the conflicts between some elements of the chivalric code and Christianity. A year later, Gawain journeys to a remote section of Britain to find the Green Knight and, en route, stays in the castle of Sir Bertilak, who also challenges him to an odd game: for three days, Bertilak will go out hunting and will bring Gawain back whatever he catches, while Gawain will wait for him in the castle and will give to Bertilak whatever he catches, in turn. For two days, Bertilak catches animals, while Gawain catches kisses from Bertilak's wife. Gawain receives the animals and gives Bertilak the kisses. However, on the third day, the wife gives Gawain a magical girdle—belt of green cloth—that will protect him from any harm. Gawain fails to pass this on to his host when he passes on more kisses, thereby breaking his oath. At this point, the day has come for him to find the Green Knight, whom he encounters in a green chapel deep in the

woods, overgrown with plants. Here, he submits to receive this stroke of the ax, though again, this leads to strange and wondrous surprises.

Reading Questions

What is the monstrous knight's function in the courtly world of this Arthurian romance? In the chivalric world of Arthur's court, behaviour was strictly controlled. Whose behaviour lives up to knightly ideals, and whose is monstrous?

Editorial Notes

The poem is divided into four *fitts* (an archaic term for a section of a longer poem) and in the original Middle English, is metrical and alliterative. The translation here is rendered in verse, but is not metrical or alliterative in order to prioritize the clarity and content of the text rather than its poetic form. The creative vocabulary made necessary by strict alliteration offers much critical room for readers considering how beings are characterized within a story. Here, words translated as *man*, *knight*, or *sir* include *burne*, *freke*, *gome*, *hathel*, *lede*, *mon*, *renk*, *schalk*, *segge*, *wyghe* (all derived from Old English), and *tulke* (from Old Norse). Where material has been omitted, a short synopsis in italics serves to orient the reader.

Further Reading

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SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Selections

Translated by CHRISTINA M. McCARTER

Fitt I (lines 37–490)

This King¹ sat at Camelot during Christmas
with many praiseworthy lords (the best of men,
all of them a rich brethren fit for the Round Table)
with rich revelry and carefree joys, as was good.
There men fought in tournament again and again:
these gentle knights jousting full joyfully
then travelled to the court for singing.
The feast went on this way a full fifteen days
with all the meat and mirth that men could think of.
Such merrymaking and glee was glorious to hear,
a noble ruckus by day—and dancing by night.
Good fortune was high throughout halls and chambers
with the lords and ladies, as they thought best.
With all the best of the world, they spent their time together— 50
the most noble knights under Christ's own kingdom
and the loveliest ladies that have ever lived,
and he the comeliest king who holds court.
For this fair company was in their first age, in the hall
the luckiest under heaven,
the king a man of the highest will.
It would be near-to-impossible,
so hardy a band of armed men to find.

While the New Year was so fresh (as it was newly arrived), 60
that day the noblemen were served double helpings on the dais.
When the king was come with his knights into the hall,
(the chapel service having been brought to an end)
loud cries were called by the clergy and others:
"Noel!" repeated, again and again.
And then the nobility hurried forth to give New Year's gifts.
They praised their gifts excitedly, giving them by hand,
and conversed on those gifts eagerly.
Ladies laughed full loudly, even when they had lost,
and he who won was not prideful—of that you may be sure. 70
All this mirth they made until it was time to eat;
when they had washed well, they went to sit.
The best man was seated above the rest, as seemed proper.
Queen Guinevere, fully adorned, was placed in the middle,
seated on the higher dais and adorned all about.
Fine silk surrounded her, a canopy covered her

(all of fine, French fabric), and plenty of carpets of Tarsian silk²—
which were embroidered and beaded with the best gems
that might have been named a price, that money could buy
anywhere. 80

To describe the loveliest one:
she looked around with blue-grey eyes;
that he had seen any fairer—
no man might say in truth.

But Arthur would not eat until all were served.
He was so joyful in that time and somewhat childlike:
he liked his life merry, and he cared very little
either to lie or sit for very long,
as his young blood and headstrong brain busied him to action.
Also, another habit moved him now: 90

that he had stated, by his honour, that he would never eat
at such a fine occasion until recounted to him was
some tale of adventurous or perilous things,
of some marvel that he might believe to be true,
of ancient princes, or arms, or other adventures;
or else if some man begged him for a knight
to join in jousting, to lay in jeopardy
his life for pleasure, each authorizing the other
to have the better outcome—as fortune would help him.
This was the king's attitude when he was in court 100
at each splendid feast, among his many noble men
in the hall.

Therefore, with so proud a face
he stands with great boldness:
full fresh in the New Year,
much mirth he made with them all.

Thus, there the bold king by himself remains standing
talking before the high table of noble trifles.
There good Gawain³ sits beside Guinevere,
and Agravain⁴ a la Dure Mayn sits on her other side 110

² "Tarsian silk": extravagant fabric imported from Tartary, a region of north-central Asia.

³ Gawain has a long history in Arthurian literature. Over the years, his character has morphed and changed, but he is almost always associated with honour, pride, and courtliness—for better or worse.

⁴ Agravain is Gawain's younger brother. In the Arthurian tradition, their parents are King Lot of Orkney and Arthur's variably named sister; the two usually have two other brothers (Gaheris and Gareth) and a half brother (Mordred).

¹ The king referred to here and throughout is Arthur.

(both the king's nephews and fully well-made knights).
 Bishop Baldwin, sitting above them, heads the table,
 and Ywain, Urien's son,⁵ eats as his partner.
 These men were set on the dais and were worthily served,
 and then many true men sat at the sideboards.
 Then the first course came with the cracking of trumpets,
 (with many bright banners hanging from them).
 The noise of drums joined those noble pipes:
 excited melodies and brave, awakening notes,
 so that many hearts jumped at their outbursts. 120
 Exquisite food was brought then: a full many meats,
 the freshest of the fresh, and in so many dishes
 that space before the people was hard to find
 on which to set the silvered platters holding those many stews,
 on the table.
 Each man, as he loved himself,
 took without worry [of running out]:
 each pair of men had twelve dishes,
 good beer, and bright wine.

Now will I say no more of their service 130
 (for each man may well know that there was nothing lacking),
 because another great, new disturbance neared quickly—
 which would grant the king leave to eat!
 The music had hardly stopped,
 and the first course graciously served to the court,
 when there drew up to the hall door a commanding man
 measuring the tallest on the earth in his height.
 From the waist to his neck, he was so square and so thick,
 and his loins and his limbs so long and so large,
 half giant of the earth, I think that he was 140
 (but of men, the largest, I think him to have been)
 and having the finest physique of anyone who may ride.
 For his back and chest were great and forbidding,
 but his stomach and waist were handsomely small,
 and all his features equally, in what form that they took,
 were comely.
 However, men had wonder at his hue
 which was set in his splendid looks:
 he rode as a man eager for battle—
 and entirely emerald green. 150

And all ornamented in green were this man and his clothes:
 a well-fitting straight coat (that fit to his sides),
 a merry mantle over that (adorned within
 with natural trimmed fur, the look made full bright

⁵ Ywain is another recurring character of the Arthurian court, popularized as the "Knight of the Lion" in Chretien de Troyes' French romance. He is also son to King Urien and, usually, Morgan le Fay, another of Arthur's sisters.

by pleasant, clean, ermine), and his hood of the same,
 (that was set back from his hair and laid on his shoulders).
 Well-fitting stockings of that same colour,
 which fit well to his calves, and bright spurs were underneath
 of bright gold, over richly embroidered, striped silk:
 and shoeless, there the man rides. 160
 And all of his clothes, truly, were bright green:
 even the metal bars set in his belt, and other attractive stones
 that were richly arranged in his bright outfit
 and about himself, and on his saddle, upon embroidered silk.
 It would be difficult to tell of even half the decorative details
 that were set into it, with birds and butterflies,
 with bright embroidery of green—always amidst fine gold work.
 The pendants of his breast plate, the splendid crupper,
 the fine bit, and all the metal was enamelled. 170
 The stirrups that he stood on were dyed the same,
 and also his saddlebow and all his splendid saddle skirts were made
 so that they always glimmered and gleamed all of green stones.
 The horse that he rode was all of the same colour,
 truly.
 A strong and great green horse,
 a bold steed difficult to restrain:
 prancing lively under bridle—
 To this man he was fully obedient.

Wonderfully was this man geared in green—
 and the hair on his head was matching his horse. 180
 Fair, fanning hair spread evenly over his shoulders,
 and a great beard like a bush hung over his breast,
 that beard, like his noble hair that reaches from his head,
 was trimmed all around above his elbows,
 so that half of his arms were thereunder hidden, like in the fashion
 of a king's capados⁶ (which covers his neck).
 The mane of that great horse was much the same:
 well curled and combed, with many braided knots
 folded with golden ribbon throughout the fair green—
 always a strand of the hair was matched with another of gold. 190
 The tail and his forelock were of a matching style
 and both bound with ribbons of bright green,
 studded with many lovely gems, to the end of the lock;
 then it was bound into a fancy knot with a thong.
 There rang many bells of bright, burnished gold.
 Neither such a horse—nor the man who rode him—on earth
 was ever seen in the hall, by sight, before that time
 with eyes.
 He looked as fast as lightning,
 so said all who saw him. 200

⁶ "capados": the Green Knight's hair is long and thick enough to cover his arms like a rich hooded mantle. Gawain later puts on a capados (ll. 571–73).

It seemed as no man might
endure under his blows.

Yet, he had neither helmet nor hauberk,⁷
nor neck-protection nor armoured plating,
nor a spear, nor a shield to shove or to smite—
but in his one hand he had a holly-branch,
which is the greatest green when the rest of the forest is bare,
and an axe in his other hand—huge and extraordinarily great in size:
a spiteful battle-axe, to explain in words, if one may.

The length of an elnyerd⁸ was the large head, 210
the blade all of green steel with a golden shine,
the cutting edge large and burnished bright—
as well shaped to shear as are sharp razors.
The bold man gripped it by a sturdy, steel staff,
which was wound about with iron to its end
and all engraved with fine works of green.
A thong wrapped about it, which tied to the head
and looped the handle several times;
splendid tassels were attached with enough
buttons of that same, bright green
embroidered richly throughout. 220

This man⁹ held himself up and entered the hall,
driving towards the high dais: he doubted any danger,
he hailed no one, but boldly looked over them all.
The first words that he spoke were, “Where is,” he said,
“the governor of this group? I would gladly
see that man in sight, and speak with him
of a proposal.”

Towards the knights he cast his eyes,
and rode himself up and down.
He paused, and waited to learn 230
who was of the most renown.

For a long time, everyone remained looking at the man,
for each man wondered what it might mean
that a man and a horse might take such a hue
as green as the grass grows—and even greener it seemed—
brighter was that green enamel on gold glowing.
All who stood there contemplated (and cautiously neared him
with all the wonder of the world) on what he would do.
For many marvels had they seen—but never such as this.
So as a phantom and fairy, the people judged it to be. 240
Therefore many men were afraid to answer,
but all were astounded by his words and sat stone-still

7 “hauberk”: a protective, mail shirt.

8 “elnyerd”: forty-five inches, or fourteen centimetres.

9 “man”: the Middle English is “hathel,” a term connoting, specifically, mortal men, noblemen, or warriors.

in a stunned silence throughout that rich hall.
As if they had all slipped into a sleep, so their talk silenced
in a hurry.

I judge it not all for fear,
but out of courtesy,
so as to allow him (of whom all people speak¹⁰),
to reply to that man.

Then Arthur inspected that adventure¹¹ before the high dais 250
and properly addressed him (for afraid was he never),
and said, “Man, you are truly welcome in this place.

I am called Arthur, the head of this hostel.
Dismount immediately and linger here, I pray you,
and whatsoever your wish is, we shall hear of it after.”
“Nay, he who sits on high,” said this man, “so help me.
To stay any while in this house was not my errand.
But I am here because your reputation is lifted so high, sir,
and this city and your men are held as the best: 260
the stiffest under war-gear and on battle-horses,
the manliest and the worthiest of the world’s men,
honourable to play against in other noble games;
here courtesy is displayed, as I have heard said.

And that has brought me here, truly, at this time.
You may be reassured by this holly branch that I bring
that I pass through in peace and that I seek no plight.
For if I had come in fiercely in fighting-dress,
I have both a hauberk and helmet at home,
a shield and a sharp spear—shining bright— 270
and also other weapons to wield, I tell you truly.
But because I desire not to battle, my gear is softer.
However, if you be as bold as all men say,
you will nobly grant me the game that I ask,
by right.”

Arthur, in answer,
said, “Sir, courteous knight:
if you crave battle without armour,
you will not fail to find a fight here.”

“Nay; I seek no fight—truly I tell you.
Those who are about this bench are but beardless children. 280
If I were clasped in my armour on a great horse,
there is no man here to match me, with their mights so weak.

10 The narrator suspects, in this moment, that the court is silent to allow Arthur (the man “of whom all people speak”) the first response.

11 “adventure”: meaning a “marvel” or “wonder,” the Middle English *adventure* is a common theme in Middle English literature. Deriving from the French term, *aventure*, an *adventure* can refer to a fantastic or miraculous occurrence of any variety, or an especially daring exploit or journey. The use here clarifies that the knight’s entry and appearance are out of the ordinary.

Therefore I crave of this court a Christmas game,
 because it is Yule and New Year, and there are
 many courageous ones here.
 If any in this house hold himself hardy enough—
 to be so bold in his blood and reckless in his head—
 that they dare to boldly exchange one strike for another,
 I shall give him, as my gift, this rich battle-axe:
 this axe (which is heavy enough) to have and use as he likes.
 And I shall take the first blow, as unarmed as I am right now. 290
 If any man be so hardy to take the deal that I speak of,
 come quickly to me, and take this weapon—
 I relinquish it forever!—he shall keep it as his own.
 And I shall stand a stroke from him, boldly on this floor,
 as long as he will grant me the right to deal him an equal blow
 by agreement.
 And yet I grant him respite
 of twelve months and a day.
 Now hurry here, and let us see
 what any here dare to say.” 300

If he had astounded them at first, they were stiller then,
 all the noblemen in the hall, both high and low.
 The man on his horse turned himself in his saddle,
 rolled his red eyes about ferociously,
 furrowed his bushy eyebrows (bristling green),
 and swung his beard while waiting to see who would rise.
 When none would greet him with a response, he coughed loudly,
 drew himself up grandly, and began to speak.
 “What? Is this Arthur’s house?” said the man then,
 “That all commend through so many kingdoms? 310
 Where now is your arrogance and your conquests,
 your fierceness and your repute, and your great words?
 Now is the revel and the renown of the Round Table
 thrown over by the words of one man’s speech,
 for all decide to cower before a blow is even shown!”
 With this he laughs so loudly that the lord grieved.
 The blood shot into his fair face and cheeks
 from shame

 He grew angry with the quickness of the wind
 and so did all who were there. 320
 The king, by nature bold,
 Then stood near to that proud man

and said, “Man, by heaven, your request is unwise,
 and as you have requested a folly, you receive what you deserve.
 I know no man who is afraid of your proud words;
 give me now your axe, in God’s name,
 and I shall give you the boon you have requested.”
 He lightly leapt to him and took [the axe] in his hands.
 Eagerly, the other man dismounted to his feet.
 Now Arthur has the axe and grips the shaft, 330

and sternly swings it about as though he thought to strike with it.
 The bold man stood upright and proud before Arthur,
 taller than any in the house by a head or more.
 With a grim expression, he stood and stroked his beard,
 and with a dry demeanor, he pulled off his coat—
 no more impressed or dismayed by Arthur’s mighty swings
 than if a man in the room had brought him a drink
 of wine!

 Gawain, who sat by the queen,
 Inclined himself towards the king: 340
 “I beseech you with simple words
 that this melee might be mine.

“Would you, worthy lord,” said Gawain to the king,
 “if you allow me to arise from my seat and stand by you there,
 (so that I might leave the table without being discourteous,
 and so that my liege lady would not be displeased),
 I would come to your counsel before your royal court.
 Because I think it is unseemly, as a truth known,
 when a request is so arrogantly presented in your hall,
 to take it up yourself (even though you, yourself,
 might be inclined) 350

while upon benches about you so many bold men sit,
 of whom there are none higher in will under heaven
 nor live any better bodies inclined to battle.
 I am the weakest, I know, and of wit the feeblest,
 and my life is worth the least, to those who know the truth.
 I am to praise because you are my uncle;
 I know no worth in my body but your blood.
 And since this idea is so foolish, it should not fall to you,
 and as I have requested it from you first, bestow it to me.
 And if my speech is not honourable, let all this rich court 360
 not bear the blame.

 The nobles discussed with each other,
 and soon they all agreed on their advice:
 to rid the crowned king of the deal
 and give Gawain the game.

Then the king commanded his knight to rise—
 and he did so eagerly, moved forward with poise,
 kneeled before the king, and took hold of the weapon.
 And Arthur honourably handed it to him, lifted up his hands,
 gave Gawain God’s blessing, and proudly bid him 370
 that his heart and his hands should both be hardy.
 “Take care, nephew,” stated the king, “so that you set one blow.
 And if you give it right, truly I know
 that you shall wait awhile for the strike he should return after.”
 Gawain goes to the man with the axe in his hands
 and waits for him boldly, showing nothing but confidence.
 Then spoke the knight in green to Sir Gawain,
 “We will repeat the agreement before we progress further.

First I ask you, man, that you tell me truly
 what you are called, so I may believe you." 380
 "In good faith," stated the good knight, "I am called Gawain,
 who gives you this blow. Whatever befalls after,
 at this time in twelve months, I take from you another
 with what weapon you desire, and from no other man
 on earth."
 The other responded back,
 "Sir Gawain, as I live,
 I am very glad
 that you shall give this blow.

"By Gog,"¹² stated the green knight, "Sir Gawain, I like 390
 that I shall receive from your power what I have requested here.
 And you have fully repeated, in full truth,
 accurately the entire agreement that I proposed to the king—
 except that you must promise me, sir, by your integrity,
 that you shall seek me yourself—wherever you think
 I may be found on the earth—and accept such payment
 as you deal out to me today standing before this noble company."
 "Where should I find you?" asked Gawain, "Where do you dwell?
 I know not where you live, by him who made me,
 nor do I know you, knight—what court you come
 from nor your name. 400

Tell me both things truly now; tell me what you are called,
 and I shall wear down all my wits to get myself there.
 That I swear to you in truth and by the security of my integrity."
 "It needs no more, that is enough for the New Year,"
 stated the man in the green to Gawain the noble,
 "if I tell you truly when I have taken the blow.
 And if you have smitten me smoothly—I will teach you
 of my house and my home and my own name.
 Then you may travel to my place and hold your promises,
 and if I offer no speech, then that is the better for you, 410
 for you may linger in your own land and seek me no further.
 But enough:
 Take now your grim weapon
 and let us see how you smite."
 "Gladly, sir, in truth,"
 stated Gawain; he feels out his axe.

The green knight eagerly set himself up—standing on the ground,
 gives his head a little bow, reveals the skin;
 laying his long, lovely hair over the top of his head,
 letting show his bald, naked neck. 420

¹² "By Gog": the original text states "bigog," an exclamation that may be the equivalent of modern "by gosh." However, in the biblical tradition Gog is related to the release of Satan (Revelation 20:7–9) and is called the enemy of man (Ezekiel 38), connecting the Green Knight to the demonic or, at least, the supernatural.

Gawain gripped his axe and lifted it high,
 his left foot set on the earth before him,
 brings the axe down quickly on the naked neck,
 so that the sharp blade cleaved through the bones
 and cut through the white marrows and split it in two,
 so that the edge of the polished steel bit into the floor.
 From the neck, the fair head fell to the earth—
 so that many pushed it with their feet when it rolled near them;
 the blood flowed from the body and glittered on the green outfit.
 But the confident man neither staggered nor fell, 430
 but boldly he moved forth on strong legs.
 Fiercely he reached out to where the men stood,
 took up his fine head, and quickly bore it up.
 He then moved to his horse and caught up the bridle,
 stepped into the stirrups, and swung into the seat—
 and his head he held in his hands, by the hair.
 The man set himself in his saddle as sturdily
 as if nothing unlucky ailed him—though he was headless
 in that place.
 He moved his body around 440
 (that unsightly, bleeding body);
 Many were made afraid by him
 because of the words that were said.

For the head in his hands, he held up (truly!),
 turning the face towards the noblest in the dais.
 It lifted up its eyelids and looked intently
 and spoke this much with his mouth, as you may now hear:
 "Look, Gawain, that you honourably go (as you promised)
 and search faithfully until you find me, sir,
 as you have promised in this hall,
 in the hearing of these knights. 450
 To the green chapel you'll chase me (I charge you) to receive
 such a blow as you have dealt—which you have earned
 to be eagerly given on New Year's morn.
 Many men know me, the knight of the green chapel,
 so that if you try to find me, you cannot fail.
 Therefore, come, or else earn being called a coward."
 With a fierce pull of the reins, he turned
 and rushed out of the hall door (his head in his hands),
 so that, as if on flint, fire flew from the horse's hooves.
 To what land he returned, no one there knew 460
 any more than they knew from where he had come.
 What then?
 The king and Gawain, of that
 green man, they laughed and grinned.
 Yet both fully agreed
 that had been a marvel.

Though Arthur the noble king had anxious wonder in his heart,
 he let nothing of his feelings be seen, instead saying loudly

to the beautiful queen, with courteous speech,
 “Dear lady, have nothing dismay you today. 470
 It is becoming that such artistry happen on a Christmas
 lacking in interludes, to laugh and to sing,
 among these courtly carols of knights and ladies.
 Nonetheless, I may well sit at my meal,
 for I have seen a wonder, that I may not deny.”
 He glanced upon Sir Gawain, and nobly he said,
 “Now sir, hang up your axe; it has hewn enough.”
 And it was placed above the dais, hanging on a tapestry,
 where all men may look on it in wonder.
 Then they turned to the meal, those men together— 480
 the king and the good knight—and good men served them
 double helpings of everything, as the most noble of men.
 With all manner of meat and minstrelsy both,
 they spent that day joyfully until daytime ended
 on the land.
 Now reason well, Sir Gawain,
 that fear does not hold you back
 from this adventure
 that you have taken in hand. 489

In the intervening action, a year has elapsed. True to his word, Gawain wanders the land looking for the Green Chapel without success until he happens across the castle of Bertilak de Hautdesert, where he is warmly welcomed and informed that the Chapel is close by. His host proposes a game in which he goes out for the day to hunt and Gawain remains behind in the castle; at the end of the day, they will trade what they have won. The next morning, Lady Bertilak attempts to seduce Gawain while he is still in bed, but he gives her only a kiss—and that to avoid giving offense. Bertilak returns with a deer, and after he offers it in exchange, Gawain kisses him. The second day progresses much like the first, with Bertilak returning with a boar and exchanging it for the two kisses given to him that day. On the third day, Lady Bertilak offers Gawain three kisses and a magic green girdle that will protect him from harm. Gawain reluctantly accepts the gift due to his fear of the Green Knight, but when Bertilak returns with the fox he has killed, Gawain gives him only three kisses, keeping the girdle for himself. The next day, he sets off for the Green Chapel.

Fitt 4 (lines 1998—2478)

Now nears the New Year, and the night passes by; 1998
 the day drives away the dark, as the Creator commands.
 But wild weather wakes up the land outside: 2000
 clouds cast a cold cover over the earth,
 with more than enough of the north-wind to torment the poorly clad.
 The snow falls quite bitterly, which stings the wild;
 the warbling wind strikes from the higher grounds

and drives each dale full of great drifts.
 The knight, who lies in his bed, listens intently;
 though he locks his eyelids, very little he sleeps.
 By each cock that crows, he remembers his spoken promise.
 Before the day began, he quickly arose and dressed
 (for there was the light of a lamp that gleamed in his chamber). 2010
 He called to the chamberlain (who quickly responded)
 and bade him bring his hauberk and saddle his horse.
 The man hastens to his feet and fetches his clothing
 and dresses Sir Gawain in a great fashion.
 First he clads him in his clothes to wear against the cold
 and then the rest of his gear, which had been kept secure:
 both his body armour and his plates, polished brightly.
 The rings in his rich chainmail hauberk rocked—free of rust,
 and all was as fresh as if new; for this he desired to
 give thanks. 2020
 The servant had, upon each piece,
 wiped full well and made it magnificent:
 the fairest since Greece.
 The man ordered his horse brought.

While the most magnificent attire he wore on himself—
 his coat, with an emblem of fine embroidery
 set upon velvet, gracious gems
 set about and within, embroidered seams,
 and fairly lined with fair, natural furs—
 yet left he not the lace, the lady’s gift.¹³ 2030
 That Gawain did not forget for the good of himself.
 When he had belted his sword upon his curving hips,
 then he wrapped his keepsake about him twice.
 That knight eagerly wrapped it around his lovely waist.
 The girdle of green silk looked quite elegant
 upon the royal red cloth which was noble to see.
 But this man did not wear the girdle for its worth,
 for pride of its decoration (though polished they were),
 and though the glittering gold gleamed at its edges,
 but to save himself when he was required to suffer— 2040
 abiding a blow without the ability to defend himself with sword
 or blade.
 When the bold man was prepared,
 he hurried out from the room.
 All the retinue of the noble house
 he thanked with great full abundance.

Then Gringolet¹⁴ was adorned, who was great and huge,
 and had been kept securely in a proper stable.

¹³ “lady’s gift”: the text clarifies that Gawain does not forget to wear the “green girdle,” the ornately woven belt given to him by Bertilak’s wife. (Fitt 3, lines 1829–65).

¹⁴ Gringolet is the name of Gawain’s warhorse throughout the Arthurian tradition.

He desired to gallop and run, that proud horse then.
 The knight goes to the horse and examines his coat, 2050
 and says soberly to himself and swears by his honour,
 “Here is a household, in this castle, that thinks on courtesy
 and the lord who maintains them—may they all have joy;
 and may the dear lady be loved all her life.
 If they for charity are kind to a guest
 and bear honour in their hands, may the lord reward them
 who hold the heavens on high and reward you all.
 And if I might live upon the earth for any while,
 I would grant you some reward readily, if I am able.”
 Then he steps into his stirrups and lifts himself
 into the saddle. 2060
 His servant hands him his shield; he lifts it onto his shoulder,
 spurs Gringolet with his gilt heels¹⁵,
 and he starts down the paving: he stood no longer
 to prance.
 His man, who carried his spear and lance,
 was then set on his horse.
 “This castle I commend to Christ.”
 He wished it always good luck.

The drawbridge was brought down, and the broad gates
 were unbarred, and both halves were pushed open. 2070
 The man crossed himself quickly and passed over the bridgeboards.
 The porter who knelt before the prince praised him,
 wishing him a good day and commending him to God
 —that he save Gawain.
 Gawain went on his way with his one man,
 who would guide him towards that perilous place for battle—
 where he would receive that rueful stroke.
 They climbed up banks where branches were bare;
 they climbed up cliffs where the cold clung.
 The clouds were not low, but it was ugly beneath them;
 mist shrouded the moors, melting from the hills. 2080
 Each hill had a hat—a huge mist-cloak.
 Brooks foamed and broke on the surrounding banks,
 shattering white foam on the shores before they rushed down.
 Quite wandering was the path they had to take to the wood,
 until, soon, it was time for the sun to rise in that time
 of season.
 They were on a high hill,
 the settled snow around them.
 Then the man who rode with him
 bade his master to stop. 2090

“For I have brought you here, sir, at this time,
 and now you know we are not far from that infamous place
 that you have searched for and hurried towards so especially.

But I shall say to you in truth, since I know you,
 and you are a living man who I love well,
 that you ought to do as I suggest—you would be the better for it.
 The place that you press towards is believed very perilous:
 there lives a man in that wilderness, the worst upon the earth,
 for he is bold and strong and loves to strike blows,
 and he is bigger than any man on the earth— 2100
 his body bigger than four of the largest men
 in Arthur’s household, Hector, or any other.
 He performs in ways at that green chapel,
 so that none pass by that house proud in arms
 who he does not batter to death by the blows of his hands.
 For he is an immoderate man, and he uses no mercy,
 for be it a churl or a chaplain who rides by the chapel,
 monk or mass-priest, or anyone else—
 he considers it as pleasant to quell their life as it is to live himself.
 Therefore, I say to you, as surely as you sit in that saddle: 2110
 if you go there, you will be killed. I advise you, knight,
 trust me in this truly, even if you had twenty lives
 to spend.

He has lived there a long time
 and brought much battle-strife.
 Against his strong blows,
 you may not defend yourself.

“Therefore, good Sir Gawain, let the man alone,
 and go away some other way, for God’s sake.
 Carry yourself through some other country,
 where Christ may speed you. 2120
 And I shall take to home again, and if yet you fear,
 I shall swear ‘by God and all his good men,’
 and ‘so help me God and the holiness,’ and oaths enough,
 that I shall faithfully uphold you and never open your tale
 that ever you decided to flee from a man, that I am aware.”
 “Grant mercy,” says Gawain, and protesting, he said,
 “Well to thee, man, who would have me well
 and that faithfully of me relate; I believe well you would.
 But however you may hold it, if I passed by here,
 decided to flee in fear in the form that you suggest, 2130
 I would be a coward knight: I may not be excused.
 But I will go to that chapel (for whatever that may happen)
 and meet with that same man of your tales (who is desirous to me),
 whether it is for well or woe, as destiny would like
 to have it.
 Though he is a stern opponent
 to contend with and face with weapon,
 the Creator knows full well
 how to save his servants.”

“Mary!” states that other man, “Now your words make clear 2140
 that you will abuse your own self to him
 and you desire to lose your life—then let me not keep you.

¹⁵ “gilt heels”: golden spurs.

Put this helmet on your head and this spear in your hand,
and ride down this same path by the rocky edge yonder
until you are at the bottom of the wild valley.
Then look a little into the land on your left side,
and you should see in that dale that very chapel
in the field and the burly man who keeps it.
Now fare well, on God's behalf, Gawain the noble.
For all the gold on earth I would not go with you 2150
nor offer you fellowship through this wilderness one foot further:"
With that, the man pulls on his bridle,
hits his horse with his heels as hard as he can,
leaps across the land, and leaves the knight there
alone.
"By God's own self," said Gawain,
"I will neither cry nor groan.
To God's will I am fully obedient,
and to him I hand my anxieties."

Then he spurred Gringolet and drove on the path, 2160
shambled along an edge of the wood,
rode through the rough bank right to the dale.
Then he observed around him—he thought it a wild place—
and saw no sign of a resident anywhere around,
but only high, steep banks upon both sides
and rough, knuckled crags with jagged stones:
the clouds skimmed the jutting rocks, he thought.
Then he stopped and rested his horse for a time,
and often directed his face to seek the chapel:
he saw no such place in any direction,
and he thought it marvellous. 2170
Except, a little into the land, was a mound (so it seemed)—
a curving burrow beside the bank of the stream
by a flat of the water that moved by there.
The water blubbered therein as if it boiled.
The knight took his horse and came to the mound,
dismounted lightly, and to a tree attached
the reins and his rich horse to a rough branch.
Then he went down to the barrow, walked about it,
debating with himself what it might be.
It had a hole on the end and on either side, 2180
and it was overgrown with grass patches everywhere,
and it was hollow within—nothing but an old cave
or a crevice of an old crag. He could not decide what to call it
with words.
"Ho, sir," stated the gentle knight,
"Can this be the green chapel?
The devil might say his matins¹⁶
here about midnight.

"Now truly," proclaimed Gawain, "this here is desolate.
This chapel is ugly, overgrown with herbage. 2190
It seems appropriate the man bound in green
would perform his devotion here, in a devilish fashion.
Now I feel it is the fiend, by my five wits,
who has staked this agreement which has brought me here.
This is a chapel of mischance; let it be checked.
It is the most cursed church that I have ever come in."
With tall helmet on his head, his lance in his hand,
he climbed up to the roof of the rough building.
Then he heard—off the high hillside, from a hard rock,
beyond the water bank—a marvellous, grim noise: 2200
What! (It clattered in the cliff, as if it would cleave the rocks,
as one upon a grindstone was sharpening a scythe.)
What! (It whirred and whistled, as water at a mill.)
What! (It rushed and rang, terrible to hear.)
Then "By God," states Gawain, "that sound, I believe,
is a respectful invitation to me, a knight, in order to meet me
with due ceremony.
Allow God's workings—but, alas,
they help me not a bit, here.
My life, though, I forgo— 2210
noise cannot cause me fear."

Then the knight began to call loudly,
"Who stands in this dwelling, to hold me in combat?
For good Gawain is now waiting right here.
If any man desires something, come here at once,
either now or never, to settle his needs."
"Wait," said one from the bank above his head,
"and you shall have quickly what I stated once."
Yet he continued with that harried clamour a while
and directed himself to his whetting
before he would come down. 2220
And then he made his way down the crags, coming out of a hole,
whirling out of a rock with a fearsome weapon:
a Danish axe, newly made, with which to give the blow,
with a huge blade curving back towards the shaft,
filed on a whetstone, four-foot long
(it was no less than that)—despite the lace upon it
that gleamed full bright.
And the man in the green (geared like the first time:
both the flesh and the legs, locks and beard,
except that he walked the earth fairly, on foot)
set the steel to the ground and walked beside it. 2230
When he went to the water, he would not wade:
he hopped over on his axe and with powerful strides,
fiercely grim in a wide stretching clearing,

which prayers are to be said at which time of day) matins refers to the set of prayers offered between midnight and dawn.

¹⁶ "matins": according to the canonical hours (which designates

under snow.

Sir Gawain met with the knight;
he gave him a low bow.
The other said, "Now, good sir,
man may trust in your vow.

"Gawain," said that green man, "may God protect you.
Truly you are welcome, sir, to my place, 2240
and you have timed your travel as a true man should,
and you know the covenant cast between us:
at this time, twelve months ago, you took what fell to you,
and I should requite you the same at this New Year.
And, truly, we are alone in this valley:
there are no knights to obstruct us; we may deal as we like.
Have your helmet from your head and receive your payment.
Make no more debate than I gave you then—
when you swiped off my head in a single blow."
"Know, by God," stated Gawain, "who gave me a soul, 2250
I shall not begrudge you, nor groan for the grim things
that may happen.
But hold yourself to one stroke, and I shall stand still
and offer you no resistance to work as you like,
in any way.
He leaned his neck and bowed,
and showed the bare flesh,
and let on as if he was not afraid—
for he would not resist in fear.

Then the man in the green prepared himself quickly:
he gathered up his grim tool to smite Gawain 2260
with all his bodily strength. He raised it aloft,
swung it mightily up as if he would hurt him;
had he driven down with the strength that he acted,
that noble knight would have been quite dead from the blow.
But Gawain glanced sideways at that axe
as it came gliding down to slice him there,
and he shrank his shoulders a little in response to that sharp blade.
That other man, with a jerk, stopped the blade!
And then he rebuked the prince with proud words:
"You are not Gawain," said the man, "who is held so good, 2270
who never balked against an army in hill nor valley,
and now who flies in fear before he feels harm!
I have never heard of such cowardice from that knight.
I neither flinched nor fled, sir, when you sliced me,
nor cast any objection in King Arthur's house.
My head flew to my feet, and yet I never fled—
and you, before any harm is given, flinched in heart.
For this, I am destined to be called the better man,
therefore.
Replied Gawain, "I jerked once, 2280
and so I will no more—

even though, if my head falls to the stone,
I cannot restore it.

"But hurry, man, by your faith, and bring me to the point.
Deal to me my destiny and do it out of hand,
for I shall stand a stroke from you and flinch no more
until your axe has hit me: here have my truth."
"Have at you then," stated the other man and heaves the axe aloft,
and looks so ferocious, as if he were a madman.
He swings at Gawain suddenly, but hurts the man none; 2290
he withheld his blow before it might hurt him.
Gawain waits patiently and in no way flinches,
but stood as still as a stone or as a tree stump
that is anchored in the rocky ground by a hundred roots.
Then, merrily, the man in green speaks again,
"So, now that you have your heart whole, it is time for what is right.
Hold you now to your knighthood, which Arthur granted you,
and keep your collarbone on this occasion, if it is in your power."
Gawain, aggressively annoyed, said then,
"Why, thrash on, you fierce man—you threaten for too long. 2300
I believe you have stalled your heart with your own words."
"In truth," said the other man, "so feelingly you speak,
that I will no longer delay lightly your errand
right now."
Then he takes his stance to strike
and furrows both his lips and brow.
No wonder if Gawain was too despondent
to hope for any rescue.
He lifts lightly his weapon and lets it fall down
with the edge of the blade upon the bare neck: 2310
though he hammered down fiercely, it hurt him no more
than to slash him on the back of the neck so that it severed the skin.
The sharp edge cut into the body, through the white flesh,
so that the shining blood shot over his shoulders and to the earth.
And when the man saw the blood glisten on the snow,
he spirited forth (with both feet) more than a spear's length.
He fiercely grabbed his helmet and cast it onto his head,
swung his shoulders to bring his fair shield down,
brandished a bright sword, and courageously spoke—
never since he was a man born of his mother 2320
was he ever in this world so glad:
"Hold off, man, from your force—ask no more of me!"
I have taken a stroke in this place without strife,
and if you approach me anymore, I shall readily repay in kind
and give you the same force in return—in this
you should trust.
But one stroke was due to me here,
the covenant shaped it so,
as formed in Arthur's halls,
and, therefore, noble sir, now hold." 2330

The man held himself from Gawain and rested on his axe,
 set the shaft upon the ground and leaned on the blade,
 and looked to the young man who stood on the ground before him—
 how that brave man, fearlessly and boldly, stood there
 armed, fully unflinching; in his heart, this pleased him greatly.
 Then he spoke merrily with a loud speech,
 and with a ringing voice he said to the knight:
 “Brave man, on this ground be not so angry.
 No man here has mistreated you unmannerly,
 nor acted but as was shaped in agreement in the king’s court. 2340
 I swore you a stroke and you have it; hold yourself fully repaid.
 I release you of any remaining obligations.
 If I had been more agile, perhaps a buffet
 more malicious I could have given, to have wrought your anger.
 First I threatened you mockingly with a false start
 and dealt to you no damage, which I was right to do
 on account of the agreement that we fastened in the first night—
 which you held to loyally, when you told me the truth and truly
 gave me all your winnings, as a good man should.¹⁷
 The next swing I proffered you was for the morning, sir, 2350
 when you kissed my bright wife—those kisses you gave me in return.
 For both those two times, here I gave you but two mock swings
 without giving harm.
 True men requite truly:
 then they may need fear nothing.
 At the third, you failed me—
 and therefore you took that tap.

“For that is my belt that you wear, that same woven girdle
 that my own wife gave to me; I know it well in truth.
 Now, I know well of your kisses and your withholdings also, 2360
 and the wooing of my wife: I arranged it myself!
 I sent her to test you, and you (truly) I consider
 one of the most faultless men that ever walked the earth.
 As a pearl compared to a whitened pea is of more worth,
 so is Gawain, in good faith, compared to other fair knights.
 But here you lacked a little, sir, and in loyalty you were wanting—
 but that was not for dishonest crafts, nor for lustful wooing—
 but it was because you desired your life; for this I blame you less.”
 That other bold man stood a great while in contemplation,
 so angered for shame he was torn apart within. 2370
 All the blood from his chest burned in his face
 so that he shrank in shame from what the man said.
 The first words that the man spilled out were
 “Curse cowardice and covetousness both.
 In you is villainy and vice, which the virtuous distrusts.”
 Then he caught the knot and loosened the joint,

and violently threw the belt at the man:
 “Lo, there is the false thing, to foulness might it fall.
 For anxiety of your blows taught me cowardice,
 to align me with covetousness, my nature to forsake— 2380
 that is, generosity and loyalty that belong to a knight.
 Now am I faulty and false, who has been always afraid
 of treachery and untruth: both vices deserve sorrow
 and grief.
 I let you know, knight, here freely,
 entirely faulty is my venture.
 Let me regain your trust:
 the next time I will be prepared.”

Then the other man laughed and lightly said,
 “I hold the harm that I received hardly whole. 2390
 You are confessed to it fully, making known your mistakes,
 and have received the penance of my blade’s edge:
 I declare you polished from your offense and as purely cleansed
 as if you have never transgressed since you were first born.
 And I give you, sir, that gold-hemmed girdle,
 for it is as green as my gown, Sir Gawain, so you may
 think upon this meeting when you go forth
 among princes of rank, and this will be a pure token
 of the adventure of the green chapel to chivalrous knights.
 And you shall come again, now, to my home for this New Year, 2400
 and we shall revel for the remainder of this rich holiday
 with full joy.”

On this the lord sincerely pressed him
 and said, “With my wife, I know,
 we shall reconcile you well,
 who was your cunning enemy.”

“No, for truth,” said the knight, seized his helmet
 and took it off politely, and thanked the man:
 “I have stayed long enough; good luck come to you,
 and may he who prepares honours soon give you full reward. 2410
 Commend me to that courteous one, your lovely wife,
 both she and the other woman, my honoured ladies,
 who have jointly beguiled their knight with their games.
 But it is no surprise if a fool acts mad
 and through the wiles of women be brought to sorrow:
 for so was Adam on the earth beguiled by one,
 and Solomon by many women, and Samson was as well—
 Delilah dealt him his fate—and David after
 was deceived by Bathsheba, so he suffered much sorrow.
 Know that these were brought to ruin by those wiles;
 it would be a great victory 2420
 to love women well but believe them not, if a man can.
 For these men were the best of old, whom good luck followed always
 more thoroughly than all others who dwelt
 under heaven.

¹⁷ The Green Knight’s explanation in this section refers back to Gawain’s stay in Lord Bertilak’s castle during which the two men promised to trade their winnings. See the summary of this section, above.

And they were all deceived
by the women who they dealt with.
Because I am now beguiled,
I think my burden should be excused.

“But for your girdle,” says Gawain, “God, repay you.
That I will wield with good will—not for the worthy gold, 2430
nor use as a girdle, nor the silk, nor for the pendants,
nor for the high worship of it, nor its luxurious works—
but instead as it signifies my failure, so that I may look on it often
when I ride in renown, and regret to myself
the fault and the frailty of the perverse flesh, and
how easy it is to be enticed to the counsel of filth.
And thus, when pride shall prick me towards prowess in arms,
looking to this love-lace shall humble my heart.
But one thing I would request of you, if it doesn’t displease you:
since you are the lord of yonder land where I have been staying 2440
with you in honour—may He reward you,
who hold up the heavens and sits on high—
What right name do you call yourself? And then no more questions.”
“That I will tell you truly,” stated the other man then,
“Bertilak of Hautdesert, I am called in this land,
through the might of Morgan la Faye, who lives in my house,
and her skill in learning—well educated in crafts,
she has taken many of the workings of Merlin.
For she at sometime dealt in dear affection
with that wise clerk, as is known by all your knights 2450
at home.
Morgan the goddess,
therefore, is her name.
No one wields so haughty a might
that she cannot make them fully tame.

She sent me in this physical form to your lovely hall
to test your reputation, if it were the truth—
those stories of the great renown of the Round Table.
She sent me as this wonder to challenge your wits,
in order to grieve Guinevere and cause her to die 2460
with horror from that same man who spoke ghostlike
with his head in his hands before the high table.
It is she who is at home, the elderly lady.
She is even your aunt, Arthur’s half-sister,
the duchess of Tintagel’s daughter, upon whom that dear Uther¹⁸
had Arthur, who is now king.
Therefore, I entreat you, sir, to come to your aunt.
Make merry in my house. My servants all love you,
and I will love you as well, sir, by my faith,

as any man under God, on account of your great truth.” 2470
But Gawain responded, no, he would not join him in any way.
They accorded and kissed and commended each other
to the prince of paradise, and they parted right there
in the cold.

On his horse, Gawain was full of joy.
To the king’s city, he hurriedly went.
And the knight in emerald-green—
he went wheresoever he wanted.

18 Uther Pendragon, Arthur’s father. Uther was the second husband of Arthur’s mother, the mentioned duchess of Tintagel, usually named Igraine.

AMBROISE PARÉ, ON MONSTERS
BOOK 25: TREATING OF MONSTERS AND PRODIGIES
Translated by ANNA KŁOSOWSKA

Critical Introduction

Ambroise Paré (1510–1590) was a royal surgeon and a foremost medical authority. His book *On Monsters* sits between the medieval model of monsters as signs of God’s will and ill omens, and the Enlightenment model of monsters resulting from simple causes that can be explained through science. Here, we present the preface and first four chapters. These lay out Paré’s view that “Monsters are things that appear against the course of Nature.” By this, he means to describe offspring that differ in various ways from their parents. In this, Paré builds on a tradition that is at least as old as the writing of Saint Augustine, but rather than assuming all monsters to be the will of God and part of God’s method of teaching humans about his plan for the universe, Paré suggests non-religious causes for some. These causes range quite widely, from scientific (if inaccurate) explanations regarding the quantity of semen and shape of the uterus to theological explanations about the devil. Even when Paré relies on supernatural explanations, though, he remains very much an early scientific thinker, enumerating several distinct categories of difference from normative expectations. However, his enthusiasm for the subject also seems to get the better of him at times.

Reading Questions

Is there any resolution of the tension between the theological and the medical explanations Paré gives? We learn a bit about Paré as we read, including that he seems to own the preserved remains of some of the unusual babies he dissected. Does this change how we view him and his work?

Editorial Notes

We have cut some footnotes from the original text that did not add to the discussion and references to images that are reproduced separately. Explanatory footnotes inserted by the volume editors are enclosed in brackets. This translation uses the term “hermaphrodites” because the early modern source uses this term. It is no longer the preferred term for actual human beings whose bodies or gender identities lie between traditional notions of male and female. Intersex or trans* are now common terms.

Further Reading

- Fernel, Jean. *On the Hidden Causes of Things: Forms, Souls, and Occult Diseases in Renaissance Medicine*. Translated by John M. Forrester. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- Hamby, Wallace. *Ambroise Paré: Surgeon of the Renaissance*. St. Louis: W. H. Green, 1967.
- Paré, Ambroise. *The Collected Works of Ambroise Paré*. Translated by Thomas Johnson. Pound Ridge, NY: Milford House, 1968.
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AMBROISE PARÉ, ON MONSTERS

First published as *Les oeuvres d'Ambroise Paré, conseiller, et premier chirurgien du roy, Lyon, Chez Jean Grégoire, 1664.*
Book 25: Treating of Monsters and Prodigies

Translated by ANNA KŁOSOWSKA

By Ambroise Paré of Laval in the Maine, Counselor, and first Surgeon to the King.

Preface

Monsters are things that appear against the course of Nature (and most often, are the sign of some forthcoming misfortune), such as a child born with just one arm, another that will have two heads and other members, out of the ordinary. Prodigies are things that happen altogether against Nature, such as a woman who gives birth to a serpent, a dog, or any thing at all against Nature, as we will show below through many examples of these monsters and prodigies, which I have compiled, with images, from many authors, such as the prodigious *Histories* of Pierre Boistean and of Claude de Tesserant, of Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, Esdras the Prophet; and ancient Philosophers, such as Hippocrates, Galen, Empedocles, Aristotle, **Pliny**, Lycosthenes; and others that will be cited when appropriate. The mutilated are the blind, the one-eyed, the humpbacks, the lame, the hermaphrodites, or those who have six digits on the hand or foot, or less than five, or joined together, or too short of an arm, or too flat of a nose, such as those who have an upturned nose, or fat and upturned lips, or closed genital parts, such as, some girls, because of the hymen, or supranatural flesh, or some stains, or warts, or lumps, or other things against nature.

Chapter 1: On Causes of Monsters

There are many causes of monsters. The first is the glory of the God. The second, his ire. The third, an excessive amount of seed. The fourth, an insufficient amount. The fifth, imagination. The sixth, the narrowness or smallness of the uterus. The seventh, mother's indecent pose, such as, when pregnant, she remained too long with thighs crossed or pressed tight against her belly. The eighth, a fall or blows against the belly of a mother when pregnant with child. The ninth, hereditary or accidental illness. The tenth, rotting or corruption of semen. The eleventh, blending or mixture of semen. The twelfth, the artifice of evil door-to-door beggars. The thirteenth, Demons or Devils.

Chapter 2: Example of the Glory of God

In Saint John, we read about a man born blind who, having recovered his sight by the grace of Jesus Christ, was interrogated by the Disciples, whether his sin, or the sin of his parents, was the cause for him being thus produced blind since the day of his birth. And Jesus Christ answered them that neither he, nor his father, nor his mother have sinned, but that this was in order that God's works be exalted through him.

Chapter 3: Example of God's Ire

There are other creatures that doubly astonish us because they do not proceed from the above said causes, but from the confusion of strange species, which make nature not only monstrous, but prodigious; that is, altogether abhorrent and against nature, as are those who have the face of a dog, the head of a bird, four horns on their head, four ox feet, and torn up thighs, the head of a parrot, and two plumes on their head, and four claws, and other forms you can see by many and diverse figures, depicted in the images below. It is certain that most often, these monstrous and prodigious creatures proceed from God's judgment, which allows that fathers and mothers produce such abominations because of the disorder at copulation, where they proceed as brutal beasts, wherever their appetite guides them, without concern for the time or other laws ordered by God and Nature; as it is written in Esdras the Prophet, that women soiled by menstrual blood engender monsters. Similarly, Moses prohibits such copulation in Leviticus, chapter 16. Also, the Ancients observed by long experience that women who conceive during their flowers¹ engender children that are leprous, scurvy, gouty, scrofulous, or prone to a thousand illnesses. Moreover, the child conceived during the menstrual flux takes nourishment and growth, being in the mother's belly, from vicious, dirty, and corrupt blood. As time passes, having rooted its infection, it manifests itself and makes its malignity apparent. Some will be scurvy, others gouty, others leprous, others will

¹ ["flowers": menstruation.]

have smallpox or measles, or other infirmities of illnesses. Conclusion: it's a dirty and brutal thing to have to do with a woman while she is purging. The above said ancients thought that these prodigies often come from the will of God, to warn us of misfortunes that threaten us, of some great disorder, just as the ordinary course of Nature seems to be perverted in infelicitous offspring. Italy is sufficient proof, given the suffering it endured in the war between Florence and Pisa, which happened after an incident in Verona, in 1254, when a mare gave birth to a colt with a well-formed human head, and the remainder of a horse [...].

Another proof: Pope Julius II² provoked so many misfortunes in Italy, and conducted a war with King Louis XII in 1512, followed by a bloody battle near Ravenna; soon after, people in the same city saw the birth of a monster with one horn on its head, two wings, and a single leg, similar to that of a bird of prey; an eye at the knee joint, and partaking of both male and female nature [...].

Chapter 4: An Example of Too Great a Quantity of Seed

Hippocrates, in his "On the Generation of Monsters," says that where there is too great an abundance of matter, there will be a great number of offspring made, or a monstrous child with superfluous and useless parts,³ such as two heads, four arms, four legs, six digits on the hands and feet, or other things. Conversely, if the seed is insufficient in quantity, a member will be missing, such as: having only one hand, no arms, no foot, no head, or other missing parts. Saint Augustine says that in his time in the Orient was born a child that had two of all the parts above the stomach, and single of all the parts below. For he had two heads and four eyes, two chests and four hands, and the rest as any other man. He lived long enough. Caelius Rhodiginus wrote in the book of his *Ancient Lessons* that he saw two monsters in Italy, one male and another female, their bodies perfect and well proportioned, except the duplication of the head: the male died soon after his birth, and the female, whose portrait you see here, lived for twenty-five years, which is against the nature of monsters,

² [Julius II (1443–1513) was one of the last Popes who thought of himself as part-emperor, part-Pope. Although he held the papacy for only nine years, he actively sought to consolidate power for himself, leading to the War of the League of Cambria, which placed him at times allied with Venice and France, and at times at war with them. Eds.]

³ Chap. 8 of the *City of God*. [Note that this is a reference to *Augustine's City of God*. Eds.]

who ordinarily live hardly at all, because they grieve and are melancholy to see themselves despised by everyone; so that their life is short. However, it must be noted here that Licosthenes writes a marvellous thing here about this female monster. For, except the duplication of the head, Nature has not omitted anything there. These two heads (says he) had the same desire to drink and eat, and a similar manner of speaking, just as their affects were the same. That girl went from door to door begging for a living, and people gave to her freely, because she was such a novel, strange, and new spectacle. However, she was, in the end, chased away from the Duchy of Bavaria, because (it was said) she could spoil the fruit of pregnant women, because of the perception and the ideas that could remain in the imaginative faculty, based on the appearance of this monstrous creature.

Similarly, in the year of grace 1475, there were engendered in Italy, in the city of Verona, two girls joined by the kidneys, from the shoulder down to the buttocks. And, because their parents were poor, they were taken around many cities in Italy to collect money from the people, burning and eager to see this new spectacle of Nature. That same year, Charles Duke of Burgundy occupied the Duchy of Lorraine. A great part of Cracow was reduced to ashes by a violent fire. The Kingdom of Spain was divided between Ferdinand, the great King of Spain, and Alphonso, King of Portugal. This monster was followed by many other effects, which it seemed to have presaged.

In the year 1530, in our city of Paris, was seen a man, from whose belly another man protruded, well formed in all his members, except the head; and this man was about forty years of age. He thus carried that body in his arms. It was such a great marvel that people gathered in great throngs to see him [...].

In Piedmont, in the city of Chieri, about five miles distant from Turin, a noble Lady gave birth to a monster, on the seventeenth day of January, at eight in the evening, in the current year, 1578. His face was well proportioned in all its parts. He was monstrous in the rest of his head: five horns, similar to that of a ram, were coming out of it, arranged one against another up on the forehead, and in the back a long piece of flesh hung down the back, in the manner of a maiden's hood. Around his neck he had a double piece of flesh lying in the manner of a shirt collar, made from a contiguous strip. His fingertips were like the claws of a bird of prey, and he had knees on the backs of his thighs, at the garters. His right foot and leg were a vivid red, and the rest of his body was a smoky grey. It is said that at birth, this monster made a loud cry, which so

frightened the midwife and the whole company that they left the premises in a panic. This news having reached his highness the Prince of Piedmont, he bade him brought thither out of his desire to see him. Numerous people made diverse judgments in his presence....

The Monster [...] resembling a Medusa was found inside an egg. It had the face and visage of a man, the hair all made of little serpents, and the beard in the fashion and manner of three serpents coming out of his chin. He was found the fifteenth day of the month of March, last year, 1569, at a lawyer's named Baucheron, in Autun, in Burgundy, by a chambermaid who was breaking eggs to put them in butter, among which was this one. Which, having been broken by her, she saw this monster come out, with a human face, and serpent hair and beard, which marvellously frightened her. The white of the egg was given to a cat who instantly died. His Lordship the Baron of Sennecy, Knight of the Order,⁴ having been told of it, ordered the above said monster brought to him. He sent it to king Charles, who was in Metz at the time.

The year one thousand five hundred and forty-six, in Paris, a woman six month pregnant gave birth to a child with two heads, two arms, and four legs. I opened it and only found one heart. I keep it in my house as a monstrous thing. You could almost say it was only one child. Aristotle says that if a monster with two bodies joined together has two hearts, we can truly say that these are two men, or two women. Otherwise, if it has but one heart with two bodies, it is only one man, or one woman. For, if the heart, which is the source of life, is single, it follows that there can only be one life. And, if there is only one life, there is only one soul; as it can be seen, for example, in chapter 4, above. Conversely, when there are two hearts, the diversity of affects can be seen, as in these two girls joined by the front, whose portrait can be seen above. And, the cause of this monster could have been the default of a sufficient quantity of matter. Or, the fault of the uterus, which was too small: Nature, who wanted to create two children, finding it too narrow, found itself at a loss, so that the seed, being constrained and squeezed, ended up coagulating in one globe, of which two children were formed, thus joined and united together.

In the year one thousand five hundred sixty-nine, a woman of Tours gave birth to two twin children with only one head, who were embracing one another, and they were

given to me,⁵ and anatomized by master René Ciret, Master Barber and Surgeon, whose renown is widespread enough in the whole country of Touraine, and to whom I need to give no other praise.

Sebastian Münster writes that he saw two girls in the year one thousand four hundred ninety-five, in the month of September, near Worms,⁶ in the village named Bristant, who had two complete and well formed bodies, but their fronts were joined together, and it was impossible to separate them by human arts, and their noses almost touched. And they lived until ten, and then one died, and was taken away and separated from the other. And the one who was left alive died soon after, when the dead sister was separated from her, from the wounds that she sustained in the course of the separation [...].

In the year one thousand five hundred seventy, the twentieth day of the month of July, in Paris, on Gravilliers street, at the sign of the Bell, were born two children thus depicted, recognized by the Surgeons as male and female. And they were baptized at Saint Nicolas in the Fields, and named Louis and Louise. The father was named Pierre Germain, called Petit Dieu, mason's helper of his trade, and the mother, Mathée Pernelle.

On Monday, the tenth day of July, year one thousand five hundred seventy two, in the town of Ponts-de-Cé, near Angers, were born two female children, who lived for half an hour and received baptism. And they were well formed, except one left hand only had four fingers. And they were conjoined together in their front part, that is, from the chin to the navel; and they only had one navel and one heart, and the liver divided into four lobes.

Caelius Rhodiginus, in chapter three, book twenty-four of his *Ancient Lessons*, writes that a monster was produced in Ferrara, in Italy, in the year of grace one thousand four hundred, the nineteenth day of March. When it was born, it was as big and well formed as a child at full four months. It had both the female and the male sex and two heads, one male, and the other, female. That year was completely full of prodigies, and of miseries that followed them.

An ox with two perfect heads, joined together by the occiput [the back of the skull] was born in Milan.

⁴ [This is a reference to the Order of Malta, which grew out of the Knights Hospitaller, an order of religious knights who cared for and protected the Christian pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem. Eds.]

⁵ These two last monsters are in the possession of the Author.

⁶ ["Worms": a city in Germany that played an important part in Reformation Christianity. Eds.]

On the twenty-sixth day of December, in many places in Germany, a star was visible during the day within the body of the Moon, from which came out two stars the following day, producing very bright light.

On January fifth, a monstrous child was born in Germany, with two heads turned towards the back, whose two faces, opposite one another, looked at each other with a fierce and menacing countenance.

A comet appeared, and the Sun suffered a great eclipse on April seventh.

There were great and cruel wars that year.

There were numerous earthquakes, in Germany and elsewhere, with a great deal of ruins.

The Cathedral Church of Prague, the capital city of Bohemia, and the Royal Palace, were completely burned.

The principal participants of the revolt of Gand were executed by the order of Charles V.

The Summer was very hot and dry, with a great shortage of grass, legumes, and other necessities. All these misfortunes, and many others that arrived that year, seem to have been predicted by these monsters. Just as in the perfect composition of the individual of every animal, such forms are monstrous, extraordinary, and horrible to see; so these accidents, similarly, happen to the States, Cities and Republics, that are the victim of such afflictions.

Iovinianus Pontanus writes that in the year one thousand five hundred and twenty-nine, on January ninth, in Germany, a male child was seen with four arms and four legs, of whom here is the portrait. The extraordinarily rainy summer caused the loss of all earthly goods.

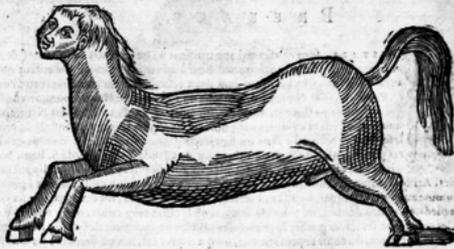
The same year that the Great King François made peace with the Swiss, there was born in Germany a monster with a head in the middle of its belly; it lived until manhood. That head took in food, just like the other.

On the last day of February one thousand five hundred seventy two, in the parish of Viabam, on the road from Paris to Chartres, in a place called Little Bordes, a woman named Cypriane Girande, the wife of Jacques Marchand, a farmer, gave birth to this monster, who lived until the Sunday following.

In the year one thousand five hundred and seventy two, on the day after Easter, in Metz, in Lorraine, in the tavern of the Holy Spirit, a sow gave birth to a pig with eight legs, four ears, the head of a real dog, and with the back part of the body separated up to the stomach, and from the stomach up joined as one, with two tongues in the snout. And he had four big teeth, that is, on the top as well as the bottom, on each side. Its genitalia were poorly marked, so that you couldn't tell if they were male or female; the two lower bodies each only had one conduit under the tail. Its figure is shown here by this portrait, which has recently been sent to me by Sir Bourgeois, Doctor of Medicine, in which he was well experienced, a man of sound knowledge, living in the city of Metz.

qu'ils font en la copulation, comme bestes brutes, où leur appetit les guide, sans respecter le temps ou autres loix ordonnées de Dieu & de Nature, comme il est écrit en Eüdras le Prophete, que les femmes fouillées de sang menstruel engendrent des monstres. Pareillement Moyse defend telle conuention au Levitique chapitre 15. Aussi les anciens ont obserué par longues experiences, que la femme qui aura conçu durant ses fleurs, engendra enfans lepreux, tigneux, gouteux, cirouelleux, ou suiets à mille maladies: d'autant que l'enfant conceu durant le flux menstruel, prend nourriture & accroissement estant au ventre de la mere d'un sang vicieux, sale & corrompu, lequel avec le temps ayant enraciné son infection, se manifeste, & fait apparoître sa malignité: aucuns steront tigneux, autres gouteux, autres lepreux, autres auront la pierre vesicale ou rougeolle, & autres inhumitez de maladies. Conclusion, c'est vne chose sale & brutale d'auoir affaire à vne femme pendant qu'elle se purge. Les dits anciens estimoient tels prodiges venir souuent de la pure voloné de Dieu, pour nous aduertir des malheurs dont nous sommes menacez de quelque grand deffordre, ainsi que le cours ordinaire de Nature sembloit estre peruertuy en vne mal-heureuse engance. L'Italie en fit preuue assez suffisante, pour les trauaux qu'elle endura en la guerre qui fut entre les Florentins & les Pisans, apres auoir veu à Veronne l'an 1544, vne iument qui pouliu vn poulin qui auoit vne teste d'homme bien formée, & le reste d'un cheual, comme tu vois par cete figure.

Figure d'un poulain ayant la teste d'homme.



Portrait d'un monstre merueilleux.



Autre preuue. Du temps que le Pape Iules II. suscita tant de mal-heurs en Italie, & qu'il eust la guerre contre le Roy Louys XII. 1512. laquelle fut suivie d'une sanglante bataille donnée près de Ra-uenne, peu de temps apres on veid naistre en la meisme ville vn monstre ayant vne corne à la teste, deux ailles, & vn seul Pied, semblable à celui d'un oyseau de proie: à la jointure du genouil vn oeil: & participant de la nature de male & de femelle, comme tu vois par ce pourtrait.

Figure 5a. Figure of a Foal with a Human Head; Portrait of a Marvelous Monster. First published in Ambroise Paré, *Les oeuvres d'Ambroise Paré, conseiller, et premier chirurgien du roy* (Lyon, Chez Jean Grégoire, 1664).

Exemple de trop grande quantité de semence.

CHAPITRE IV.



PROCRATE sur la Generation des Monstres, dit, que s'il y a trop grande abondance de matiere, il se fera grand nombre de portées, ou vn enfant monstrueux, ayant des parties superflues & inutiles; comme deux testes, quatre bras, quatre jambes, six doigts es mains & pieds, ou autres choses au contraire, si la semence defaut en quantité, quelque membre defaüdra, comme n'auoir qu'une main, point de bras, ou de pied, ou de teste, ou autres parties defaillantes. Saint Augustin dit, que de son temps il naquit en Orient vn enfant qui auoit le ventre en haut, toutes les parties superieures doubles, & les inferieures simples: car il auoit deux testes & quatre yeux, deux poitrines & quatre mains, & le reste comme vn autre homme, lequel vesquit assez long-temps. Calus Rhodignus à écrit au liu. de ses Antiques le voyeu, auoir veu en Italie deux monstres, l'vn male & l'autre femelle, leurs corps bien parfaits & proportionnez, resté la duplication de la teste: le male mourut peu de iours apres sa natiuité, & la femelle, de laquelle tu vois icy le pourtrait, vesquit vingt-cinq ans apres, qui est contre le naturel des monstres, lesquels ordinairement ne viuent gueres, pour ce qu'ils se deplaisent, & melancholient de le voir sinfen approbre de tout le monde, si bien que leur vie est briefue. Or il faut icy noter que Licollhene écrivit vne chose merueilleuse de ce monstre femelle: car referuée la duplication de la teste, Nature n'y auoit rien comme estoient mesmes toutes les affections. Cete fille alloit d'huïs en huïs chercher la vie, & luy donnoit-on volontiers pour la nouveauté d'un si estrange & nouveau spectacle: toutesfois elle fut deüchassée à la longue de la Duché de Bauiere, parce (disoit-on) qu'elle pourroit galler le fruit des femmes grosses, pour l'aprehension, & idées qui pourroient demeurer en la vertu imaginative, de la figure de cete creature au si monstrueuse.

Figure de deux filles gemelles, jointes & vnies par les parties posterieures.



Figure d'un homme, du ventre duquel sortoit vn autre homme.



Figure 5b. Example of Too Large a Quantity of Semen; Figure of two twin girls, joined together by the posterior parts; Figure of a man from whose belly another man issued. First published in Ambroise Paré, *Les oeuvres d'Ambroise Paré, conseiller, et premier chirurgien du roy* (Lyon, Chez Jean Grégoire, 1664).

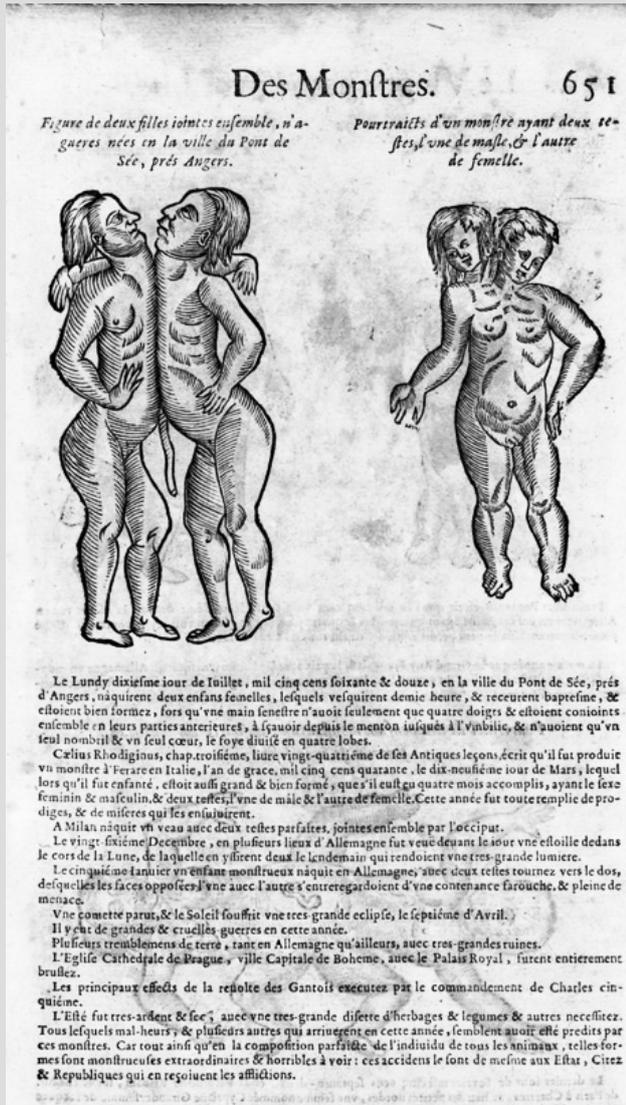


Figure 5c. Figures of two girls joined together by their anterior parts and of a monster having two heads, one male and the other female. First published in Ambroise Paré, *Les oeuvres d'Ambroise Paré, conseiller, et premier chirurgien du roy* (Lyon, Chez Jean Grégoire, 1664).

RENAISSANCE FIGURES OF MONSTERS

FIRST PUBLISHED IN AMBROISE PARÉ, *LES OEUVRES D'AMBROISE PARÉ, CONSEILLER, ET PREMIER CHIRURGIEN DU ROY* (LYON, CHEZ JEAN GRÉGOIRE, 1664).

Critical Introduction

The images that accompany Ambroise Paré's *On Monsters* present a range of monster types, for which the text gives a variety of explanations. Paré claims that the foal with the human face foretold a war between Florence and Pisa, and that the horned, winged, one-footed "hermaphroditic" monster arrived in concert with a bloody battle near Ravenna. On the other hand, he provides a rational scientific account of the origin of the two-headed girl, conjoined twins, and man with another man emerging from his belly. Paré, relying on the ancient doctor Hippocrates, informs us that these figures are all the result of too much semen and that their excesses are the result of this initial excess. The two-headed girl, we learn, was well-proportioned and lived for twenty-five years, making a living begging door to door in Bavaria before being driven out because monsters may ruin the fetuses of pregnant women. The woodcut illustrations are simple in technique, but the figures are strange and expressive. The so-called Monster of Ravenna is one of the most puzzling. It is a wild amalgam of human and bird, sciopod and unicorn, cyclops and (the text tells us, though the image demures) an inter-sexed person. The figure bears a sorrowful expression, as if mourning the losses of the dreadful battle that seems to have called it into existence, or as if suffering due to own monstrosity. Paré asserts that most monsters die young because they are scorned and loathed by all who see them. The conjoined figures are similarly curious. Both the two-headed girl and the man with a man emerging from his belly stand in the classical *contrapposto* post, in which the body's weight is placed on one leg and the other bends casually. This places these figures within classical conventions of beauty and balance.

Viewing Questions

Why has the artist here relied on classical tropes for beauty and balance? How does this influence our reception of the figures? The text moves between divine and biological explanations for the figures; is this reflected in the images?

ASM

EDMUND SPENSER, *THE FAERIE QUEENE* — Selections

Critical Introduction

Edmund Spenser (1552?–1599) was a prolific writer in England during the Elizabethan period with an output and reputation to rival John Milton. Whereas Spenser was a master of the pastoral, it is his lengthy, allegorical romance, *The Faerie Queene*, that has made a lasting impact on later readers. Written in the 1590s, the poem celebrates Elizabeth I (Gloriana, the Faerie Queene in the poem) and the Tudor family line that would ultimately be extinguished with her death in 1603. Mimicking medieval romances with daring knights, damsels in distress, fantastic events, and even archaic language, Spenser tries to evoke Britain's mythologized past as a metaphor for its present—in much the same way that west-erns spoke to the American present in the 1950s and 1960s.

The section reproduced here comes from Book I, the most popular of the six, and details the initial adventures of Redcrosse Knight and Una. Redcrosse has embarked upon a quest to both rid Una's family of a dragon and prove himself as a knight-errant. Almost immediately, however, they run into trouble and get lost in a dark wood where they meet Error. Since the text is an allegory, every character in it is a personification: Redcrosse is generally thought to represent England and Una to represent the "True Church" (Church of England). It is then not difficult to interpret their struggle with Error, in which false texts are spewed out and a serpentine female attempts to ensnare Redcrosse. England, according to Spenser, is in grave danger when it strays from the path and does not heed warning signs. That Redcrosse defeats Error is intended to be heartening, but it is not an easy battle and serves as a lesson to the young knight/country yearning to prove himself/itself.

Reading Questions

Why is Error female? Though not reproduced here, Redcrosse has a number of encounters with male antagonists (the wizard Archimago and giants, for example), so we know that there are male monsters in the narrative. Is there any special significance to the personification of error as female? Spenser clearly does not want his audience to empathize with Error, but consider the story from that character's point of view: Who is the threat? Who initiates contact? Who invades a character's sphere of influence? Compare your answers to these questions with other monsters of literature or film and see if the relationship holds true.

Editorial Notes

We have taken the liberty to modernize Spenser's archaic and often difficult verse. Where it does not affect the rhyme, we have regularized spellings. Because of the metre, however, much of Spenser's grammar (he tends to place objects and prepositional phrases in front of a sentence's main verb) must remain. Where he is forced to contract words to fit the metre, the omitted letters are signified by an apostrophe. Where sections are omitted, we have inserted summaries in italics.

Further Reading

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THE FAERIE QUEENE

Selections

EDMUND SPENSER

Book I, Canto I

**The Patron of true Holiness
foul Error does defeat;
Hypocrisy him to entrap
does to his home entreat.**

- I A gentle Knight was pricking on the plain,
Clad in mighty arms and silver shield,
Wherein old dents of deep wounds did remain,
The cruel marks of many a bloody field;
Yet arms till that time did he never wield:
His angry steed did chide his foaming bit,
As much disdain to the curb to yield:
Full jolly knight he seemed and faire did sit,
As one for knightly jousts and fierce encounters fit.
- II And on his breast a bloody Cross he bore, 10
The dear remembrance of his dying Lord,
For whose sweet sake that glorious badge he wore,
And dead as living ever him adored:
Upon his shield the like was also scored,
For sovereign hope, which in his help he had:
Right faithful true he was in deed and word,
But of his cheer¹ did seem too solemn sad;
Yet nothing did he dread, but ever was ydrad.²
- III Upon a great adventure he was bound, 20
That greatest Gloriana³ to him gave,
That greatest Glorious Queen of Faerie land,
To win him worship, and her grace to have,
Which of all earthly things he most did crave;
And ever as he rode, his heart did yearn
To prove his puissance in battle brave
Upon his foe, and his new force to learn;
Upon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stern.
- IV A lovely Lady rode him fair beside, 30
Upon a lowly Ass more white than snow,
Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide
Under a veil, that wimpled⁴ was full low,
- V And over all a black stole⁵ she did throw,
As one that inly mourned: so was she sad,
And heavy sat upon her palfrey slow;
Seemed in heart some hidden care she had,
And by her in a line a milk white lamb she lad.
- V So pure and innocent, as that same lamb,
She was in life and every virtuous lore,
And by descent from Royal lineage came
Of ancient Kings and Queens, that had of yore 40
Their sceptres stretched from East to Western shore,
And all the world in their subjection held;
Till that infernal fiend with foul uproar
Wasted all their land, and them expelled:
Whom to avenge, she had this Knight from far compelled.
- VI Behind her far away a Dwarf did lag,
That lazy seemed in being ever last,
Or wearied with bearing of her bag
Of needments⁶ at his back. Thus as they passed,
The day with clouds was sudden overcast, 50
And angry Jove a hideous storm of rain
Did pour into his Lemans lap⁷ so fast,
That every wight⁸ to shroud it did constrain,
And this fair couple also to shroud themselves were fain.⁹
- VII Enforced to seek some cover nigh at hand,
A shady grove not far away they spied,
That promised aid the tempest to withstand:
Whose lofty trees clad with summer's pride
Did spread so broad, that heaven's light did hide, 60
Not pierceable with power of any star:
And all within were paths and allies wide,
With footing worn, and leading inward far:
Fair harbour that them seems; so in they entered arre. 63

1 "cheer": temper, personality

2 "ydrad": afeared

3 Gloriana is the marvellous character representing Elizabeth I.

4 "wimpled": a wimple was a cloth headdress worn by women in

the Middle Ages and now a part of some nun's habits (though it is becoming increasingly rare); it covered both the head and the neck.

5 "stole": a sort of shawl worn over the shoulders, though Spenser may also be alluding to its Christian function as part of a priest's vestments.

6 "needments": supplies

7 "Lemans lap": the lap of the Earth

8 "wight": person or being

9 "were fain": were eager

The two stanzas omitted describe the glade and the trees within it.

- X Led with delight, they thus beguile the way, 82
 Until the blustering storm is overblown;
 When seeking to return, whence they did stray,
 They cannot find that path, which first was shown,
 But wander to and fro in ways unknown,
 Furthest from end then, when they nearest ween,¹⁰
 That makes them doubt their wits be not their own:
 So many paths, so many turnings seen,
 That which of them to take, in diverse doubt they been. 90
- XI At last resolving forward still to fare,
 Till that some end they find or in or out,
 That path they take, that beaten seemed most bare,
 And like to lead the labyrinth about;
 Which when by tract¹¹ they hunted had throughout,
 At length it brought them to a hollow cave
 Amid the thickest woods. The Champion stout
 Eftsoones¹² dismounted from his courser brave,
 And to the Dwarf awhile his needless spear he gave.
- XII "Be well aware," said then that Lady mild, 100
 Lest sudden mischief you too rash provoke:
 The danger hid, the place unknown and wild,
 Breeds dreadful doubts: Often fire is without smoke
 And peril without show: therefore your stroke,
 Sir Knight, withhold, till further trial made."
 "Ah Lady," said he, "shame were to revoke
 The forward footing for an hidden shade:
 Virtue gives herself light, through darkness for to wade."
- XIII "Yea but," said she, "the peril of this place
 I better know than you, though now too late 110
 To wish you back return with foul disgrace,
 Yet wisdom warns, while foot is in the gate,
 To stay the step, ere forced to retreat.
 This is the wandering wood, this Errour's den,
 A monster vile, whom God and man does hate:
 Therefore I say beware." "Fly, fly," said then
 The fearful Dwarf, "this is no place for living men."
- XIV But full of fire and greedy hardiment,¹³
 The youthful knight could not for ought be stayed,
 But forth unto the darksome hole he went, 120
 And looked in: his glittering armour made

¹⁰ "ween": think, seek, want

¹¹ "by tract": by tracks

¹² "Eftsoones": immediately

¹³ "hardiment": hardiness, courage

A little glooming light, much like a shade,
 By which he saw the ugly monster plain,
 Half like a serpent horribly displayed,
 But th'other half did woman's shape retain,
 Most loathsome, filthy, foul, and full of vile disdain.

- XV And as she lay upon the dirty ground,
 Her huge long tail her den all overspread,
 Yet was in knots and many coils upwound,
 Pointed with mortal sting. Of her there bred 130
 A thousand young ones, which she daily fed,
 Sucking upon her poisonous dugs,¹⁴ each one
 Of sundry shapes, yet all ill-favoured:
 Soon as that uncouth light upon them shone,
 Into her mouth they crept, and sudden all were gone.
- XVI Their dam¹⁵ upstart, out of her den afraid,
 And rushed forth, hurling her hideous tail
 About her cursed head, whose folds displayed
 Were stretched now forth at length without entrails.¹⁶
 She looked about, and seeing one in mail 140
 Armed to point,¹⁷ sought back to turn again;
 For light she hated as the deadly bale,
 Ay wont¹⁸ in desert darkness to remain,
 Where plain none might her see, nor she see any plain.
- XVII Which when the valiant Elf¹⁹ perceived, he leapt
 As Lion fierce upon the flying prey,
 And with his trenchant blade her boldly kept
 From turning back and forced her to stay:
 Therewith enraged, she loudly 'gan to bray,
 And turning fierce, her speckled tail advanced, 150
 Threat'ning her angry sting, him to dismay:
 Who, nought aghast, his mighty hand enhaunst:²⁰
 The stroke down from her head unto her shoulder glanced.
- XVIII Much daunted with that dint,²¹ her sense was dazed,
 Yet kindling rage, herself she gathered round,
 And all at once her beastly body raised

¹⁴ "dugs": teats, udder

¹⁵ "dam": mother, used in reference to animals only

¹⁶ "entraile": looping, coiling

¹⁷ "armed to point": thoroughly equipped, as we might say "armed to the teeth"

¹⁸ "wont": used to, in the habit of

¹⁹ "Elfe": Redcrosse is a knight in the fairyland, and *elf* and *fairy* were used interchangeably in Spenser's time.

²⁰ "enhaunst": raised

²¹ "dint": stroke, blow

- With doubled forces high above the ground:
 Though wrapping up her wreathed stern²² around,
 Leapt fierce upon his shield, and her huge train
 All suddenly about his body wound,
 That hand or foot to stir he strove in vain: 160
 God help the man so wrapped in Errour's endless train.
- XIX** His Lady, sad to see his sore constraint,
 Cried out, "Now, now, Sir knight, show what you be,
 Add faith unto your force, and be not faint:
 Strangle her, else she sure will strangle thee."
 That when he heard, in great perplexity,
 His gall did grate for grief and high disdain,
 And knitting all his force got one hand free,
 Wherewith he gripped her gorge with so great pain, 170
 That soon to loose her wicked bands did her constrain.
- XX** Therewith she spewed out of her filthy maw
 A flood of poison, horrible and black,
 Full of great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw,
 Which stunk so vilely, that it forced him slack
 His grasping hold, and from her turn him back:
 Her vomit full of books and papers was,
 With loathly frogs and toads, which eyes did lack,
 And creeping sought way in the weedy grass: 180
 Her filthy vomit all the place defiled has.
- XXI** As when old father Nilus²³ 'gins to swell
 With timely pride above the Egyptian vale,
 His fatty²⁴ waves do fertile slime out-well,
 And overflow each plain and lowly dale:
 But when his later spring 'gins to avail,
 Huge heaps of mud he leaves, wherein there breed
 Ten thousand kinds of creatures, partly male
 And partly female of his fruitful seed;
 Such ugly monstrous shapes elsewhere may no man read.²⁵
- XXII** The same so sore annoyed has the knight, 190
 That well nigh choked with the deadly stink,
 His forces fail, ne²⁶ can no longer fight.
 Whose courage when the fiend perceived to shrink,
 She poured forth out of her hellish sink
- Her fruitful cursed spawn of serpents small,
 Deformed monsters, foul, and black as ink,
 With swarming all about his legs did crawl,
 And him encumbered sore, but could not hurt at all.
- XXIII** As gentle Shepherd in sweet eventide,
 When ruddy Phoebus 'gins to wane in west, 200
 High on a hill, his flock to veiwen wide,
 Marks which do bite their hasty supper best,
 A cloud of cumbrous gnats do him molest,
 All striving to infix their feeble stings,
 That from their 'noyance he nowhere can rest,
 But with his clownish hands their tender wings
 He brusheth oft, and oft does mar their murmurings.
- XXIV** Thus ill bestedd,²⁷ and fearful more of shame,
 Than of the certain peril he stood in,
 Half furious unto his foe he came, 210
 Resolved in mind all suddenly to win,
 Or soon to lose, before he once would lin²⁸
 And stroke at her with more than manly force,
 That from her body full of filthy sin
 He cut her hateful head without remorse;
 A stream of coal-black blood forth gushed from her corpse.
- XXV** Her scattered brood, soon as their Parent dear
 They saw so rudely falling to the ground,
 Groaning full deadly, all with troublous fear,
 Gathered themselves about her body round, 220
 Seeking their wonted entrance to have found
 At her wide mouth: but being there withstood
 They flocked all about her bleeding wound,
 And sucked up their dying mother's blood,
 Making her death their life, and so her hurt their good.
- XXVI** That detestable sight him much amazed,
 To see the unkindly Imps, of heaven accursed,
 Devour their dam; on whom while so he gazed,
 Having all satisfied their bloody thirst, 230
 Their bellies swollen he saw with fullness burst,
 And bowels gushing forth: well worthy end
 Of such as drunk her life, the which them nursed;
 Now needeth him no longer labour spend,
 His foes have slain themselves,
 with whom he should contend.

²² "stern": backside

²³ "Nilus": a personified version of the Nile, using the Roman tradition of personifying rivers

²⁴ "fatty": rich

²⁵ "read": view, see, interpret

²⁶ "ne can no longer fight": nor can he fight any longer; Spenser is following the Middle English tradition of using double negatives to intensify an idea.

²⁷ "ill bestedd": in a bad spot

²⁸ "lin": quit

XXVII His Lady seeing all that chanced, from far
 Approached in haste to greet his victory,
 And said, "Fair knight, born under happy star,
 Who see your vanquished foes before you lie:
 Well worthy be you of that Armour,
 Wherein you have great glory won this day, 240
 And proved your strength on a strong enemy,
 Your first adventure: many such I pray,
 And henceforth ever wish that like succeed it may."

XXVIII Then mounted he upon his Steed again,
 And with the Lady backward sought to wend;
 That path he kept which beaten was most plain,
 Ne ever would to any byway bend,
 But still did follow one unto the end,
 The which at last out of the wood them brought.
 So forward on his way (with God to friend) 250
 He passed forth and new adventure sought;
 Long way he travelled, before he heard of ought.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *THE TEMPEST* — Selections

Critical Introduction

Written later in William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) life, *The Tempest* is one of his most famous "problem plays." Although it contains many elements of a revenge tragedy such as *Hamlet*, the murders that mark this sort of drama are wholly absent, and the protagonist Prospero ends the play quite pleased with his situation. On the other hand, it cannot be considered a comedy in the vein of *Much Ado About Nothing* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream* since it lacks the commonplace of mistaken identity and since it deals with serious subject matter. Part of that serious subject matter is the status and fate of Caliban, the malformed son of Satan and an African witch, who ends the play chastened and accepting of his life of servitude. With the advent of postcolonial criticism and theory, we have begun to question what Shakespeare assumed. Redefining the relationship between Prospero and Caliban as that of colonizer/colonized makes Caliban a more sympathetic figure. Further, the play relies on relatively new information coming back to Europe about those living in the Americas: Setebos, the god of Caliban's mother, was described by Antonio Pigafetta, a Venetian scholar who provides accounts of Patagonian peoples he encountered when sailing with Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan. Caliban's name itself is a linguistic variation of *cannibal*, which was a variation of the Carib; this tribe, for whom the Caribbean is named, was frequently accused of cannibalism by European explorers. Rethinking Caliban's status and exploring Shakespeare's use of the New World reveals the cultural material that comprises Caliban as a monster. The more obvious elements of his monstrousness, such as physical deformity and connection to Satan, may actually cloud a more complex issue.

Reading Questions

As you read, we invite you to consider the cultural elements of monster-making. Is Caliban a monster because he is a malformed spawn of Satan or is he a malformed spawn of Satan because he is based on a Western European understanding of so-called "primitive" people and is, therefore, assumed to be inherently inferior to white Europeans?

Editorial Notes

The following excerpts are based on the First Folio (1623). Spelling, capitalization, and punctuation have been normalized and modernized throughout. Where it does not affect the meter, contractions have been normalized to make for easier reading. Where sections are omitted, we have inserted summaries in italics.

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THE TEMPEST

Selections

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

1.1–1.2: *In the preceding action, the audience is introduced to Alonso, Sebastian, Ferdinand, Antonio, and Gonzalo, noblemen on a sea voyage back to Italy from Tunis. The ship encounters a storm and seems to be lost. We are then introduced to Prospero, his daughter Miranda, and his spirit-servant Ariel who are all residents of an island nearby the distressed noblemen. After watching the shipwreck, Prospero explains to Miranda that he used to be the Duke of Milan but had his title stolen from him by his brother, Antonio, who was aided by King Alonso. To legitimate his claim, Antonio put them to sea with little more than some food, clothing, and some of Prospero's books. The audience further learns that Ariel—on orders from Prospero—caused the storm and shipwreck to bring Prospero's enemies under his control. Ariel then reminds Prospero that he promised to free the spirit a year earlier for faithful service, angering his master.*

1.2

Prospero

Dost thou forget
From what a torment I did free thee?

Ariel

No.

Prospero

Thou dost and think it much to tread the ooze
Of the salt deep,
To run upon the sharp wind of the North,
To do me business in the veins of the earth
When it is baked with frost.

Ariel

I do not Sir.

Prospero

Thou liest, malignant thing: hast thou forgot
The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy
Was grown into a hoop? Hast thou forgot her?

Ariel

No Sir.

Prospero

Thou hast: where was she born? Speak. Tell me.

Ariel

Sir, in Argier.¹

Prospero

Oh, was she so: I must

Once in a month recount what thou hast been,
Which thou forget'st. This damned witch Sycorax
For mischiefs manifold and sorceries terrible
To enter humane hearing, from Argier
Thou know'st was banished: for one thing she did
They would not take her life. Is not this true?

Ariel

Aye, sir.

Prospero

This blue-eyed hag, was hither brought with child
And here was left by the sailors; thou, my slave,
As thou report'st thyself, was then her servant.
And for thou wast a spirit too delicate²
To act her earthy and abhorred commands,
Refusing her grand hests, she did confine thee³
By help of her more potent ministers
And in her most unmittigable rage,
Into a cloven pine, within which rift
Imprisoned, thou didst painfully remain
A dozen years. Within which space, she died
And left thee there where thou didst vent thy groans
As fast as mill wheels strike. Then was this island
(Save for the son, that she⁴ did litter here,
A freckled whelp, hag-born) not honoured with
A human shape.

Ariel

Yes, Caliban, her son.

Prospero

Dull thing, I say so: he, that Caliban
Whom now I keep in service. Thou best know'st

1 "Argier": Algiers, a city on the northern coast of Africa. At the time Shakespeare wrote, there was much conflict between Spain and the Ottoman Empire over this coastal area. It was also closely associated with Barbary pirates.

2 "And for thou wast...": And because you were...

3 "hests": commands

4 The First Folio gives "he," though the referent is clearly Sycorax.

To name the bigger light and how the less
That burn by day and night, and then I loved thee
And showed thee all the qualities o' the isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits—barren place and fertile.
Cursed be I that did so. All the charms
Of Sycorax—toads, beetles, bats—light on you.
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king. And here you sty me
In this hard rock while you do keep from me
The rest of the island.

Prospero

Thou most lying slave,
Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have used thee
(Filt' as thou art) with humane care and lodged thee
In mine own cell till thou didst seek to violate
The honour of my child.

Caliban

Oh ho, oh ho, would't had been done!
Thou didst prevent me, I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.¹¹

Miranda

Abhorred slave,
Which any print of goodness wilt not take,¹²
Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other. When thou didst not (savage)
Know thine own meaning but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes
With words that made them known. But thy vile race
(Though thou didst learn) had that in't which good natures
Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
Deservedly confined into this rock, who hadst
Deserved more than a prison.

Caliban

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse: the red plague rid you
For learning me your language.

Prospero

Hag-seed, hence!
Fetch us in fuel. And be quick, thou'rt best,

¹¹ "Thou didst prevent me, I had peopled else this isle with Calibans": If you had not prevented me, I would have populated the rest of this island with my offspring.

¹² "Abhorred slave, which any print of goodness wilt not take": Repugnant slave, who will not receive any mark of goodness. Goodness here is probably meant by Prospero to be synonymous with "civilization."

To answer other business. Shrug'st thou, malice?
If thou neglects or does unwillingly
What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps,
Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar,
That beasts shall tremble at thy din.

Caliban

No, prithee.¹³

I must obey. His art is of such power,
It would control my dam's god Setebos¹⁴
And make a vassal of him.

Prospero

So, slave, hence. *Exit Caliban*

1.2-2.1: In the intervening action, Ariel has drawn Ferdinand, King Alonso's son, toward Prospero's and Miranda's dwelling. Miranda, having never seen man other than Prospero and Caliban, immediately falls in love with Ferdinand, who is also taken with her. Although this is part of his master plan, Prospero feigns anger with Ferdinand to slow the progress of the courtship. The scene then shifts to the Italian nobles on another part of the island. King Alonso is despondent over what he believes is Ferdinand's death. Gonzalo tries and fails to comfort him, while Sebastian, Alonso's brother, blames the king for marrying off his daughter to an African. Ariel charms all to sleep except Sebastian and Antonio, and Antonio convinces Sebastian to kill his brother and claim the throne himself. Before they can put their plan into action, Ariel awakens the sleepers.

2.2

Enter Caliban, with a burden of wood, (a noise of thunder heard.)

Caliban

All the infections that the sun sucks up
From bogs, fens, flats, on Prospero fall and make him
By inch-meal a disease. His spirits hear me,
And yet I needs must curse. But they'll nor pinch,
Fright me with urchin-shows, pitch me i'th mire,
Nor lead me like a fire-brand, in the dark

¹³ "prithee": I pray thee, I beg you. In early modern usage—and especially with respect to the metrical demands placed on Shakespeare—this term is contracted many different ways. In this text, all contractions have been regularized to "prithee," such a common form that the *OED* gives it its own entry.

¹⁴ Setebos: Also known as Setteboth, this was a Patagonian god first reported by Antonio Pigafetta, who wrote of his travels with Ferdinand Magellan (translated into English as *The First Voyage Around the World, by Magellan* in 1874). Pigafetta characterizes Setebos as the most powerful demon associated with Patagonian death rituals.

Out of my way, unless he bid them. But
 For every trifle, are they set upon me,
 Sometime like apes that mow¹⁵ and chatter at me
 And after bite me, then like hedgehogs which
 Lie tumbling in my barefoot way and mount
 Their pricks at my footfall. Sometime am I
 All wound with adders, who with cloven tongues
 Do hiss me into madness. Lo, now lo,

Enter Trinculo.

Here comes a spirit of his—and to torment me
 For bringing wood in slowly. I'll fall flat.
 Perchance he will not mind me.

Trinculo

Here's neither bush nor shrub to bear off any weather at
 all, and another storm brewing: I hear it sing ith' wind.
 Yond same black cloud, yond huge one, looks like a foul
 bumbard¹⁶ that would shed his liquor. If it should thunder,
 as it did before, I know not where to hide my head: yond
 same cloud cannot choose but fall by pailfuls. What have
 we here, a man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish, he smells
 like a fish—a very ancient and fish-like smell: a kind
 of not-of-the-newest poor-John: a strange fish.¹⁷ Were
 I in England now (as once I was) and had but this fish
 painted, not a holiday-fool there but would give a piece of
 silver. There, would this monster make a man: any strange
 beast there makes a man. When they will not give a doit¹⁸
 to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a
 dead Indian. Legged like a man, and his fins like arms.
 Warm, o' my troth.¹⁹ I do now let loose my opinion, hold
 it no longer: this is no fish, but an islander that hath lately
 suffered by a thunderbolt. Alas, the storm is come again.
 My best way is to creep under his gabardine:²⁰ there is no
 other shelter here about. Misery acquaints a man with
 strange bedfellows. I will here shroud till the dregs of the
 storm be past.

15 "mow": to make a face or grimace at

16 "bumbard": originally in reference to a bee, in Shakespeare's
 time the word came to be applied to a drooling, babbling fool.

17 "a kind of not-of-the-newest poor-John": a stale fish, which has
 possibly gone bad; a "poor-John" was a whitefish that had been salted
 and dried in order to preserve it for food.

18 "doit": A Dutch coin worth half an English farthing, here used
 figuratively for a very small sum.

19 "o' my troth": literally "of my truth," in Shakespeare's time, the
 phrase was a mild oath meaning "by my faith."

20 "gabardine": a loose frock, often made of homespun material

Enter Stephano singing.

Stephano

I shall no more to sea, to sea, here shall I die ashore.
 This is a very scurvy tune to sing at a man's
 Funeral. Well, here's my comfort.

Drinks. Sings.

The master, the swabber, the boatswain, and I,
 The gunner and his mate
 Loved Mall, Meg, and Marrian, and Margerie,
 But none of us cared for Kate.
 For she had a tongue with a tang,
 Would cry to a sailor go hang.
 She loved not the savor of tar nor of pitch,
 Yet a tailor might scratch her where ere she did itch.
 Then to sea boys, and let her go hang.

This is a scurvy tune, too. But here's my comfort. *Drinks.*

Caliban

Do not torment me. Oh!

Stephano

What's the matter? Have we devils here? Do you put
 tricks upon us with savages and men of India? Ha? I have
 not escaped drowning to be afeard now of your four legs,
 for it hath been said: "as proper a man as ever went on
 four legs, cannot make him give ground," and it shall be
 said so again while Stephano breathes at the nostrils.

Caliban

The spirit torments me. Oh!

Stephano

This is some monster of the isle with four legs who hath
 got (as I take it) an ague.²¹ Where the devil should he
 learn our language? I will give him some relief if it be but
 for that. If I can recover him and keep him tame and get to
 Naples with him, he's a present for any emperor that ever
 trod on neat's leather.²²

Caliban

Do not torment me, prithee. I'll bring my wood home faster.

Stephano

He's in his fit now and does not talk after the wisest. He
 shall taste of my bottle: if he have never drunk wine afore,
 it will go near to remove his fit. If I can recover him and
 keep him tame, I will not take too much for him; he shall
 pay for him that hath him—and that soundly.

21 "ague": a fever or sickness

22 "neat's leather": leather made from the hide of a cow

Caliban

Thou dost me yet but little hurt. Thou wilt anon, I know it by thy trembling. Now Prospero works upon thee.

Stephano

Come on your ways. Open your mouth; here is that which will give language to you, cat. Open your mouth. This will shake your shaking, I can tell you, and that soundly. You cannot tell who's your friend. Open your chaps again.²³

Trinculo

I should know that voice. It should be—but he is drowned, and these are devils. O, defend me.

Stephano

Four legs and two voices, a most delicate monster. His forward voice now is to speak well of his friend; his backward voice is to utter foul speeches and to detract. If all the wine in my bottle will recover him, I will help his ague. Come. Amen, I will pour some in thy other mouth.

Trinculo

Stephano.

Stephano

Doth thy other mouth call me? Mercy, mercy! This is a devil and no monster. I will leave him; I have no long spoon.

Trinculo

Stephano. If thou be Stephano, touch me and speak to me, for I am Trinculo. Be not afeard, thy good friend Trinculo.

Stephano

If thou be Trinculo, come forth. I'll pull thee by the lesser legs: if any be Trinculo's legs, these are they. Thou art very Trinculo indeed. How came thou to be the siege²⁴ of this moon-calf?²⁵ Can he vent Trinculos?

Trinculo

I took him to be killed with a thunder-stroke—but art thou not drowned Stephano? I hope now thou art not drowned. Is the storm over-blown? I hid me under the dead moon-calf's gabardine for fear of the storm—and art thou living Stephano? O Stephano, two Neapolitans escaped?

Stephano

Prithee do not turn me about: my stomach is not constant.²⁶

Caliban

These be fine things, if they be not sprites. That's a brave god and bears celestial liquor. I will kneel to him.

Stephano

How did thou escape? How came thou hither? Swear by this bottle how thou came hither. I escaped upon a butt of sack,²⁷ which the sailors heaved overboard, by this bottle²⁸ which I made of the bark of a tree with mine own hands, since²⁹ I was cast ashore.

Caliban

I'll swear upon that bottle to be thy true subject, for the liquor is not earthly.

Stephano

Here. Swear, then, how thou escaped.

Trinculo

Swam ashore, man, like a duck. I can swim like a duck, I'll be sworn.

Stephano

Here, kiss the Book.³⁰ Though thou can swim like a duck, thou art made like a goose.

Trinculo

O Stephano, have you any more of this?

Stephano

The whole butt, man. My cellar is in a rock by the seaside, where my wine is hid. How now, moon-calf! How does thine ague?

Caliban

Hast thou not dropped from heaven?

Stephano

Out of the Moon, I do assure thee. I was the Man in the Moon, when time was.

²³ "chaps": jaws

²⁴ "siege": generally meaning a seat, the term can also connote either a throne or a toilet—either of which Stephano could be using here.

²⁵ "moon-calf": a term used to describe a deformed animal, but also to describe a miscarried fetus and a foolish person.

²⁶ "not constant": upset

²⁷ "butt of sack": a cask of wine

²⁸ "by this bottle": it seems that Stephano is swearing to his story by the bottle instead of saying he escaped by means of the bottle.

²⁹ "since": after

³⁰ "kiss the book": this refers to the practice of kissing the Bible before swearing an oath; Stephano, however, uses his wine as the holy relic.

Caliban

I have seen thee in her, and I do adore thee. My mistress showed me thee and thy dog and thy bush.

Stephano

Come, swear to that. Kiss the Book. I will furnish it anon with new contents. Swear.

Trinculo

By this good light, this is a very shallow³¹ monster. I afraid of him? A very weak monster. The Man in the Moon? A most poor credulous monster. Well drawn, monster, in good sooth.

Caliban

I'll show thee every fertile inch of the island, and I will kiss thy foot. I prithee, be my god.

Trinculo

By this light, a most perfidious, and drunken monster; when his god's asleep he'll rob his bottle.

Caliban

I'll kiss thy foot. I'll swear myself thy subject.

Stephano

Come on then: down and swear.

Trinculo

I shall laugh myself to death at this puppy-headed monster!³² A most scurvy monster! I could find in my heart to beat him.

Stephano

Come, kiss.

Trinculo

But that the poor monster's in drink.³³
An abominable monster!

Caliban

I'll show thee the best springs. I'll pluck thee berries. I'll fish for thee and get thee wood enough. A plague upon the tyrant that I serve: I'll bear him no more sticks but follow thee, thou wondrous man.

Trinculo

A most ridiculous monster to make a wonder of a poor drunkard.

Caliban

I prithee let me bring thee where crabs grow, and I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts,³⁴ show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how to snare the nimble marmoset. I'll bring thee to clustering filberts,³⁵ and sometimes I'll get thee young scamels³⁶ from the rock. Wilt thou go with me?

Stephano

I prithee now lead the way without any more talking. Trinculo, the King and all our company else being drowned, we will inherit here. Here, bear my bottle. Fellow Trinculo, we'll fill him by and by again.

Caliban

(Sings drunkenly.)

Farewell, master. Farewell, farewell.

Trinculo

A howling monster, a drunken monster.

Caliban

No more dams I'll make for fish,
Nor fetch in firing at requiring,
Nor scrape trenchering,³⁷ nor wash dish,
'Ban, 'ban, Ca-Caliban
Has a new master! Get a new man!
Freedom, high-day, high-day freedom,
freedom high-day, freedom.

Stephano

O brave monster, lead the way.

Exeunt.

3.1: *Ferdinand and Miranda declare their love and exchange secret wedding vows; Prospero, spying on them, sees the "wedding."*

3.2

Enter Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo.

Stephano

Tell not me! When the butt is out we will drink water, not a drop before. Therefore, bear up and board 'em, servant monster.³⁸ Drink to me.

31 "shallow": lacking intellect or depth of thought

32 "puppy-headed monster": either Trinculo means this literally (in which case, Shakespeare may be playing on the idea that cynocephali lived in far-flung regions) or the metaphor has been lost.

33 Probably a continuation of Trinculo's previous statement and meaning that he would beat Caliban if the latter were not drunk.

34 "pig-nuts": a semi-sweet tuber, also known as an earthnut

35 "filberts": hazelnuts

36 The meaning of this word is unknown.

37 "trenchering": wooden dishes

38 "bear up and board 'em": "bear up" is a nautical term meaning to sail with the wind and "board 'em" a term for coming alongside and boarding a ship (perhaps violently).

Trinculo

Servant monster? The folly of this island! They say there's but five upon this isle. We are three of them: if the other two be brained like us, the state totters.

Stephano

Drink, servant monster, when I bid thee: thy eyes are almost set in thy head.³⁹

Trinculo

Where should they be set else? He were a brave monster indeed if they were set in his tail.

Stephano

My man-monster hath drowned his tongue in sack. For my part, the sea cannot drown me: I swam ere I could recover the shore, five and thirty leagues off and on.⁴⁰ By this light, thou shalt be my lieutenant, monster, or my standard.⁴¹

Trinculo

Your lieutenant if you list.⁴² He's no standard.

Stephano

We'll not run, Monsieur Monster.

Trinculo

Nor go, neither. But you'll lie like dogs and yet say nothing, neither.

Stephano

Moon-calf, speak once in thy life, if thou be a good moon-calf.

Caliban

How does thy honour? Let me lick thy shoe. I'll not serve him: he is not valiant.

Trinculo

Thou liest, most ignorant monster. I am in case⁴³ to jostle a constable. Why, thou debauched fish, thou! Was there ever man a coward, that hath drunk so much sack as I today? Wilt thou tell a monstrous lie, being but half a fish and half a monster?

Caliban

Lo, how he mocks me. Wilt thou let him my lord?

Trinculo

"Lord," quoth he? That a monster should be such a natural?⁴⁴

Caliban

Lo, lo again! Bite him to death, I prithee.

Stephano

Trinculo, keep a good tongue in your head. If you prove a mutineer, the next tree.⁴⁵ The poor monster's my subject and he shall not suffer indignity.

Caliban

I thank my noble Lord. Wilt thou be pleased to hearken once again to the suit I made to thee?

Stephano

Marry will I. Kneel and repeat it. I will stand and so shall Trinculo.

Enter Ariel, invisible.

Caliban

As I told thee before, I am subject to a tyrant, a sorcerer that by his cunning hath cheated me of the island.

Ariel

Thou liest.

Caliban

Thou liest, thou jesting monkey, thou! I would my valiant master would destroy thee. I do not lie.

Stephano

Trinculo, if you trouble him any more in his tale, by this hand, I will supplant some of your teeth.

Trinculo

Why, I said nothing.

Stephano

Mum, then, and no more. Proceed.

Caliban

I say, by sorcery he got this isle—
From me, he got it. If thy greatness will
Revenge it on him—for I know thou darest,
But this thing dare not.

Stephano

That's most certain.

Caliban

Thou shalt be lord of it, and I'll serve thee.

³⁹ "set": perhaps a sort of fixed stare as a result of drunkenness

⁴⁰ Thirty-five nautical leagues would be approximately 120 miles, or 193 kilometres.

⁴¹ "standard": standard-bearer or flag-bearer; Trinculo puns on the word, using a definition which denotes an exemplar of correctness.

⁴² "list": wish

⁴³ "in case": ready

⁴⁴ "natural": either an unrefined or dimwitted person

⁴⁵ "the next tree": a threat to hang Trinculo from the next tree, as was the punishment for mutiny.

Stephano
How now shall this be compassed?⁴⁶ Canst thou bring me to the party?

Caliban
Yea, yea my lord. I'll yield him thee asleep, where thou may knock a nail into his head.

Ariel
Thou liest. Thou canst not.

Caliban
What a pied ninny's this? Thou scurvy patch!
I do beseech thy greatness give him blows
And take his bottle from him. When that's gone,
He shall drink naught but brine, for I'll not show him
Where the quick freshes⁴⁷ are.

Stephano
Trinculo, run into no further danger. Interrupt the monster one word further, and by this hand I'll turn my merry out of doors and make a stockfish⁴⁸ of thee.

Trinculo
Why, what did I? I did nothing. I'll go farther off.

Stephano
Didst thou not say he lied?

Ariel
Thou liest.

Stephano
Do I so? Take thou that. As you like this, give me the lie another time.

Trinculo
I did not give the lie. Out of your wits, and hearing too?
A pox on your bottle! This can sack and drinking do.
A murrain⁴⁹ on your monster, and the devil take your fingers.

Caliban
Ha, ha, ha!

Stephano
Now forward with your tale. Prithee, stand further off.

Caliban
Beat him enough. After a little time, I'll beat him too.

Stephano
Stand farther. Come, proceed.

Caliban
Why, as I told thee, 'tis a custom with him I'th' afternoon to sleep: there thou mayest brain him, Having first seized his books, or with a log Batter his skull, or paunch⁵⁰ him with a stake, Or cut his weasand⁵¹ with thy knife. Remember First to possess his books, for without them He's but a sot, as I am—nor hath not One spirit to command. They all do hate him As rootedly⁵² as I. Burn but his books, He has brave⁵³ utensils (for so he calls them) Which when he has a house, he'll deck withal. And that most deeply to consider is The beauty of his daughter: he himself Calls her a nonpareil.⁵⁴ I never saw a woman But only Sycorax my dam, and she, But she as far surpasseth Sycorax As great'st does least.

Stephano
Is it so brave a lass?

Caliban
Aye, lord, she will become thy bed, I warrant, And bring thee forth brave brood.

Stephano
Monster, I will kill this man. His daughter and I will be king and queen (save our Graces), and Trinculo and thyself shall be viceroys. Dost thou like the plot Trinculo?

Trinculo
Excellent.

Stephano
Give me thy hand. I am sorry I beat thee, But while thou liv'st keep a good tongue in thy head.

Caliban
Within this half hour will he be asleep. Wilt thou destroy him then?

Stephano
Aye, on mine honour.

⁴⁶ "compassed": brought about, performed

⁴⁷ "quick freshes": fast-flowing freshwater sources

⁴⁸ "stockfish": referring to dried fish, which were often pounded before cooking

⁴⁹ "murrain": a plague or disease

⁵⁰ "paunch": to stab in the stomach

⁵¹ "weasand": esophagus, throat

⁵² "rootedly": deeply

⁵³ "brave": excellent, fine

⁵⁴ "nonpareil": one who has no equal

Ariel

This will I tell my master.

Caliban

Thou mak'st me merry. I am full of pleasure.
Let us be jocund.⁵⁵ Will you troll the catch⁵⁶
You taught me but whilere?⁵⁷

Stephano

At thy request monster, I will do reason,⁵⁸
Any reason. Come on Trinculo, let us sing.

Sings.

Flout'em, and cout'em: and skowt'em, and flout'em,
Thought is free.

Caliban

That's not the tune.
Ariel plays the tune on a tabor⁵⁹ and pipe.

Stephano

What is this same?

Trinculo

This is the tune of our catch, played by the picture of nobody.

Stephano

If thou be'est a man, show thyself in thy likeness;
If thou be'est a devil, take't as thou list.

Trinculo

O, forgive me my sins.

Stephano

He that dies pays all debts. I defy thee.
Mercy upon us.

Caliban

Art thou afeard?

Stephano

No, monster, not I.

Caliban

Be not afeard: the isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twanging instruments
Will hum about mine ears (and sometime voices)
That if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again, and then in dreaming,

The clouds me thought would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
I cried to dream again.

Stephano

This will prove a brave kingdom to me, where I shall have
my music for nothing.

Caliban

When Prospero is destroyed.

Stephano

That shall be by and by: I remember the story.

Trinculo

The sound is going away. Let's follow it and after do our work.

Stephano

Lead, monster. We'll follow. I would I could see this
taborer; he lays it on.

Trinculo

Wilt come? I'll follow Stephano.

Exeunt.

3.3

In the few lines excised here, Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, Adrian, and Francisco have resolved to rest at old Gonzalo's request. Sebastian and Antonio, still plotting to usurp Alonso, decide that they will act that very night.

Solemn and strange music, and Prospero on the top (invisible). Enter several strange shapes, bringing in a banquet, and dance about it with gentle actions of salutations, and inviting the king, etc. to eat, they depart.

Alonso

What harmony is this? My good friends, hark.

Gonzalo

Marvellous sweet music.

Alonso

Give us kind keepers, heavens. What were these?

Sebastian

A living drollery!⁶⁰ Now I will believe
That there are unicorns, that in Arabia
There is one tree, the phoenix-throne, one phoenix
At this hour reigning there.

⁵⁵ "jocund": cheerful, merry

⁵⁶ "troll the catch": sing the song (specifically, a round)

⁵⁷ "whilere": earlier

⁵⁸ "do reason": give satisfaction, do justice

⁵⁹ "tabor": drum

⁶⁰ "drollery": a comic play, specifically a puppet show

Antonio

I'll believe both!
 And what does else want credit,⁶¹ come to me
 And I'll be sworn 'tis true. Travelers ne're did lie,
 Though fools at home condemn 'em.

Gonzalo

If in Naples
 I should report this now, would they believe me
 If I should say I saw such islands?
 For certes,⁶² these are people of the island,
 Who though they are of monstrous shape, yet note
 Their manners are more gentle, kind, than of
 Our human generation you shall find
 Many, nay almost any.

Prospero

Honest lord,
 Thou hast said well—for some of you there present
 Are worse than devils.

Alonso

I cannot too much muse:⁶³
 Such shapes, such gesture, and such sound expressing
 (Although they want the use of tongue) a kind
 Of excellent dumb discourse.

Prospero

Praise in departing.

Francisco

They vanished strangely.

Sebastian

No matter, since
 They have left their viands⁶⁴ behind, for we have stomachs.⁶⁵
 Wilt please you taste of what is here?

Alonso

Not I.

Gonzalo

Faith, sir, you need not fear: when we were boys
 Who would believe that there were mountaineers,⁶⁶

61 "what does else want credit": anything else that seems unbelievable

62 "certes": certainly

63 "muse": wonder at, be shocked by

64 "viands": food

65 "stomachs": appetites

66 "mountaineers": here simply meaning people who lived on mountains

Dewlapped⁶⁷ like bulls, whose throats had hanging at 'em
 Wallets⁶⁸ of flesh? Or that there were such men
 Whose heads stood in their breasts,⁶⁹ which now we find
 Each putter out of five for one,⁷⁰ will bring us
 Good warrant of.⁷¹

Alonso

I will stand to and feed,
 Although my last, no matter, since I feel
 The best is past. Brother, my lord the Duke,
 Stand too and do as we.

Thunder and lightning. Enter Ariel (like a harpy) claps his wings upon the table, and with a quaint device⁷² the banquet vanishes.

Ariel

You are three men of sin, whom destiny
 (That hath to instrument this lower world,
 And what is in't) the never-surfeited sea
 Hath caused to belch up you,⁷³ and on this island,
 Where man doth not inhabit, you 'mongst men,
 Being most unfit to live. I have made you mad,
 And even with such like valour, men hang and drown
 Their proper selves. You fools! I and my fellows
 Are ministers of Fate: the elements
 Of whom your swords are tempered⁷⁴ may as well
 Wound the loud winds or with bemocked-at stabs
 Kill the still-closing waters as diminish
 One dowl⁷⁵ that's in my plume. My fellow ministers
 Are like invulnerable. If⁷⁶ you could hurt,

67 "dewlapped": having loose skin beneath the throat (such as that on cattle, dogs, and turkeys)

68 "wallets": a wattle, or fleshy flap of skin

69 "whose heads stood in their breasts": blemmyae

70 "putter": a traveler who made a sort of wager on an upcoming voyage; since travel was fairly dangerous in the sixteenth century, one could put money on the voyage—and if evidence were then produced of a successful trip, the return could be five times the original deposit.

71 "good warrant of": a credible report about the blemmyae

72 "quaint": cunning, ingenious

73 "You are...belch you up": You are three men of sin, whom destiny (which has the Earth and all that is in it as its tool) has caused to be washed ashore by the insatiable sea.

74 Steel was tempered by heating it and then either cooling it in a liquid bath or letting it cool in the open air. Thus, Ariel has here alluded to all four elements: fire (in the forge), water (in the cooling bath), air (open-air cooling), and earth (the metal of the sword).

75 "dowl": down feathers

76 "if": even if

Your swords are now too massy⁷⁷ for your strengths
 And will not be uplifted. But remember
 (For that's my business to you) that you three
 From Milan did supplant good Prospero,
 Exposed unto the sea (which hath requit it)
 Him and his innocent child—for which foul deed,
 The powers, delaying (not forgetting) have
 Incensed the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures
 Against your peace. Thee of thy son, Alonso,
 They have bereft and do pronounce by me
 Lingered perdition (worse than any death
 Can be at once) shall, step by step, attend
 You and your ways, whose wraths to guard you from,
 Which here, in this most desolate isle, else falls
 Upon your heads, is nothing but hearts-sorrow,
 And a clear life ensuing.

He vanishes in thunder. Then (to soft music) enter the shapes again and dance (with mocks and mows) and carrying out the table.

Prospero

Bravely the figure of this harpy hast thou
 Performed, my Ariel. A grace it had devouring.
 Of my instruction hast thou nothing bated
 In what thou hadst to say. So with good life
 And observation strange, my meaner ministers
 Their several kinds⁷⁸ have done, my high charms' work.
 And these, mine enemies, are all knit up
 In their distractions. They now are in my power,
 And in these fits I leave them, while I visit
 Young Ferdinand (whom they suppose is drowned)
 And his—and mine—loved darling.

Gonzalo

I'th name of something holy, sir, why stand you
 In this strange stare?

Alonso

O, it is monstrous! Monstrous!
 Me thought the billows spoke and told me of it,
 The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder
 (That deep and dreadful organ pipe) pronounced
 The name of Prospero. It did bass my trespass.⁷⁹
 Therefore my son I'th ooze is bedded, and

I'll seek him deeper than ere plummet sounded,
 And with him there lie mudded. *Exit.*

Sebastian

But one fiend at a time,
 I'll fight their legions o'er.⁸⁰

Antonio

I'll be thy second. *Exeunt.*

Gonzalo

All three of them are desperate. Their great guilt,
 Like poison given to work a great time after,
 Now 'gins⁸¹ to bite the spirits. I do beseech you—
 That are of suppler joints—follow them swiftly
 And hinder them from what this ecstasy
 May now provoke them to.

Adrian

Follow, I pray you. *Exeunt omnes.*

4.1

The previous action in this scene shows Prospero "repenting" of his treatment of Ferdinand and releasing him to marry Miranda. To celebrate, Prospero instructs Ariel to put on a sort of masque (which includes goddesses from the Greco-Roman pantheon such as Iris and Juno). In the middle of the masque, Prospero is reminded of Caliban's plan and ends the festivities.

Prospero

This was well done, my bird.
 Thy shape invisible retain thou still.
 The trumpery⁸² in my house, go bring it hither
 For stale⁸³ to catch these thieves.

Ariel

I go, I go. *Exit.*

Prospero

A devil—a born devil—on whose nature
 Nurture can never stick, on whom my pains
 Humanely taken, all, all lost. Quite lost.
 And as with age his body uglier grows,
 So his mind cankers. I will plague them all,
 Even to roaring. Come, hang on them this line.

⁷⁷ "massy": heavy

⁷⁸ "kinds": jobs, roles

⁷⁹ "bass": here used as a verb meaning to sound with a bass or lower note, Shakespeare is punning on "base," which describes Alonso's earlier actions against Prospero.

⁸⁰ "o'er": over, here meaning from the first to the last

⁸¹ "'gins": begins

⁸² "trumpery": items of little value that look as if they are valuable

⁸³ "stale": lure, bait

Enter Ariel, laden with glistering⁸⁴ apparel, etc. Enter Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, all wet.

Caliban

Pray you tread softly, that the blind mole may not hear a footfall: we now are near his cell.

Stephano

Monster, your fairy, which you say is a harmless fairy, has done little better than played the Jack⁸⁵ with us.

Trinculo

Monster, I do smell all horse piss, at which my nose is in great indignation.

Stephano

So is mine. Do you hear, monster.⁸⁶ If I should take a displeasure against you, look you.⁸⁷

Trinculo

Thou wert but a lost monster.

Caliban

Good my Lord, give me thy favor still.
Be patient, for the prize I'll bring thee to
Shall hoodwink this mischance.⁸⁸ Therefore, speak softly:
All's hushed as midnight yet.

Trinculo

Aye, but to lose our bottles in the pool.

Stephano

There is not only disgrace and dishonour in that, monster, but an infinite loss.

Trinculo

That's more to me than my wetting, yet this is your harmless fairy, monster.

Stephano

I will fetch off my bottle, though I be o're ears for my labour.

Caliban

Prithee, my king, be quiet. See'st thou here:

This is the mouth o' th' cell. No noise,⁸⁹ and enter.
Do that good mischief which may make this island
Thine own forever and I thy Caliban,
For aye⁹⁰ thy foot-licker.

Stephano

Give me thy hand. I do begin to have bloody thoughts.

Trinculo

O, King Stephano! O, peer! O, worthy Stephano, look what a wardrobe here is for thee.

Caliban

Let it alone, thou fool; it is but trash.

Trinculo

Oh, ho, monster! We know what belongs to a frippery,⁹¹
O, King Stephano.

Stephano

Put off that gown, Trinculo: by this hand I'll have that gown.

Trinculo

Thy grace shall have it.

Caliban

The dropsy drown this fool! What do you mean
To dote thus on such luggage? Let't⁹² alone,
And do the murder first. If he awake,
From toe to crown he'll fill our skins with pinches,
Make us strange stuff.

Stephano

Be you quiet, monster. Mistress line, is not this my jerkin?
Now is the jerkin under the line. Now, jerkin, you are like
to lose your hair and prove a bald jerkin.

Trinculo

Do, do! We steal by line and level, and't like your grace.⁹³

Stephano

I thank thee for that jest. Here's a garment for't; wit shall
not go unrewarded while I am king of this country. Steal
by line and level, is an excellent pass of pate.⁹⁴ There's
another garment for't.

⁸⁴ "glistering": sparkling, glittering

⁸⁵ "played the Jack": play a mean trick on

⁸⁶ "Do you hear": not the question that a contemporary audience might speak but a sentence in which "do" is emphatic; a modern equivalent would be "you'd better listen good."

⁸⁷ "look you": watch out

⁸⁸ "hoodwink this mischance": literally, "blindfold this unfortunate event," the phrase is used figuratively to mean that what Caliban will show them will make Stephano and Trinculo forget about the difficulties encountered in reaching it.

⁸⁹ "No noise": make no sound

⁹⁰ "for aye": forever

⁹¹ "frippery": cast-off clothing and/or trumpery

⁹² The First Folio reads "let's," probably a mistake for "let't," meaning "leave it."

⁹³ "and't like your grace": if it pleases your grace

⁹⁴ "pass of pate," an especially witty remark

Trinculo

Monster, come put some lime⁹⁵ upon your fingers and
away with the rest.

Caliban

I will have none on't! We shall lose our time
And all be turned to barnacles or to apes
With foreheads villainous low.

Stephano

Monster, lay to your fingers. Help to bear this away
where my hogshead of wine is, or I'll turn you out of my
kingdom. Go to! Carry this.

Trinculo

And this.

Stephano

Aye, and this.

*A noise of hunters heard. Enter diverse spirits in shape of dogs
and hounds, hunting them about: Prospero and Ariel setting
them on.*

Prospero

Hey Mountain,⁹⁶ hey.

Ariel

Silver! There it goes, Silver!

Prospero

Fury, Fury! There, Tyrant, there! Hark, hark!
Go, charge my goblins that they grind their joints
With dry convulsions, shorten up their sinews
With aged cramps, and more pinch-spotted make them
Than pard or Cat o' Mountain.⁹⁷

Ariel

Hark, they roar.

Prospero

Let them be hunted soundly. At this hour
Lies at my mercy all mine enemies.
Shortly shall all my labours end, and thou
Shalt have the air at freedom. For a little,
Follow and do me service.

Exeunt.

4.2–5.1: *Having repented and/or gotten his vengeance on the Neapolitans who wronged him, Prospero releases them from their madness; Alonso returns Prospero to his former state, and Prospero returns Ferdinand to Alonso. The ship and its crew is revealed to be intact.*

5.1

Enter Ariel, driving in Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo in their stolen apparel.

Stephano

Every man shift⁹⁸ for all the rest, and let no man take
care for himself, for all is but fortune. *Coraggio*,⁹⁹ bully-
monster, *coraggio*!

Trinculo

If these be true spies which I wear in my head, here's a
goodly sight.

Caliban

O Setebos, these be brave spirits indeed! How fine my
Master is. I am afraid he will chastise me.

Sebastian

Ha, ha!
What things are these, my Lord Antonio?
Will money buy 'em?

Antonio

Very like. One of them
Is a plain fish, and no doubt marketable.

Prospero

Mark but the badges of these men, my lords,
Then say if they be true. This misshapen knave,
His mother was a witch and one so strong
That could control the Moon—make flows and ebbs,
And deal in her command—without her power.¹⁰⁰
These three have robbed me, and this demi-devil
(For he's a bastard one) had plotted with them
To take my life. Two of these fellows, you
Must know and own; this thing of darkness, I
Acknowledge mine.

Caliban

I shall be pinched to death.

⁹⁵ "lime": bird-lime, a sticky substance put on branches to catch birds

⁹⁶ Mountain, Silver, Fury, and Tyrant are thought to be the names of the dogs.

⁹⁷ "pard": leopard; "cat o' Mountain": panther or mountain lion

⁹⁸ "shift": make arrangements, look out for

⁹⁹ "coraggio": Italian, meaning "take courage"; the First Folio actually reads "coragio."

¹⁰⁰ Both pronouns in this line refer to the moon.

Alonso

Is not this Stephano, my drunken butler?

Sebastian

He is drunk now. Where had he wine?

Alonso

And Trinculo is reeling ripe. Where should they
Find this grand liquor that hath gilded 'em?
How cam'st thou in this pickle?

Trinculo

I have been in such a pickle¹⁰¹ since I saw you last that
I fear me will never out of my bones. I shall not fear fly-
blowing.

Sebastian

Why, how now, Stephano?

Stephano

O touch me not! I am not Stephano, but a cramp.

Prospero

You'd be king o' the isle, sirrah?

Stephano

I should have been a sore one then.

Alonso

This is a strange thing as ere I looked on.

Prospero

He is as disproportioned in his manners
As in his shape. Go, sirrah, to my cell.
Take with you your companions. As you look
To have my pardon, trim it handsomely.¹⁰²

Caliban

I that I will, and I'll be wise hereafter
And seek for grace. What a thrice double ass
Was I to take this drunkard for a god
And worship this dull fool.

Prospero

Go to, away.

Alonso

Hence, and bestow your luggage where you found it.

Sebastian

Or stole it, rather.

101 Trinculo is punning on Alonso's use of the word "pickle." Alonso used it to mean a difficult situation, but Trinculo uses it to refer to the supposed effects of drinking too much.

102 "trim": prepare

IMAGES OF CALIBAN

Critical Introduction

John Hamilton Mortimer (1740–1779) was a painter of history scenes and portraits, as well as an illustrator. His speciality was romantic images of Italy. His depiction of Caliban is one of a series of images of Shakespearean characters that also included Shylock, Ophelia, and Richard II. The image, like the rest of the series, stresses both the external appearance and the dramatic emotion of the character. The image emphasizes the duality of this monster: he is base and bestial, a goat-man driven by uncontained lusts, but also a tormented creature eliciting pathos from the viewer.

Charles A. Buchel (1872–1950) was a late Victorian painter and printmaker who produced numerous images of Shakespeare performances, including several of Herbert Beerbohm Tree, a leading actor of his day and successful theatre manager. Buchel's paintings of Tree seem especially interested in the roles of outsiders and villains such as Macbeth, Othello, Shylock, and Caliban. His drawing of Tree as Caliban displays the character's distinctly monstrous features—whiskers, fangs, and pointed ears—but the stress is on the actor's emotion. He seems more frightened than frightful, with his shining eyes peering out from beneath his shaggy brows. While there is a besital quality to the figure, it is one that seems to stress his role as hunted rather than as hunter. This drawing was made in preparation for a full figure illustration that shows Caliban's furry body and taloned hands and feet, but also shows him clutching what seems to be a rosary. Tree was the first major star to choose to play Caliban over Prospero, and he was also the first to use electric lighting for a theatrical production. It was used to stress Tree's emotional performance, captured in Buchel's drawing.

Viewing Questions

What are the strong points of similarity between these two images? What are the interesting differences? How do the different media—engraving and charcoal—affect the images and your response to them?

ASM



Figure 6a.
John Hamilton Mortimer,
Caliban (from *Twelve Characters from Shakespeare*)
Romanticism (1775) 15 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art 62.602.163

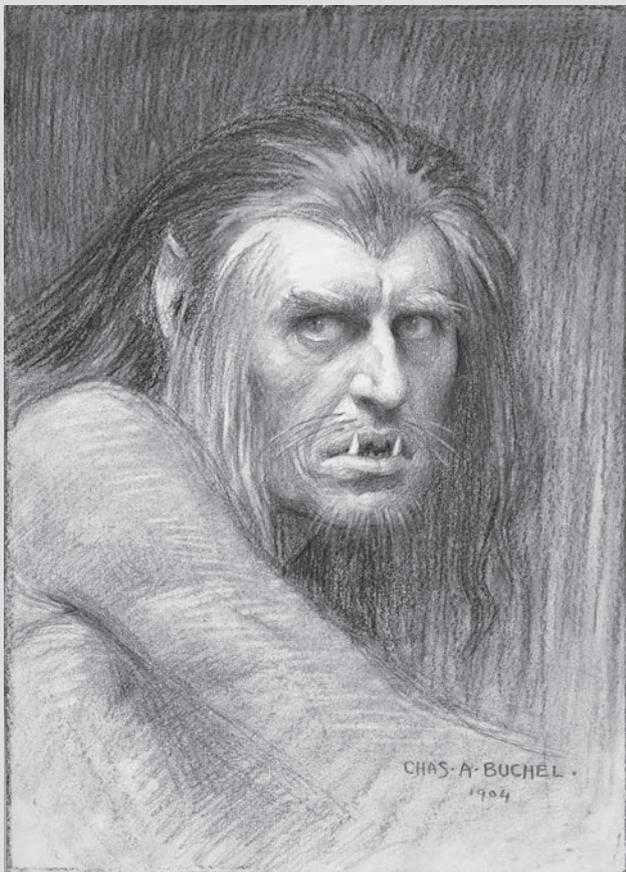


Figure 6b. Charles A. Buchel, *The Tempest at His Majesty's Theatre, Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Caliban*. Victorian (1904), 15 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.
Folger Shakespeare Library. ART Box B919 no.19 (size L).

**JOHN SPENCER, A DISCOURSE CONCERNING PRODIGIES:
WHEREIN THE VANITY OF PRESAGES BY THEM IS REPREHENDED,
AND THEIR TRUE AND PROPER ENDS ARE INDICATED**

Critical Introduction

John Spencer (1630–1693) was an antiquarian at Cambridge and conceived of this book as a challenge to the prevailing belief in place since antiquity that prodigies—monstrous births human and animal—were signs from God. Instead, he argued that they were simply natural phenomena resulting from errors in the processes of conception and gestation. While this might seem like a radical break from tradition, Spencer’s motives were quite orthodox: he was attempting to stop ordinary people from making their own interpretations of monstrous phenomena, which he argued were *either* in no way signs of God’s will or, if they were, that they could only be interpreted by the Church. Signs should not be read, according to Spencer, as indications that the Church or Crown should be challenged. His explicitly stated goal, therefore, was to preserve “the quiet and tranquillity of the State” by explaining away a remarkable and diverse array of monsters through a process in which he attempts to “indict them at the bar of Reason.” It is unsurprising, then, that unlike the authors of broadsheets and other widely disseminated, inexpensive monster accounts, Spencer’s hefty and costly volume, laden with quotations in Greek and Latin, was aimed at the wealthy, learned establishment, which had no interest in seeing their own power and authority diminished by those who would read monsters as signs encouraging popular revolt and revolution. Spencer was a Protestant and held to a common belief that miracles had ceased to occur centuries before his own era.

Reading Questions

What sorts of explanations does Spencer offer for prodigies? What do his judgments imply about those who are interested in monsters and other strange phenomena?

Editorial Notes

Few changes to Spencer’s text have been made; most spelling has been silently modernized, though Spencer’s seventeenth-century style of capitalization and italicization has been maintained. The text reproduced here is from the 1665 second edition.

Further Reading

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ASM

A DISCOURSE CONCERNING PRODIGIES
Wherein the Vanity of Presages by them is Reprehended,
and their True and Proper Ends are Indicated (Cambridge, 1663)

JOHN SPENCER

CHAP. I. Concerning the several kinds of Prodigies.

It is the prerogative royal of the King of heaven, that He *only* doeth great wonders, commands Nature to what actions, in to what posture, may best serve the ends of his own honour and wisdom. The biggest works the Devil doeth, have but a tympany of greatness, are a kind of practical fallacies; as he is but *Simia Dei*, so the greatest work which falls within his compass, is but *Simia Miraculi*, and owes the wonder it meets with, not to its own real greatness, but our *Ignorance*.¹

Now these wonders are either *Ordinary* or *Extraordinary*.

First, there are some of his wonders of *Ordinary and constant residence* (a kind of more remarkable passages in the Book of Nature) such as are,

1. The *Monadica Naturae*,² by which I take leave to understand at present, those works in Nature which are of so private and peculiar a make and character, that they stand almost alone, and hardly admit their pattern in the whole System of the Creation, such as are *boiling Springs, flaming Mountains, petrifying Waters, vast chasms and hiatus in the Earth, etc.* the instances whereof are so various, that there is no Country but hath its *miranda*, which call upon it to pay the constant tribute of a deliberate and judicious admiration to him, who seems to inscribe his own name *Wonderful* upon all these works of his.

2. The *Lusus Naturae*,³ (as I may style them) the disports of Nature; such works wherein the hand of Nature breaks and divides, as it were, the plain ground of some common nature into an elegant variety of Individuals, different in shape and temper; as is seen in Dogs and Roses, etc. as also those works wherein (because delighted as much with consent as variety) [...] she seems to follow and fly from her self both at once, aping and imitating her own works, in one element, by some similar figures or dispositions; in different pieces of the Creation, in another: (which serve as a kind of grateful repeats in the harmony of the world.)

¹ "*Simia Dei*": ape god; "*Simia Miraculi*": ape miracles. Spencer here, as he does throughout the text, asserts that Satan can merely ape or mimic God.

² "*Monadica Naturae*": unit of nature

³ "*Lusus Naturae*": freak of nature

3. The *Varietates Naturae*,⁴ elegant and copious varieties of Nature, appearing in the various *species* of things, which different Countries so entertain the curiosities of each other with, that one appears a kind of constant Prodigy to another. All these have employed the hours of other men, and besides are more properly entered among the rarities than the Prodigies of Nature, and so fall not within the lines of our present Argument.

Secondly, there are *Wonders Extraordinary*, such are they which happen but now and then, and are a kind of short and transient discords, stepping in sometimes to recommend the general harmony and evenness in the motions of Nature, and the Government of the World, comprised under the general name of *Prodigies*.

Now that division of these, which I shall premise to the ensuing discourse, shall be such as the necessity and design thereof, rather than such as the laws of Logic, do prompt me to; which I conceive may be best served, by dividing them into Prodigies (barely) *Signal* and *Penal*: for though I have no faith nor favor for the former, yet while I indict them at the bar of Reason, I am forced to take notice of them under such names and titles, as common opinion hath affixed upon them.

Those which are (barely) *Signal* (such, I mean, in vulgar account) are of three sorts:

1. *Prodigies Natural*, such I reckon all those of whose particular and immediate causes (though rarely occurring) we are sufficiently resolved: such as are, to speak with the people, *falling Stars, Earthquakes, Extraordinary Eclipses, the appearance of two or three Suns at once, some kind of monstrous births*. With these I number all Events, besides the common road of Nature, owing to some accidental, though to us unknown, assistance or interruption of Agents purely natural, or some secret and reserved Law in Nature: as Comets, New Stars, some extraordinary alteration in the heavenly Bodies, [as that in the Planet *Venus*, both as to color and figure, before the times of Christ, often mentioned by Astronomers from *Varro* and *S. Austin*],

⁴ "*Varietates Naturae*": varieties of nature

⁵ Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BCE) was a Roman polymath. The identity of "S. Austin" is unknown to the editors, though Spencer may be referring to [Saint Augustine](#).

and the strange *deliquium*⁶ of Light in the Sun about the death of Cæsar,] some irregular ebbings and flowings of the Sea. These I reckon Prodigies Natural, all being but Nature's acting of its part in different habits and appearances, and giving us to know how it will exert itself, when such Actives and Passives chance to meet, and that it intends the more private and common Laws of Motion appointed to some particular and inferior Agents, shall obtain and bind, except where some more catholic and indispensable Laws of operation given to Causes of greater force and value shall chance to interpose and suspends them for a time; as the Statutes and Customs of private Corporations take place, till their power be suspended by some more catholic and enforcing Law of State.

2. *Prodigies Preternatural*, such I account all strange Events, which hold of no steady causes, but are (to us) solely casual and uncertain: *as the firing of a house by Lightning, the coming to shore of some strange kind of fish, Spots as of blood appearing upon Stones or Statues, Messages delivered by Spirits, apparitions in the air (strange Voices in the night, apparitions of Ghosts, fearful fights in the Air, as of Armies, and instruments of War; in short, all the odd accidents anciently distinguished by the name of Omens.* All or most of these being effects without a constant and Natural, and yet not requiring the special presence and power of a Supernatural cause.)

3. *Supernatural*. Under which head I comprise all those Miracles which ignorance of causes is the maker of, as also those Events of Reason is sufficiently resolved that they exceed the powers and sufficiencies of all Natural Causes. For as in Religion there are some things *according* to the reason of all men; *viz.* the doctrines of *temperance, righteousness, and judgment to come, etc.* some things *beside* Reason; those divine discoveries in Scripture, which Reason readily apprehends and seals unto, as just and true, which it could not by its own powers rise up to the knowledge of, such are all the historical reports, and the wise methods of Salvation, contained therein. Other things *above* Reason; the great Articles of Faith, transcendent to the Capacity as well as light of common reason, in the modes and circumstances of them. So in the compass of divine providence, there are three sorts of works; Some, *according* to Nature, and the more common laws and rules of operation given to it. Some, *beside common* Nature, such are the Events we call Prodigies, which though according to nature, as considered in such circumstances and coincidence of causes, yet are beside it, if considered solely

with regard to its more usual and familiar methods of action. Other things *above* Nature, such are those alterations therein which exceed the capacities of second causes. In a Prodigy strictly taken, Nature suffers from itself, and is in a sort both Victor and Captive to itself; but in a Miracle, Nature is solely passive to that Original Mind and Power, who first gave, and who alone can suspend, it its original Laws of Motion.

These Supernatural Prodigies (though I know not to believe any such now happening) must find a place in this discourse, not only because some such have, as Ambassadors extraordinary, been dispatched heretofore upon some great errand [as the fearful Eclipse at our Saviour's death, the hailstones, mentioned *Josh.* 10.11, so hugely exceeding the common standard of Nature, and perhaps the fiery Sword which hung over *Jerusalem*, so long, before its final desolation:] but because our Adversaries are so prone to overvalue occurrences, and to entitle an immediate hand of Heaven to all such objects of wonder.

As for those stories, with which the Ethnic Legends abound, of the *speaking of Children out of their Mother's wombs, the raining of Stones, the speaking of Oxen, their being found without hearts or livers when brought to the Altars, Fountains running real blood for a long time together, the bloody sweats of Armor,* (which may seem to enter a fair plea for the honour of being marshalled under this head) I am greatly inclinable, with *Tully*, to reject them all as fables and impostures, with which the World hath ever been abused. (*Rome Pagan* was as good at inventing stories of Prodigies, and Apparitions of the Gods, as *Rome Christian* of Miracles and Apparitions of Saints.) Except, to salve the credit of Historians, we believe that the Devil, while the noise of Miracles was so loud in the World, might with these and the like antic and lying Wonders, ape the true Miracles of God, whose worship and attributes he had usurped; so to maintain his reputation with his befooled Votaries. With a like faith, though better affection, (because found in a Poem) I receive many of those *Portenta* which *Virgil* tells us attended the fall of *Cæsar*:

*Simulachra miris pallentia modis
Visa sub obscurum noctis, pecudesque locutæ.
Infandum, sistunt amnes, terræque dehiscunt,
Et mæstum illachrymat templis ebur, æraque sudant.
Nec puteis manare cruor cessavit.*⁷

⁷ "And the pale, amazing images were seen in the twilight, and cattle spoke. A dire omen, rivers pause and the earth splits, and the downcast ivory weeps in the temples, and the bronze sheds tears. And it wells up with blood." *Virgil, Georgics*, Bk. 1, ll. 478–80, 485.

⁶ "*deliquium*": waning or dropping

‘Twas but proper for a *Poet* to hang the whole frame of Nature, as it were, with mourning and astonishment, upon the fall of so great a Person as *Cæsar* was. God’s Miracles carried majesty in those visible characters of Power, Greatness, Wisdom, stamped upon them; (they were never vain and ludicrous) and they came forth upon some errand of importance: like a broad Seal they carried Majesty in their aspect, and came to derive credit and authority upon some matter of great weight and moment.

Secondly, there are a sort of *Penal Prodigies* (for I take the word in the latitude of its sense) such as are judgements upon Persons or Nations of a dreadful and unusual figure and condition: *sudden arrests by death, strange diseases, death by lightning, or the fall of a tower, unusual plagues, defeats of Armies at huge odds and disadvantages, murrain of cattle, very unseasonable years, etc.*

These distinctions premised, I shall offer the best service I can, toward the deciphering of these dark characters of divine Providence; and make enquiry (in the order they now lie before us) into the intent and meaning of these new and unwonted occurrences. In which Essay, I shall assume the liberty which I readily allow another of advising freely with Reason; for we cannot in this Argument take to any other Oracle to resolve us, if we intend to be wise to sobriety. It is but a just valuation of ourselves, to let no vulgar notions commence our persuasions, before they have passed the scrutiny of our Reason, and appear to merit our assent.

JOHN MILTON, *PARADISE LOST* — Selections

Critical Introduction

John Milton (1608–1674) was a British poet and pamphleteer. His breadth of knowledge was amazing, allowing him to speak on everything from censorship, covered in his *Areopagitica*, to a history of England in six parts. Milton's reputation was, therefore, riding high by the 1650s, but his body was not. At over sixty years of age, in poor health, and having recently gone blind, he set out to create a poem that, in his words, would “justify the ways of God to men.” Styled as an epic, *Paradise Lost* (1667) begins *in media res* with the fall of Satan and follows his desire for revenge on God via the corruption of Adam and Eve. The later books deal more heavily with the first couple as they begin to understand what they have done, ending with their expulsion from Eden.

Milton took Homer and Virgil as his models for an epic, and so seriously did he take them that he reorganized the second edition into twelve books (instead of the ten of the first edition) to better match the epic form. Though *Paradise Lost* may reflect the form of an ancient epic, the subject matter differs markedly. In some instances, elements have been adapted: for example, working in a monotheistic religious tradition, Milton turns to God, Christ, and a host of angels to provide the sort of divine intervention seen in **The Odyssey** and *The Aeneid*. In many other respects, the poem departs completely from the classical epic: *Paradise Lost*, for instance, does not follow its predecessors in recounting the great deeds of a legendary hero or king.

One sticking point, however, stands out when trying to view *Paradise Lost* through an epic lens: Satan would seem to be the *hero*. It is Satan, not Adam or Eve, who fights the battles, undertakes the journey, and tries his strength against long odds. In this way, the poem is conflicted. If we listen to Milton, it is a poem about God, Adam, Eve, and explaining the Fall. If, however, we follow his implied instructions and read it as an epic, it is a narrative of Satan's journey and Milton is, as William Blake said, “of the Devil's party without knowing it.” The conflict at the heart of *Paradise Lost* and, possibly, in Milton himself have made the poem one of the lasting contributions to English literature.

Reading Questions

As you read, be mindful of the conflict noted above. Satan is marked as the antagonist by his very name, but Milton gives

him attributes that complicate this role. When Satan decides to make the best of the situation, refuses to give in to self-pity, and takes on the dangerous journey out of Hell, do you see a grudging respect from the poem? Whatever your answer to the question, does it contribute to you seeing this particular version of Satan as a monster? Why?

The most monstrous characters in *Paradise Lost* are Sin and Death. Some readers, however, can find a sort of sympathy for Sin (and Satan). As you read Book II, try to decide *why* it is easier to sympathize with Sin than with Death. Does that sympathy make you less likely to view her as a monster?

Editorial Notes

The text below follows the second edition of *Paradise Lost*, published in 1674. We have maintained Milton's verse structure, and spelling has been modernized except where doing so would affect a line's meter. Capitalization has been regularized throughout. A diacritic marking (') indicates that the vowel should be pronounced. Where selections have been omitted, we have provided a summary in italics.

Further Reading

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PARADISE LOST
Selections

JOHN MILTON

Book I

Say first—for Heaven hides nothing from thy view, Nor the deep tract of Hell—say first what cause Moved our grand parents, in that happy state, Favoured of Heaven so highly, to fall off From their Creator, and transgress his will For one restraint, lords of the World besides. Who first seduced them to that foul revolt? The infernal Serpent; he it was whose guile, Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived The mother of mankind, what time his pride Had cast him out from Heaven, with all his host Of rebel angels, by whose aid, aspiring To set himself in glory above his peers, He trusted to have equalled the Most High, If he opposed, and, with ambitious aim Against the throne and monarchy of God, Raised impious war in Heaven and battle proud, With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky, With hideous ruin and combustion, down To bottomless perdition, there to dwell In adamant chains and penal fire, Who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms. Nine times the space that measures day and night To mortal men, he, with his horrid crew, Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf, Confounded, though immortal. But his doom Reserved him to more wrath; for now the thought Both of lost happiness and lasting pain Torments him: round he throws his baleful eyes, That witnessed huge affliction and dismay, Mixed with obdurate pride and steadfast hate. At once, as far as angel's ken, he views The dismal situation waste and wild. A dungeon horrible, on all sides round, As one great furnace flamed; yet from those flames No light; but rather darkness visible Served only to discover sights of woe, Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace And rest can never dwell, hope never comes That comes to all, but torture without end Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed.	27 30 40 50 60	Such place eternal justice has prepared For those rebellious; here their prison ordained In utter darkness, and their portion set, As far removed from God and light of Heaven As from the centre thrice to the utmost pole. Oh how unlike the place from whence they fell! There the companions of his fall, o'erwhelmed With floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire, He soon discerns; and, weltering by his side, One next himself in power, and next in crime, Long after known in Palestine, and named Beelzebub. ¹ To whom the Arch-Enemy, And thence in Heaven called Satan, with bold words Breaking the horrid silence, thus began:— “If thou beest he—but O how fallen! how changed From him!—who in the happy realms of light, Clothed with transcendent brightness, didst outshine Myriads, though bright—if he whom mutual league, United thoughts and counsels, equal hope And hazard in the glorious enterprise, Joined with me once, now misery hath joined In equal ruin; into what pit thou seest From what height fallen: so much the stronger proved He with his thunder: and till then who knew The force of those dire arms? Yet not for those, Nor what the potent victor in his rage Can else inflict, do I repent or change, Though changed in outward lustre, that fixed mind, And high disdain from sense of injured merit, That with the mightiest raised me to contend, And to the fierce contentions brought along Innumerable force of spirits armed, That durst dislike his reign, and, me preferring, His utmost power with adverse power opposed In dubious battle on the plains of Heaven, And shook his throne. What though the field be lost? All is not lost—the unconquerable will, And study of revenge, immortal hate, And courage never to submit or yield: And what is else not to be overcome.	70 80 90 100
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¹ Beelzebub is associated with the Philistine god, Baal. In Abrahamic religions, he is known as the “lord of the flies” and is variously considered a high-ranking demon or another name for Satan himself.

That glory never shall his wrath or might
 Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace
 With suppliant knee, and deify his power
 Who, from the terror of this arm, so late
 Doubted his empire—that were low indeed;
 That were an ignominy and shame beneath
 This downfall; since, by fate, the strength of Gods,
 And this empyreal substance, cannot fail;
 Since, through experience of this great event,
 In arms not worse, in foresight much advanced,
 We may with more successful hope resolve
 To wage by force or guile eternal war,
 Irreconcilable to our grand foe,
 Who now triumphs, and in the excess of joy
 Sole reigning holds the tyranny of Heaven.”

So spake the apostate angel, though in pain,
 Vaunting aloud, but racked with deep despair;
 And him thus answered soon his bold compeer:—

“O Prince, O Chief of many thronéd powers
 That led the embattled Seraphim to war
 Under thy conduct, and, in dreadful deeds
 Fearless, endangered Heaven’s perpetual King,
 And put to proof his high supremacy,
 Whether upheld by strength, or chance, or fate!
 Too well I see and rue the dire event
 That, with sad overthrow and foul defeat,
 Hath lost us Heaven, and all this mighty host
 In horrible destruction laid thus low,
 As far as Gods and heavenly essences
 Can perish: for the mind and spirit remains
 Invincible, and vigour soon returns,
 Though all our glory extinct, and happy state
 Here swallowed up in endless misery.
 But what if he our Conqueror (whom I now
 Of force believe almighty, since no less
 Than such could have o’erpowered such force as ours)
 Have left us this our spirit and strength entire,
 Strongly to suffer and support our pains,
 That we may so suffice his vengeful ire,
 Or do him mightier service as his thralls
 By right of war, whate’er his business be,
 Here in the heart of Hell to work in fire,
 Or do his errands in the gloomy deep;
 What can it then avail though yet we feel
 Strength undiminished, or eternal being
 To undergo eternal punishment?”

Whereto with speedy words the Arch-Fiend replied:—
 “Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable,
 Doing or suffering: but of this be sure—
 To do aught good never will be our task,

110 But ever to do ill our sole delight,
 As being the contrary to his high will
 Whom we resist. If then his providence
 Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
 Our labour must be to pervert that end,
 And out of good still to find means of evil;
 Which oft times may succeed so as perhaps
 Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb
 His inmost counsels from their destined aim.

But see! the angry victor hath recalled
 120 His ministers of vengeance and pursuit
 Back to the gates of Heaven: the sulphurous hail,
 Shot after us in storm, o’erblown hath laid
 The fiery surge that from the precipice
 Of Heaven received us falling; and the thunder,
 Winged with red lightning and impetuous rage,
 Perhaps hath spent his shafts, and ceases now
 To bellow through the vast and boundless deep.
 Let us not slip the occasion, whether scorn
 Or satiate fury yield it from our foe.

130 Seest thou yon dreary plain, forlorn and wild,
 The seat of desolation, void of light,
 Save what the glimmering of these livid flames
 Casts pale and dreadful? Thither let us tend
 From off the tossing of these fiery waves;
 There rest, if any rest can harbour there;
 And reassembling our afflicted powers,
 Consult how we may henceforth most offend
 Our enemy, our own loss how repair,
 How overcome this dire calamity,
 140 What reinforcement we may gain from hope,
 If not, what resolution from despair.”

Thus Satan talking to his nearest mate
 With head uplift above the wave, and eyes
 That sparkling blazed; his other parts besides
 Prone on the flood, extended long and large,
 Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge
 As whom the fables name of monstrous size,
 Titanian² or Earth-born, that warred on Jove,
 Briareos or Typhon,³ whom the den

150 _____
 2 Titanian is an archaic form of “titanic,” which refers to the **Titans**
 of Greek myth, second-generation gods who were eventually
 supplanted by the third-generation Olympians.

3 Briareos (also called Aegaeon in some sources) was the son of Gaia
 and Uranus and therefore a Titan. He was one of the three Hundred-
 Handers who, bound by his father and banished to Tartarus, later
 aided the Olympians in overthrowing the Titans. **Typhon** was the son
 of Gaia (in some sources Hera) and is also, therefore, a Titan. A giant,
 he is generally considered the sire to most of the monsters in Greek
 mythology.

By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea-beast
 Leviathan,⁴ which God of all his works
 Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream.
 Him, haply slumbering on the Norway foam,
 The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff,
 Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
 With fixéd anchor in his scaly rind,
 Moors by his side under the lee, while night
 Invests the sea, and wishéd morn delays.
 So stretched out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay,
 Chained on the burning lake; nor ever thence
 Had risen, or heaved his head, but that the will
 And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
 Left him at large to his own dark designs,
 That with reiterated crimes he might
 Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
 Evil to others, and enraged might see
 How all his malice served but to bring forth
 Infinite goodness, grace, and mercy, shown
 On Man by him seduced, but on himself
 Treble confusion, wrath, and vengeance poured. 200

Forthwith upright he rears from off the pool
 His mighty stature; on each hand the flames
 Driven backward slope their pointing spires, and, rolled
 In billows, leave i' the midst a horrid vale.
 Then with expanded wings he steers his flight
 Aloft, incumbent on the dusky air,
 That felt unusual weight; till on dry land
 He lights—if it were land that ever burned
 With solid, as the lake with liquid fire,
 And such appeared in hue as when the force 210
 Of subterranean wind transports a hill
 Torn from Pelorus,⁵ or the shattered side
 Of thundering Ætna,⁶ whose combustible
 And fueled entrails, thence conceiving fire,
 Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds,
 And leave a singéd bottom all involved
 With stench and smoke. Such resting found the sole
 Of unblest feet. Him followed his next mate;

Both glorying to have 'scaped the Stygian⁷ flood
 As gods, and by their own recovered strength, 240
 Not by the sufferance of supernal power.
 "Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,"
 Said then the lost Archangel, "this the seat
 That we must change for Heaven?—this mournful gloom
 For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
 Who now is sovereign can dispose and bid
 What shall be right: farthest from him is best
 Whom reason hath equaled, force hath made supreme
 Above his equals. Farewell, happy fields,
 Where joy forever dwells! Hail, horrors! hail, 250
 Infernal world! and thou, profoundest Hell,
 Receive thy new possessor—one who brings
 A mind not to be changed by place or time.
 The mind is its own place, and in itself
 Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.
 What matter where, if I be still the same,
 And what I should be, all but less than he
 Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
 We shall be free; the Almighty hath not built
 Here for his envy, will not drive us hence: 260
 Here we may reign secure; and, in my choice,
 To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
 Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.
 But wherefore let we then our faithful friends,
 The associates and copartners of our loss,
 Lie thus astonished on the oblivious pool,
 And call them not to share with us their part
 In this unhappy mansion, or once more
 With rallied arms to try what may be yet
 Regained in Heaven, or what more lost in Hell?" 270

So Satan spake; and him Beelzebub
 Thus answered:—"Leader of those armies bright
 Which, but the Omnipotent, none could have foiled!
 If once they hear that voice, their liveliest pledge
 Of hope in fears and dangers—heard so oft
 In worst extremes, and on the perilous edge
 Of battle, when it raged, in all assaults
 Their surest signal—they will soon resume
 New courage and revive, though now they lie
 Groveling and prostrate on yon lake of fire, 280
 As we erewhile, astounded and amazed;
 No wonder, fallen such a pernicious height!"
 He scarce had ceased when the superior fiend
 Was moving toward the shore; his ponderous shield,
 Ethereal temper, massy, large and round,

⁴ Milton moves easily between religious traditions. **Leviathan** is an enormous sea monster in Abrahamic religious texts.

⁵ In Greek mythology, Pelorus was one of the violent humans who grew out of the dragon's teeth sown by **Cadmus**. Fighting amongst themselves until there were only five left (including Pelorus), they aided Cadmus in founding Thebes.

⁶ An alternate spelling of Mt. Etna, a still-active volcano in Sicily and an important location in Greco-Roman mythology. Typhon, for instance, was said to be imprisoned beneath the mountain after Zeus defeated him.

⁷ Stygian is an adjectival form of Styx, the river that forms the border between Earth and Hades/Dis.

Behind him cast. The broad circumference
 Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb
 Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views
 At evening, from the top of Fesolè,⁸
 Or in Valdarno,⁹ to descry new lands, 290
 Rivers, or mountains, in her spotty globe.
 His spear—to equal which the tallest pine
 Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the mast
 Of some great admiral,¹⁰ were but a wand—
 He walked with, to support uneasy steps
 Over the burning marl, not like those steps
 On Heaven's azure; and the torrid clime
 Smote on him sore besides, vaulted with fire.
 Nathless¹¹ he so endured, till on the beach
 Of that inflaméd sea, he stood and called 300
 His legions—angel forms, who lay entranced
 Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks
 In Vallombrosa, where the Etrurian¹² shades
 High overarched embower; or scattered sedge
 Afloat, when with fierce winds Orion armed
 Hath vexed the Red Sea coast, whose waves o'erthrew
 Busiris and his Memphian¹³ chivalry,
 While with perfidious hatred they pursued
 The sojourners of Goshen,¹⁴ who beheld 310
 From the safe shore their floating carcasses
 And broken chariot-wheels. So thick bestrown,
 Abject and lost, lay these; covering the flood,
 Under amazement of their hideous change.
 He called so loud that all the hollow deep
 Of Hell resounded:—"Princes, potentates,
 Warriors, the Flower of Heaven—once yours; now lost,
 If such astonishment as this can seize

8 Fesolè is an alternative spelling of Fiesole, a Tuscan town on the slopes above Florence, Italy.

9 Valdarno refers to the valley formed by the Arno River, an important river in the Tuscan region of Italy.

10 The word here refers not to an individual but the flagship of a fleet.

11 "Nathless": nevertheless

12 Vallombrosa is a heavily wooded area near Florence, Italy. Etrurian refers to Etruria, an area in central Italy including Tuscany; the "shades" in this line likely refer to trees rather than spirits of the Underworld.

13 Busiris is the name of an Egyptian king killed by Heracles; Milton is here using it to name the unnamed pharaoh that pursued Moses and the Israelites. Memphian refers to Memphis, an important city in ancient Egypt.

14 Goshen was the region of Egypt that Moses and the Israelites fled in the book of Exodus.

Eternal spirits! Or have ye chosen this place
 After the toil of battle to repose
 Your wearied virtue, for the ease you find 320
 To slumber here, as in the vales of Heaven?
 Or in this abject posture have ye sworn
 To adore the conqueror, who now beholds
 Cherub and Seraph¹⁵ rolling in the flood
 With scattered arms and ensigns, till anon
 His swift pursuers from Heaven gates discern
 The advantage, and, descending tread us down
 Thus drooping, or with linked thunderbolts
 Transfix us to the bottom of this gulf?—
 Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen!" 330
 They heard, and were abashed, and up they sprung
 Upon the wing, as when men went to watch,
 On duty sleeping found by whom they dread,
 Rouse and bestir themselves ere well awake.
 Nor did they not perceive the evil plight
 In which they were, or the fierce pains not feel;
 Yet to their general's voice they soon obeyed
 Innumerable. As when the potent rod
 Of Amram's¹⁶ son in Egypt's evil day
 Waved round the coast, up called a pitchy cloud 340
 Of locusts, warping on the eastern wind,
 That o'er the realm of impious Pharaoh hung
 Like Night, and darkened all the land of Nile;
 So numberless were those bad angels seen
 Hovering on wing under the cope of Hell,
 'Twixt upper, nether, and surrounding fires;
 Till, as a signal given, the uplifted spear
 Of their great sultan waving to direct
 Their course, in even balance down they light
 On the firm brimstone, and fill all the plain: 350
 A multitude, like which the populous North
 Poured never from her frozen loins to pass
 Rhene or the Danaw,¹⁷ when her barbarous sons
 Came like a deluge on the South, and spread
 Beneath Gibraltar to the Libyan¹⁸ sands.

15 Cherubim are angels who worked directly in service of God—for example guarding the entrance to the Garden of Eden. Seraphim are angels whose main duty was related to God's throne and involved continuously praising God.

16 In Abrahamic traditions, Amram is the father of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

17 These are alternate spellings for the Rhine river in the Swiss Alps and the Danube in Eastern Europe. These two rivers were generally considered the frontier of the Roman empire.

18 Gibraltar is at the tip of the Iberian Peninsula and forms part of the mouth of the Mediterranean Sea. Libya here refers not to the

Forthwith, from every squadron and each band,
 The heads and leaders thither haste where stood
 Their great commander—godlike shapes and forms
 Excelling human; princely dignities;
 And powers that erst¹⁹ in Heaven sat on thrones, 360
 Though on their names in heavenly records now
 Be no memorial, blotted out and razed
 By their rebellion from the Books of Life.
 Nor had they yet among the sons of Eve
 Got them new names, till, wandering o'er the earth,
 Through God's high sufferance for the trial of man,
 By falsities and lies the greatest part
 Of mankind they corrupted to forsake
 God their Creator, and the invisible
 Glory of him that made them to transform 370
 Oft to the image of a brute, adorned
 With gay religions full of pomp and gold,
 And devils to adore for deities:
 Then were they known to men by various names,
 And various idols through the heathen world.
 Say, Muse, their names then known, who first, who last,
 Roused from the slumber on that fiery couch,
 At their great emperor's call, as next in worth
 Came singly where he stood on the bare strand,
 While the promiscuous crowd stood yet aloof. 380
 The chief were those who, from the pit of Hell
 Roaming to seek their prey on Earth, durst fix
 Their seats, long after, next the seat of God,
 Their altars by his altar, gods adored
 Among the nations round, and durst abide
 Jehovah thundering out of Zion,²⁰ throned
 Between the Cherubim; yea, often placed
 Within his sanctuary itself their shrines,
 Abominations; and with curséd things
 His holy rites and solemn feasts profaned, 390
 And with their darkness durst affront his light.
 First, Moloch,²¹ horrid king, besmeared with blood
 Of human sacrifice, and parents' tears;
 Though, for the noise of drums and timbrels loud,
 Their children's cries unheard that passed through fire

modern African state but probably to the northern coast of Africa, which forms the other part of the mouth of the Mediterranean.

19 "erst": before

20 It is unclear whether Milton is referring to the actual location of Mt. Zion located in modern-day Jerusalem where the first Temple was built or the broader eschatological ideas of Judaism.

21 Moloch was an ancient Canaanite god associated with child sacrifice in Abrahamic traditions, specifically sacrifice by burning live victims.

To his grim idol. Him the Ammonite²²
 Worshipped in Rabba²³ and her watery plain,
 In Argob and in Basan,²⁴ to the stream
 Of utmost Arnon.²⁵ Nor content with such
 Audacious neighbourhood, the wisest heart 400
 Of Solomon²⁶ he led by fraud to build
 His temple right against the temple of God
 On that opprobrious hill, and made his grove
 The pleasant valley of Hinnom, Tophet²⁷ thence
 And black Gehenna called, the type of Hell.
 Next Chemos, the obscene dread of Moab's²⁸ sons,
 From Aroar to Nebo²⁹ and the wild
 Of southmost Abarim; in Hesebon³⁰
 And Horonaim, Seon's³¹ realm, beyond
 The flowery dale of Sibma³² clad with vines, 410
 And Elealè to the Asphaltic pool:³³
 Peor³⁴ his other name, when he enticed

22 The Ammonites were an ancient people who lived at roughly the same time as the ancient Israelites, and it is from biblical sources that we have a good deal of information about them.

23 Rabba was the capital city of the Ammonite kingdom.

24 Argob refers to the lava field now called Lajat in Syria. Usually referred to as Bashan, Basan was a region in what is now the nation of Jordan.

25 Arnon, now called the Wadi Mujib, is a river that runs through modern-day Jordan.

26 The third king of ancient Israel (after Saul and David), Solomon was renowned for his wisdom and for building the first Temple.

27 Hinnom, often called Gehenna, is a small valley near Jerusalem. In Judeo-Christian traditions, it was associated with Hell. Tophet is a location within the Gehenna valley.

28 Chemos (Chemosh) was a god associated with the Moabites and Amorites. "Moab's sons" refers to the Moabites, an ancient people who lived in what is now Jordan.

29 Aroar is an alternate spelling of Aroer (now thought to be Ariar, Jordan), a settlement on the banks of the Arnon river. Nebo is a mountain in modern-day Jordan; in the Abrahamic faiths, it is also the summit from which Moses got his first glimpse of the promised land.

30 Abarim is a Jordanian mountain range, which includes Mt. Nebo. Hesebon (Heshbon) was an Amorite city in what is now Jordan.

31 Horoniam was also an Amorite city in what is now Jordan. Seon (Sihon) was an Amorite king who impeded the Israelite's exodus.

32 Sibma (Sibmah) was a Moabite town in what is now Jordan.

33 Elealè (Elealeh) was a town near Sibmah. The "Asphaltic pool" that Milton refers to here is the Red Sea, which still consistently discharges small, black, tarry bits of asphalt, which was used in making pitch and in mummification.

34 Peor is actually a mountain in Moab with which a heretical worship of Baal by the ancient Israelites was associated.

Israel in Sittim, on their march from Nile,
 To do him wanton rites, which cost them woe.
 Yet thence his lustful orgies he enlarged
 Even to that hill of scandal, by the grove
 Of Moloch homicide, lust hard by hate,
 Till good Josiah³⁵ drove them thence to Hell.
 With these came they, who from the bordering flood
 Of old Euphrates³⁶ to the brook that parts 420
 Egypt from Syrian ground, had general names
 Of Baalim and Ashtaroth³⁷—those male,
 These feminine. For spirits when they please
 Can either sex assume, or both; so soft
 And uncompounded is their essence pure,
 Not tried or manacled with joint or limb,
 Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,
 Like cumbrous flesh; but, in what shape they choose,
 Dilated or condensed, bright or obscure,
 Can execute their airy purposes, 430
 And works of love or enmity fulfil.
 For those the race of Israel oft forsook
 Their living strength, and unfrequented left
 His righteous altar, bowing lowly down
 To bestial gods; for which their heads as low
 Bowed down in battle, sunk before the spear
 Of despicable foes. With these in troop
 Came Astoreth, whom the Phoenicians³⁸ called
 Astarte,³⁹ Queen of Heaven, with crescent horns;
 To whose bright image nightly by the moon 440
 Sidonian⁴⁰ virgins paid their vows and songs;
 In Zion also not unsung, where stood

35 Josiah was a king of Judea who instituted major reforms to Judaism. His actions are in stark contrast to his father and predecessor, Amon, who was said to have indulged in idolatrous practices and for this reason was assassinated.

36 The Euphrates, along with the Tigris, is one of the most important rivers in Mesopotamia. It begins in modern-day Turkey and empties into the Persian Gulf, forming the border between Iran and Iraq.

37 Baalim is the plural form of Baal and here probably refers to Baal in all his various regional forms. Ashtaroth is the plural form of Ashtoreth and here probably refers to Astarte (see below) in all her regional forms.

38 An ancient people whose civilization was based in the coastal area of the Levant in the Eastern Mediterranean. They are best known as a sea-faring people with extensive trade routes by water.

39 Astarte (Ashtoreth) was the Mediterranean iteration of the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar. She was most closely associated with fertility, love and, sex.

40 Sidonian refers to the city Sidon (in modern-day Lebanon), one of the most important cities to the Phoenicians.

Her temple on the offensive mountain, built
 By that uxorious king whose heart, though large,
 Beguiled by fair idolatresses, fell
 To idols foul. Thammuz⁴¹ came next behind,
 Whose annual wound in Lebanon⁴² allured
 The Syrian damsels to lament his fate
 In amorous ditties all a summer's day,
 While smooth Adonis⁴³ from his native rock 450
 Ran purple to the sea, supposed with blood
 Of Thammuz yearly wounded: the love-tale
 Infected Zion's daughters with like heat,
 Whose wanton passions in the sacred porch
 Ezekiel⁴⁴ saw, when, by the vision led,
 His eye surveyed the dark idolatries
 Of alienated Judah.⁴⁵ Next came one
 Who mourned in earnest, when the captive Ark
 Maimed his brute image, head and hands lopped off,
 In his own temple, on the grunsel⁴⁶ edge, 460
 Where he fell flat and shamed his worshippers:
 Dagon⁴⁷ his name, sea-monster, upward man
 And downward fish; yet had his temple high
 Reared in Azotus,⁴⁸ dreaded through the coast

41 Thammuz (Tammuz) was a Mesopotamian god; he was thought of as Astarte's consort and was associated with death and rebirth. In later Mesopotamian traditions, he was conflated with Adonis, who was even later absorbed into Greek mythology.

42 Milton is referring not to the modern-day country but to Phoenician Lebanon; the term referred to all of Phoenician-controlled land.

43 The Adonis (Abraham) River is in modern-day Lebanon and was closely associated with the Phoenician god of the same name. As with Tammuz, with whom he was later conflated, Adonis is associated with death and rebirth. Because of seasonal rains washing soil from the nearby slopes, the river runs red at certain times of the year; this was said to be the blood of Adonis, dying each year to later be reborn.

44 Ezekiel was a Hebrew prophet who, having had an encounter with God, foretold the destruction of the first Temple at the hands of the Babylonian army.

45 Judah was the kingdom associated with the Davidic tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin after the rule of Solomon ended. Israel, in this context, would refer to the other ten tribes in the north. Biblical accounts consistently excoriate Judah for idolatry.

46 "grunsel": an archaic form of the word groundsel, meaning "threshold."

47 Dagon was a Mesopotamian deity worshipped by the Babylonians and Phoenicians; the merman depiction given by Milton comes from an interpretation of him as a fish-god in I Samuel 5.2–7.

48 Azotus (Ashdod) is a Mediterranean coastal city in what is now Israel. It, like the other cities listed after it, was a part of the Philistine civilization before being conquered by the Israelites.

Of Palestine, in Gath and Ascalon,⁴⁹
 And Accaron and Gaza's⁵⁰ frontier bounds.
 Him followed Rimmon,⁵¹ whose delightful seat
 Was fair Damascus,⁵² on the fertile banks
 Of Abbana and Pharphar,⁵³ lucid streams.
 He also against the house of God was bold: 470
 A leper once he lost and gained a king—
 Ahaz,⁵⁴ his sottish conqueror, whom he drew
 God's altar to disparage and displace
 For one of Syrian mode, whereon to burn
 His odious offerings, and adore the gods
 Whom he had vanquished. After these appeared
 A crew who, under names of old renown—
 Osiris, Isis, Horus,⁵⁵ and their train—
 With monstrous shapes and sorceries abused 480
 Fanatic Egypt and her priests, to seek
 Their wandering gods disguised in brutish forms
 Rather than human. Nor did Israel 'scape
 The infection, when their borrowed gold composed
 The calf in Oreb;⁵⁶ and the rebel king
 Doubled that sin in Bethel and in Dan,⁵⁷

49 Gath was an inland city in what is now Israel; it was said to be the hometown of the giant Goliath. Ascalon (Ashkelon) is a Mediterranean coastal city in modern-day Israel.

50 Accaron (Ekron) was an inland city in what is now Israel. Gaza is a Mediterranean coastal city in the Palestinian-controlled Gaza Strip.

51 Rimmon here likely refers to the Syrian god, which was conflated with Baal.

52 Damascus was a pivotal city of the Aramaic kingdom, whose southern expansion brought it into direct conflict with Israel. It is now a part of Syria.

53 Abbana (Barada) and Pharphar (Awaj) are two rivers near Damascus.

54 Ahaz was a king of Judah and was depicted in biblical sources as particularly corrosive to Judaism through the introduction of Assyrian religious practices, including child sacrifice.

55 Osiris, Isis, and Horus were the three main deities in ancient Egyptian worship. Horus, often depicted with the head of a falcon, was the supreme god and was associated with kingship and the sky. Isis and Osiris were said to be the parents of Horus—Isis associated with magic, marriage, motherhood, and nature, Osiris associated with death and rebirth. After Osiris was killed by the god Set, Isis reassembled him and brought him back to life.

56 Oreb is an alternate spelling of Horeb, the mountain on which Moses received the Ten Commandments (according to Deuteronomy). In his absence, the Israelites created a golden bull and fell into idolatry, causing Moses to smash the first set of commandments.

57 Bethel was an important location to the ancient Israelites. Dan was the northernmost city in Israel. Milton's reference here is to

Likening his Maker to the grazéd ox—
 Jehovah, who, in one night, when he passed
 From Egypt marching, equalled with one stroke
 Both her first-born and all her bleating gods.
 Belial⁵⁸ came last; than whom a spirit more lewd 490
 Fell not from Heaven, or more gross to love,
 Vice for itself. To him no temple stood
 Or altar smoked; yet who more oft than he
 In temples and at altars, when the priest
 Turns atheist, as did Eli's⁵⁹ sons, who filled
 With lust and violence the house of God?
 In courts and palaces he also reigns,
 And in luxurious cities, where the noise
 Of riot ascends above their loftiest towers,
 And injury and outrage; and, when night 500
 Darkens the streets, then wander forth the sons
 Of Belial, flown with insolence and wine.
 Witness the streets of Sodom,⁶⁰ and that night
 In Gibeah,⁶¹ when the hospitable door
 Exposed a matron, to avoid worse rape.

These were the prime in order and in might:
 The rest were long to tell; though far renowned
 The Ionian⁶² gods—of Javan's⁶³ issue held
 Gods, yet confessed later than Heaven and Earth,

Jeroboam causing a golden calf to be erected for worship in each of these two cities.

58 Belial is not a specific god of any culture. Instead, it appears in biblical texts (usually as a part of the phrase "sons of Belial") to denote worthlessness. Here, of course, it is personified in the form of a fallen angel.

59 Eli was one of the last judges of Israel. Because of his sons' behaviour, his house was cursed so that no male would ever reach old age. His grown sons died in the Philistine attack that saw Israel lose the Ark of the Covenant.

60 Sodom (along with Gomorrah) were towns attested in biblical literature as being infested with sin; both were destroyed by God with fire. It is thought these towns—if they existed—were along the Jordan River, north of the Dead Sea.

61 Gibeah is thought to have existed in what is now Jerusalem. The story alluded to by Milton is that a traveler and his concubine were given shelter by a man in the town; later some "sons of Belial" demanded to be able to rape the male traveller, but were instead given the concubine.

62 Ionians (along with the Achaeans, Aeolians, and Dorians) were one of the four major tribes of Greece during the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Though Ionians were geographically associated with part of what is modern-day Turkey, Milton here is likely using the term as a synonym for Greek.

63 Javan was the grandson of Noah, according to the Abrahamic religions. The name was used by the ancient Israelites to refer to

Their boasted parents;—Titan, Heaven's first-born, 510
 With his enormous brood, and birthright seized
 By younger Saturn: he from mightier Jove,⁶⁴
 His own and Rhea's⁶⁵ son, like measure found;
 So Jove usurping reigned. These, first in Crete
 And Ida⁶⁶ known, thence on the snowy top
 Of cold Olympus⁶⁷ ruled the middle air,
 Their highest heaven; or on the Delphian cliff,⁶⁸
 Or in Dodona,⁶⁹ and through all the bounds
 Of Doric land; or who with Saturn old
 Fled over Adria to the Hesperian fields,⁷⁰ 520
 And o'er the Celtic roamed the utmost isles.⁷¹
 All these and more came flocking; but with looks
 Downcast and damp; yet such wherein appeared
 Obscure some glimpse of joy to have found their chief
 Not in despair; to have found themselves not lost
 In loss itself; which on his countenance cast
 Like doubtful hue. But he, his wonted pride

Greece, and there is a tradition that Javan was the same Ion who was the progenitor of the Ionian people.

64 Saturn is the Roman name for Cronus, who castrated his father Caelus/Uranus. He was a second-generation god and, therefore, a Titan. His son, Jupiter/Jove/Zeus, in turn overthrew his rule and imprisoned him and the remaining Titans.

65 Rhea is the Greek name for the consort of Cronus; in the Roman mythology suggested by Milton's previous nomenclature, she would be Ops or Cybele. Her sphere of influence was fertility (specifically female fertility) and motherhood.

66 Ida here refers to Mount Ida in Crete, which was specifically associated with goddesses in Greco-Roman mythology.

67 Olympus was the mountain from which the Olympic gods (Zeus, Athena, Hera, etc.) rule. It was arguably the most important location in Greek mythology.

68 Delphi was the location of the most important oracle in ancient Greece and was long considered the center of the earth. It is in modern-day Phocis, Greece and sits on a cliff of Mount Parnassus.

69 Dodona was, though not the most popular, the oldest oracle in ancient Greece. It is in the westernmost Ioannina region of modern-day Greece.

70 Adria here refers to the Adriatic Sea, which partially separates Italy from Eastern European countries. The Hesperian fields were an Edenic garden attended by the Hesperides, nymphs associated with evening and sunset. It was variously placed in northern Africa and the Iberian Peninsula.

71 Though most closely associated with Wales and Ireland today, Celtic culture and language was present throughout the British Isles, the Iberian Peninsula, and western Europe (including France, Germany, and northern Italy). The "utmost isles" Milton refers to here may be the British Isles themselves or the Orkneys in northern Scotland.

Soon recollecting, with high words, that bore
 Semblance of worth, not substance, gently raised
 Their fainting courage, and dispelled their fears: 530
 Then straight commands that, at the warlike sound
 Of trumpets loud and clarions, be upreared
 His mighty standard. That proud honour claimed
 Azazel⁷² as his right, a Cherub tall:
 Who forthwith from the glittering staff unfurled
 The imperial ensign; which, full high advanced,
 Shone like a meteor streaming to the wind,
 With gems and golden lustre rich emblazed,
 Seraphic arms and trophies; all the while
 Sonorous metal blowing martial sounds: 540
 At which the universal host up-sent
 A shout that tore Hell's concave, and beyond
 Frighted the reign of Chaos and old Night.⁷³
 All in a moment through the gloom were seen
 Ten thousand banners rise into the air,
 With orient colours waving; with them rose
 A forest huge of spears; and thronging helms
 Appeared, and serried⁷⁴ shields in thick array
 Of depth immeasurable. Anon they move
 In perfect phalanx to the Dorian mood 550
 Of flutes and soft recorders—such as raised
 To height of noblest temper heroes old
 Arming to battle, and instead of rage
 Deliberate valour breathed, firm, and unmoved
 With dread of death to flight or foul retreat;
 Nor wanting power to mitigate and swage
 With solemn touches troubled thoughts, and chase
 Anguish and doubt and fear and sorrow and pain
 From mortal or immortal minds. Thus they,
 Breathing united force with fixed thought, 560
 Moved on in silence to soft pipes that charmed
 Their painful steps o'er the burnt soil. And now
 Advanced in view they stand—a horrid front
 Of dreadful length and dazzling arms, in guise
 Of warriors old, with ordered spear and shield,
 Awaiting what command their mighty chief
 Had to impose. He through the arméd files
 Darts his experienced eye, and soon traverse
 The whole battalion views—their order due,

72 Azazel is variously thought of as one of the fallen angels, Satan himself, or (more literally) a scapegoat onto which the sins of the community are cast and which is then banished.

73 In Greek mythology, Chaos was the first entity to come into existence. Night was born of Chaos and went on to mother Darkness, Death, and Sleep.

74 "serried": closely set or tightly packed in an orderly manner

Their visages and stature as of gods;
Their number last he sums.

[...]

Thus far these beyond
Compare of mortal prowess, yet observed
Their dread commander. He, above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a tower. His form had yet not lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than Archangel ruined, and the excess
Of glory obscured: as when the sun new-risen
Looks through the horizontal misty air
Shorn of his beams, or, from behind the moon,
In dim eclipse, disastrous twilight sheds
On half the nations, and with fear of change
Perplexes monarchs. Darkened so, yet shone
Above them all the Archangel: but his face
Deep scars of thunder had intrenched, and care
Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows
Of dauntless courage, and considerate pride
Waiting revenge. Cruel his eye, but cast
Signs of remorse and passion, to behold
The fellows of his crime, the followers rather
(Far other once beheld in bliss), condemned
For ever now to have their lot in pain—
Millions of spirits for his fault amerced⁷⁵
Of Heaven, and from eternal splendours flung
For his revolt—yet faithful how they stood,
Their glory withered; as, when heaven's fire
Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines,
With singéd top their stately growth, though bare,
Stands on the blasted heath. He now prepared
To speak; whereat their doubled ranks they bend
From wing to wing, and half enclose him round
With all his peers: attention held them mute.
Thrice he assayed, and thrice, in spite of scorn,
Tears, such as angels weep, burst forth: at last
Words interwove with sighs found out their way:—
“O myriads of immortal Spirits! O Powers
Matchless, but with the Almighty!—and that strife
Was not inglorious, though the event was dire,
As this place testifies, and this dire change,
Hateful to utter. But what power of mind,
Forseeing or presaging, from the depth
Of knowledge past or present, could have feared
How such united force of gods, how such
As stood like these, could ever know repulse?

570 For who can yet believe, though after loss,
That all these puissant⁷⁶ legions, whose exile
Hath emptied Heaven, shall fail to reascend,
Self-raised, and repossess their native seat?
587 For me, be witness all the host of Heaven,
If counsels different, or danger shunned
By me, have lost our hopes. But he who reigns
590 Monarch in Heaven till then as one secure
Sat on his throne, upheld by old repute,
Consent or custom, and his regal state
640 Put forth at full, but still his strength concealed—
Which tempted our attempt, and wrought our fall.
Henceforth his might we know, and know our own,
So as not either to provoke, or dread
New war provoked: our better part remains
To work in close design, by fraud or guile,
What force effected not; that he no less
600 At length from us may find, who overcomes
By force hath overcome but half his foe.
Space may produce new worlds; whereof so rife
650 There went a fame in Heaven that he ere long
Intended to create, and therein plant
A generation whom his choice regard
Should favour equal to the sons of Heaven.
Thither, if but to pry, shall be perhaps
Our first eruption—thither, or elsewhere;
For this infernal pit shall never hold
610 Celestial spirits in bondage, nor the Abyss
Long under darkness cover. But these thoughts
Full counsel must mature. Peace is despaired;
660 For who can think submission? War, then, war
Open or understood, must be resolved.”
He spake; and, to confirm his words, outflew
Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs
Of mighty Cherubim; the sudden blaze
Far round illumined Hell. Highly they raged
Against the Highest and fierce with graspéd arms
620 Clashed on their sounding shields the din of war,
Hurling defiance toward the vault of Heaven.

In the intervening action, Satan and his demons build a pillared stronghold called Pandemonium.

630

75 “amerced”: punished

76 “puissant”: powerful

Book II

High on a throne of royal state, which far
 Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,⁷⁷
 Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
 Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,
 Satan exalted sat, by merit raised
 To that bad eminence; and, from despair
 Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires
 Beyond thus high, insatiate to pursue
 Vain war with Heaven; and, by success untaught,
 His proud imaginations thus displayed:—
 “Powers and dominions, deities of Heaven!—
 For, since no deep within her gulf can hold
 Immortal vigour, though oppressed and fallen,
 I give not Heaven for lost: from this descent
 Celestial virtues rising will appear
 More glorious and more dread than from no fall,
 And trust themselves to fear no second fate!—
 Me though just right, and the fixed laws of Heaven,
 Did first create your leader—next, free choice,
 With what besides in council or in fight
 Hath been achieved of merit—yet this loss,
 Thus far at least recovered, hath much more
 Established in a safe, unenvied throne,
 Yielded with full consent. The happier state
 In Heaven, which follows dignity, might draw
 Envy from each inferior; but who here
 Will envy whom the highest place exposes
 Foremost to stand against the Thunderer’s aim
 Your bulwark, and condemns to greatest share
 Of endless pain? Where there is, then, no good
 For which to strive, no strife can grow up there
 From faction: for none sure will claim in Hell
 Precedence; none whose portion is so small
 Of present pain that with ambitious mind
 Will covet more! With this advantage, then,
 To union, and firm faith, and firm accord,
 More than can be in Heaven, we now return
 To claim our just inheritance of old,
 Surer to prosper than prosperity
 Could have assured us; and by what best way,
 Whether of open war or covert guile,
 We now debate. Who can advise may speak.”

⁷⁷ Ormus (Hormuz) was a medieval kingdom centered around the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf in what is now Iran. Ind was a common name for India in English literature, though the term could also be used to refer to the undefined “East.” Both areas were known for their involvement in trade.

In the intervening action, the first-rank demons support different approaches for the resistance to God in a wide-ranging, parliament-style debate. Moloch advises open warfare, since they might win and any punishment could not be worse than Hell; Belial disagrees, arguing that there could be worse punishments and that inaction is the best course since God might yet forgive them. Mammon responds by rejecting any forgiveness that might be offered and advocating a focus on making Hell a rival to Heaven through diligent work. Beelzebub speaks last, advocating a covert war of revenge on God by polluting Earth and humanity—new creations they had heard of but not yet seen. The demons vote to adopt Beelzebub’s plan, and Satan eventually accepts the task of travelling out of Hell and to Earth.

Thus saying, rose 466
 The monarch, and prevented all reply;
 Prudent lest, from his resolution raised,
 Others among the chief might offer now,
 Certain to be refused, what erst they feared, 470
 And, so refused, might in opinion stand
 His rivals, winning cheap the high repute
 Which he through hazard huge must earn. But they
 Dreaded not more the adventure than his voice
 Forbidding; and at once with him they rose.
 Their rising all at once was as the sound
 Of thunder heard remote. Towards him they bend
 With awful reverence prone, and as a god
 Extol him equal to the highest in Heaven.
 Nor failed they to express how much they praised 480
 That for the general safety he despised
 His own: for neither do the Spirits damned
 Lose all their virtue; lest bad men should boast 30
 Their specious deeds on earth, which glory excites,
 Or close ambition varnished o’er with zeal.
 Thus they their doubtful consultations dark
 Ended, rejoicing in their matchless chief:
 As, when from mountaintops the dusky clouds
 Ascending, while the north wind sleeps, o’erspread
 Heaven’s cheerful face, the louring⁷⁸ element 490
 Scowls o’er the darkened landscape snow or shower;
 If chance the radiant sun, with farewell sweet,
 Extend his evening beam, the fields revive,
 The birds their notes renew, and bleating herds
 Attest their joy, that hill and valley rings.
 O shame to men! Devil with devil damned
 Firm concord holds; men only disagree
 Of creatures rational, though under hope
 Of heavenly grace, and, God proclaiming peace,

⁷⁸ “louring”: scowling

Yet live in hatred, enmity, and strife
 Among themselves, and levy cruel wars
 Wasting the earth, each other to destroy:
 As if (which might induce us to accord)
 Man had not hellish foes enow⁷⁹ besides,
 That day and night for his destruction wait!
 [...]
 Meanwhile the adversary of God and man,
 Satan, with thoughts inflamed of highest design,
 Puts on swift wings, and toward the gates of Hell
 Explores his solitary flight: sometimes
 He scours the right hand coast, sometimes the left;
 Now shaves with level wing the deep, then soars
 Up to the fiery concave towering high.
 As when far off at sea a fleet descried
 Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds
 Close sailing from Bengala,⁸⁰ or the isles
 Of Ternate and Tidore,⁸¹ whence merchants bring
 Their spicy drugs; they on the trading flood,
 Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape,⁸²
 Ply stemming nightly toward the pole: so seemed
 Far off the flying fiend. At last appear
 Hell-hounds, high reaching to the horrid roof,
 And thrice threefold the gates; three folds were brass,
 Three iron, three of adamantine rock,
 Impenetrable, impaled with circling fire,
 Yet unconsumed. Before the gates there sat
 On either side a formidable shape.
 The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair,
 But ended foul in many a scaly fold,
 Voluminous and vast—a serpent armed
 With mortal sting. About her middle round
 A cry of Hell-hounds never-ceasing barked
 With wide Cerberean⁸³ mouths full loud, and rung
 A hideous peal; yet, when they list, would creep,
 If aught disturbed their noise, into her womb,
 And kennel there; yet there still barked and howled

⁷⁹ “enow”: enough

⁸⁰ Bengala refers to the area of Bengal, encompassing parts of modern-day India, Bangladesh, and the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean.

⁸¹ Ternate and Tidore are Indonesian islands, and were important elements of the eastern spice trades.

⁸² Although Ethiopia is a modern state in northeastern Africa, Milton is likely using it to refer to the Ethiopian Sea, which stretch around the southern tip of Africa. The cape referred to, then, is the Cape of Good Hope.

⁸³ Cerberean refers to **Cerberus**, the three-headed dog which guarded the gates of Hades in Greco-Roman mythology.

500 Within unseen. Far less abhorred than these
 Vexed Scylla,⁸⁴ bathing in the sea that parts
 Calabria from the hoarse Trinacrian⁸⁵ shore;
 Nor uglier follow the night-hag, when, called
 In secret, riding through the air she comes,
 505 Lured with the smell of infant blood, to dance
 With Lapland⁸⁶ witches, while the labouring moon
 Eclipses at their charms. The other shape—
 629 If shape it might be called that shape had none
 Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb;
 Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,
 For each seemed either—black it stood as Night,
 670 Fierce as ten Furies,⁸⁷ terrible as Hell,
 And shook a dreadful dart: what seemed his head
 The likeness of a kingly crown had on.
 Satan was now at hand, and from his seat
 The monster moving onward came as fast
 With horrid strides; Hell trembled as he strode.
 640 The undaunted fiend what this might be admired—
 Admired, not feared (God and his Son except,
 Created thing naught valued he nor shunned),
 And with disdainful look thus first began:—
 680 “Whence and what art thou, execrable shape,
 That dar’st, though grim and terrible, advance
 Thy miscreated front athwart my way
 To yonder gates? Through them I mean to pass,
 That be assured, without leave asked of thee.
 Retire; or taste thy folly, and learn by proof,
 Hell-born, not to contend with spirits of Heaven.”
 To whom the Goblin, full of wrath, replied:—
 “Art thou that traitor-angel? art thou he,
 Who first broke peace in Heaven and faith, till then
 690 Unbroken, and in proud rebellious arms

⁸⁴ Scylla was a horrific monster who lived on a cliff-side, and would snatch up and eat those sailing by her abode. There are a number of creation stories for the monster, most of which involve her transformation from a beautiful nymph to a monster.

⁸⁵ Calabria is the area of southern Italy, which forms the “toe” of the boot shape. Trinacria here refers to the island of Sicily, which is very close to the Calabrian shoreline.

⁸⁶ Lapland was used to refer to a broad geographical area including the Scandinavian countries (except for Denmark) and western Russia. During Milton’s time, it was lightly populated by the Sami people who did not convert to Christianity until well into the 1700s. It was, therefore, commonly associated with magic and witches.

⁸⁷ The Furies were goddesses (typically three in number) associated with the first- or second-generation deities of Greco-Roman mythology. They were traditionally located in Hades and were tasked with taking vengeance on those who committed a sin—specifically the breaking of promises.

Drew after him the third part of Heaven's sons,
 Conjured against the Highest—for which both thou
 And they, outcast from God, are here condemned
 To waste eternal days in woe and pain?
 And reckon'st thou thyself with spirits of Heaven,
 Hell-doomed, and breath'st defiance here and scorn,
 Where I reign king, and, to enrage thee more,
 Thy king and lord? Back to thy punishment,
 False fugitive; and to thy speed add wings,
 Lest with a whip of scorpions I pursue
 Thy lingering, or with one stroke of this dart
 Strange horror seize thee, and pangs unfelt before.”

So spake the grisly terror; and in shape,
 So speaking and so threatening, grew tenfold,
 More dreadful and deform. On the other side,
 Incensed with indignation, Satan stood
 Unterrified, and like a comet burned,
 That fires the length of Ophiuchus⁸⁸ huge
 In the arctic sky, and from his horrid hair
 Shakes pestilence and war. Each at the head
 Levelled his deadly aim; their fatal hands
 No second stroke intend; and such a frown
 Each cast at the other as when two black clouds,
 With heaven's artillery fraught, came rattling on
 Over the Caspian,⁸⁹—then stand front to front
 Hovering a space, till winds the signal blow
 To join their dark encounter in mid-air.
 So frowned the mighty combatants that Hell
 Grew darker at their frown; so matched they stood;
 For never but once more was either like
 To meet so great a foe. And now great deeds
 Had been achieved, whereof all Hell had rung,
 Had not the snaky sorceress, that sat
 Fast by Hell-gate and kept the fatal key,
 Risen, and with hideous outcry rushed between.

“O father, what intends thy hand,” she cried,
 “Against thy only son? What fury, O son,
 Possesses thee to bend that mortal dart
 Against thy father's head? And know'st for whom?
 For him who sits above, and laughs the while
 At thee, ordained his drudge to execute
 Whate'er his wrath, which he calls justice, bids—
 His wrath, which one day will destroy ye both!”

She spake, and at her words the hellish pest
 Forbore: then these to her Satan returned:—
 “So strange thy outcry, and thy words so strange

Thou interposest, that my sudden hand,
 Prevented, spares to tell thee yet by deeds
 What it intends, till first I know of thee 740
 What thing thou art, thus double-formed, and why
 In this infernal vale first met, thou call'st
 Me father, and that phantasm call'st my son.
 I know thee not, nor ever saw till now
 Sight more detestable than him and thee.”

700 To whom thus the portress of Hell-gate replied:—
 “Hast thou forgot me, then; and do I seem
 Now in thine eye so foul?—once deemed so fair
 In Heaven, when at the assembly, and in sight
 Of all the Seraphim with thee combined 750
 In bold conspiracy against Heaven's king,
 All on a sudden miserable pain

Surprised thee, dim thine eyes and dizzy swum
 In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast
 Threw forth, till on the left side opening wide,
 Likest to thee in shape and countenance bright,
 Then shining heavenly fair; a goddess armed,
 Out of thy head I sprung. Amazement seized
 All the host of Heaven; back they recoiled afraid

At first, and called me Sin, and for a sign 760
 Portentous held me; but, familiar grown,
 I pleased, and with attractive graces won
 The most averse—thee chiefly, who, full oft
 Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing,
 Becam'st enamoured; and such joy thou took'st
 With me in secret that my womb conceived
 A growing burden. Meanwhile war arose,
 And fields were fought in Heaven: wherein remained
 (For what could else?) to our almighty foe
 Clear victory; to our part loss and rout 770

Through all the Empyrean.⁹⁰ Down they fell,
 Driven headlong from the pitch of Heaven, down
 Into this deep; and in the general fall
 I also: at which time this powerful key
 Into my hands was given, with charge to keep
 These gates forever shut, which none can pass
 Without my opening. Pensive here I sat
 Alone; but long I sat not, till my womb,
 Pregnant by thee, and now excessive grown,
 Prodigious motion felt and rueful throes. 780
 At last this odious offspring whom thou seest,
 Thine own begotten, breaking violent way,

⁸⁸ Ophiucus, or “snake-bearer,” is a constellation next to Orion.

⁸⁹ The Caspian Sea serves as a traditional border between Eastern Europe and Asia.

⁹⁰ In various Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian cosmologies, there were a number of levels to the heavens. Empyrean heaven is the location of the fire element for Greco-Roman cosmologies, whereas Christian cosmologies associate it with the dwelling place of God.

Tore through my entrails, that, with fear and pain
 Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew
 Transformed: but he my inbred enemy
 Forth issued, brandishing his fatal dart,
 Made to destroy. I fled, and cried out Death!
 Hell trembled at the hideous name, and sighed
 From all her caves, and back resounded Death!
 I fled; but he pursued (though more, it seems,
 790 Inflamed with lust than rage), and, swifter far,
 Me overtook, his mother; all dismayed,
 And, in embraces forcible and foul
 Engendering with me, of that rape begot
 These yelling monsters, that with ceaseless cry
 Surround me, as thou saw'st—hourly conceived
 And hourly born, with sorrow infinite
 To me: for, when they list, into the womb
 That bred them they return, and howl, and gnaw
 My bowels, their repast; then, bursting forth
 800 Afresh, with conscious terrors vex me round,
 That rest or intermission none I find.
 Before mine eyes in opposition sits
 Grim Death, my son and foe, who set them on,
 And me, his parent, would full soon devour
 For want of other prey, but that he knows
 His end with mine involved, and knows that I
 Should prove a bitter morsel, and his bane,
 Whenever that shall be: so Fate pronounced.
 But thou, O father, I forewarn thee, shun
 810 His deadly arrow; neither vainly hope
 To be invulnerable in those bright arms,
 Through tempered heavenly; for that mortal dint,
 Save he who reigns above, none can resist.”
 She finished; and the subtle fiend his lore
 Soon learned, now milder, and thus answered smooth:—
 “Dear daughter—since thou claim'st me for thy sire,
 And my fair son here show'st me, the dear pledge
 Of dalliance had with thee in Heaven, and joys
 Then sweet, now sad to mention, through dire change
 820 Befallen us unforeseen, unthought-of—know,
 I come no enemy, but to set free
 From out this dark and dismal house of pain
 Both him and thee, and all the heavenly host
 Of spirits that, in our just pretences armed,
 Fell with us from on high. From them I go
 This uncouth errand sole, and one for all
 Myself expose, with lonely steps to tread
 The unfounded deep, and through the void immense
 830 To search, with wandering quest, a place foretold
 Should be—and, by concurring signs, ere now
 Created vast and round—a place of bliss

In the purlieus⁹¹ of Heaven; and therein placed
 A race of upstart creatures, to supply
 Perhaps our vacant room, though more removed,
 Lest Heaven, surcharged with potent multitude,
 Might hap to move new broils. Be this, or aught
 Than this more secret, now designed, I haste
 To know; and this once known, shall soon return
 And bring ye to the place where thou and Death
 840 Shall dwell at ease, and up and down unseen
 Wing silently the buxom air, embalmed
 With odours. There ye shall be fed and filled
 Immeasurably; all things shall be your prey.”
 He ceased; for both seemed highly pleased, and Death
 Grinned horrible a ghastly smile, to hear
 His famine should be filled, and blessed his maw
 Destined to that good hour. No less rejoiced
 His mother bad, and thus bespake her sire:—
 850 “The key of this infernal pit, by due
 And by command of Heaven's all-powerful king,
 I keep, by him forbidden to unlock
 These adamantine gates; against all force
 Death ready stands to interpose his dart,
 Fearless to be o'ermatched by living might.
 But what owe I to his commands above,
 Who hates me, and hath hither thrust me down
 Into this gloom of Tartarus⁹² profound,
 To sit in hateful office here confined,
 860 Inhabitant of Heaven and heavenly-born—
 Here in perpetual agony and pain,
 With terrors and with clamours compassed round
 Of mine own brood, that on my bowels feed?
 Thou art my father, thou my author, thou
 My being gav'st me; whom should I obey
 But thee? whom follow? Thou wilt bring me soon
 To that new world of light and bliss, among
 The gods who live at ease, where I shall reign
 At thy right hand voluptuous, as beseems
 Thy daughter and thy darling, without end.”
 870 Thus saying, from her side the fatal key,
 Sad instrument of all our woe, she took;
 And, towards the gate rolling her bestial train,
 Forthwith the huge portcullis high up-drew,
 Which, but herself, not all the Stygian powers
 Could once have moved; then in the keyhole turns
 The intricate wards, and every bolt and bar

⁹¹ “purlieus”: environment, setting

⁹² Tartarus was generally associated with Hades/Dis in Greco-Roman mythology, but in the Christian context in which it is used here it is synonymous with Hell.

Of massy iron or solid rock with ease
 Unfastens. On a sudden open fly,
 With impetuous recoil and jarring sound, 880
 The infernal doors, and on their hinges grate
 Harsh thunder, that the lowest bottom shook
 Of Erebus.⁹³ She opened; but to shut
 Excelled her power: the gates wide open stood,
 That with extended wings a bannered host,
 Under spread ensigns marching, might pass through
 With horse and chariots ranked in loose array;
 So wide they stood, and like a furnace-mouth
 Cast forth redounding smoke and ruddy flame.
 Before their eyes in sudden view appear 890
 The secrets of the hoary deep—a dark
 Illimitable ocean, without bound,
 Without dimension: where length, breadth, and height,
 And time, and place, are lost; where eldest Night
 And Chaos, ancestors of Nature,⁹⁴ hold
 Eternal anarchy, amidst the noise
 Of endless wars, and by confusion stand.
 For Hot, Cold, Moist, and Dry,⁹⁵ four champions fierce,
 Strive here for mastery, and to battle bring
 Their embryon⁹⁶ atoms: they around the flag 900
 Of each his faction, in their several clans,
 Light-armed or heavy, sharp, smooth, swift, or slow,
 Swarm populous, unnumbered as the sands
 Of Barca or Cyrene's⁹⁷ torrid soil,
 Levied to side with warring winds, and poise
 Their lighter wings. To whom these most adhere
 He rules a moment: Chaos umpire sits,
 And by decision more embroils the fray
 By which he reigns: next him, high arbiter,
 Chance governs all. Into this wild abyss, 910
 The womb of Nature, and perhaps her grave,
 Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,

But all these in their pregnant causes mixed
 Confusedly, and which thus must ever fight,
 Unless the almighty maker them ordain
 His dark materials to create more worlds—
 Into this wild abyss the wary fiend
 Stood on the brink of Hell and looked a while,
 Pondering his voyage; for no narrow frith⁹⁸
 He had to cross.

93 Although the ancient Greeks conceived Erebus as a chthonic personification of darkness, Milton is using the later sense that was associated with a specific location in Tartarus/Dis.

94 Nature was personified in Greco-Roman mythology, but numerous Christian cosmographies followed the tradition and personified it as well. Nature is almost exclusively female.

95 Milton here is making use of humoral ideas that declared the human body to be composed of four humours: black bile (cold and dry), blood (warm and moist), phlegm (cold and moist), and yellow bile (warm and dry). The humours are, in turn, derived from Aristotle's four elements (air, earth, fire, and water).

96 "embryon": embryonic, nascent

97 Barca and Cyrene were Greek cities on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in what is now Libya.

98 "frith": firth, a bay or strait

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY, *FRANKENSTEIN*, OR THE MODERN PROMETHEUS — Selections

Critical Introduction

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851) was an English author whose best known work is *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, an icon of Gothic horror. It has been the inspiration for innumerable adaptations—movies, television series, short stories, novels, comic books, video games, and on. The monster, who has no name in the novel, is one of the most famous of all monsters from any period. It is a common for pedants to correct those who call the monster “Frankenstein,” when Victor Frankenstein is the doctor and the monster is his creation; however, many readers find the doctor more monstrous than his creation.

The novel purportedly was conceived as part of a sort of game. Mary Shelley, her romantic partner—the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley—and a few friends were travelling in Switzerland together. Stuck inside on a rainy day, they first read ghost stories and then challenged each other to write their own. Mary Shelley’s was the only one completed and was the start of *Frankenstein*. Her text unfolds as an epistolary novel, a novel that is framed as a series of letters, written from a ship captain to his sister. Captain Walton saves Victor from an ice flow in the Arctic, and then the doctor tells him the harrowing tale of his creation of an artificial man. The novel has been seen as a warning against unfettered ambitions, technology, rejection of difference, and poor parenting, among many other themes.

We here present a very short pair of excerpts from the novel, a pair of passages introducing and describing the Monster. In the first passage, the Monster comes to life and inspires extreme revulsion in his creator as “horror and disgust filled [his] heart.” In the second passage, after disasters and acts of violence, creature and creator again meet, and exchange heated but eloquent words. We encourage you to read the whole of the short novel.

Reading Questions

What details does Shelley provide about the appearance of the Monster, and which seem most directed toward evoking negative feelings in the reader? Is the conversation between the doctor and the Monster what you would expect? Why or why not? How does the Monster explain his actions?

Editorial Notes

We have chosen to reprint portions of the first edition (of many), from 1818. Shelley made some small changes in subsequent editions. Where material has been omitted, a short synopsis in italics serves to orient the reader.

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FRANKENSTEIN, OR THE MODERN PROMETHEUS

Selections (London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor, & Jones, 1818)

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY

IT WAS ON a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips.

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and continued a long time traversing my bed-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude succeeded to the tumult I had before endured; and I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain: I slept indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every

limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window-shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs. I took refuge in the court-yard belonging to the house which I inhabited; where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life.

Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived.

In the intervening action, Frankenstein's monster has escaped and learned to read and speak, though he is frustrated that his appearance does not allow him to be the social animal he longs to be. Frustration slowly turns to hatred for humanity. Victor Frankenstein takes ill from his long work and from the shock of seeing his creation, but he returns home when he learns his brother has been murdered; the monster has framed his brother's nanny for the crime and she is to be hanged for it. In his grief, Victor retreats to the mountains, where he again sees his creation.

As I said this, I suddenly beheld the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards me with superhuman speed. He bounded over the crevices in the ice, among which I had walked with caution; his stature also, as he approached, seemed to exceed that of man. I was troubled: a mist came over my eyes, and I felt a faintness seize me; but I was quickly restored by the cold gale of the mountains. I perceived, as the shape came nearer, (sight tremendous and abhorred!) that it was the wretch whom I had created. I trembled with rage and horror, resolving to wait his approach, and then close with him in mortal combat. He approached; his countenance

bespoke bitter anguish, combined with disdain and malignity, while its unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes. But I scarcely observed this; anger and hatred had at first deprived me of utterance, and I recovered only to overwhelm him with words expressive of furious detestation and contempt.

“Devil!” I exclaimed, “do you dare approach me? and do not you fear the fierce vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head? Begone, vile insect! or rather stay, that I may trample you to dust! and, oh, that I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered!”

“I expected this reception,” said the *dæmon*. “All men hate the wretched; how then must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace; but if you refuse, I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends.”

“Abhorred monster! fiend that thou art! the tortures of hell are too mild a vengeance for thy crimes. Wretched devil! you reproach me with your creation; come on then, that I may extinguish the spark which I so negligently bestowed.”

My rage was without bounds; I sprang on him, impelled by all the feelings which can arm one being against the existence of another.

He easily eluded me, and said,

“Be calm! I entreat you to hear me, before you give vent to your hatred on my devoted head. Have I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it. Remember, thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine; my joints more supple. But I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other, and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due. Remember, that I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Every where I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.”

“Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight, in which one must fall.”

“How can I move thee? Will no entreaties cause thee to turn a favourable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and compassion? Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow-creatures, who owe me nothing? they spurn and hate me. The desert mountains and dreary glaciers are my refuge. I have wandered here many days; the caves of ice, which I only do not fear, are a dwelling to me, and the only one which man does not grudge. These bleak skies I hail, for they are kinder to me than your fellow-beings. If the multitude of mankind knew of my existence, they would do as you do, and arm themselves for my destruction. Shall I not then hate them who abhor me? I will keep no terms with my enemies. I am miserable, and they shall share my wretchedness. Yet it is in your power to recompense me, and deliver them from an evil which it only remains for you to make so great, that not only you and your family, but thousands of others, shall be swallowed up in the whirlwinds of its rage. Let your compassion be moved, and do not disdain me. Listen to my tale: when you have heard that, abandon or commiserate me, as you shall judge that I deserve. But hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they may be, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder; and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you not to spare me: listen to me; and then, if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands.”

“Why do you call to my remembrance circumstances of which I shudder to reflect, that I have been the miserable origin and author? Cursed be the day, abhorred devil, in which you first saw light! Cursed (although I curse myself) be the hands that formed you! You have made me wretched beyond expression. You have left me no power to consider whether I am just to you, or not. Begone! relieve me from the sight of your detested form.”

“Thus I relieve thee, my creator,” he said, and placed his hated hands before my eyes, which I flung from me with violence; “thus I take from thee a sight which you abhor. Still thou canst listen to me, and grant me thy compassion. By the virtues that I once possessed, I demand this from you. Hear my tale; it is long and strange, and the temperature of this place is not fitting to your fine sensations; come to the

hut upon the mountain. The sun is yet high in the heavens; before it descends to hide itself behind yon snowy precipices, and illuminate another world, you will have heard my story, and can decide. On you it rests, whether I quit for ever the neighbourhood of man, and lead a harmless life, or become the scourge of your fellow-creatures, and the author of your own speedy ruin."

As he said this, he led the way across the ice: I followed. My heart was full, and I did not answer him; but, as I proceeded, I weighed the various arguments that he had used, and determined at least to listen to his tale. I was partly urged by curiosity, and compassion confirmed my resolution. I had hitherto supposed him to be the murderer of my brother, and I eagerly sought a confirmation or denial of this opinion. For the first time, also, I felt what the duties of a creator towards his creature were, and that I ought to render him happy before I complained of his wickedness. These motives urged me to comply with his demand.

FRANKENSTEIN FRONTISPIECE

Critical Introduction

Ever since the release of James Whale's *Frankenstein* (Universal Pictures, 1931), starring Boris Karloff, readers have come to Mary Shelley's novel with a very particular set of expectations about the appearance and behaviour of the Monster. 100 years earlier, when this revised edition was first published, the engraved frontispiece by Theodor Richard Edward von Holst (1810–1844) would have been the primary way that readers gained these expectations. Von Holst's image is quite surprising for those of us raised with images of Karloff lumbering around, bolts in his neck, stitches and staples holding his heavy-browed, flat-topped head together. The scene is set in a Gothic interior, with an arched window filled with tracery and glass roundels, a bookshelf topped with a series of human skulls, a mystical diagram hanging on the wall, and various scientific apparatuses on a table. However, the main focus of the image is clearly the Monster himself. He is the brightest object in the room—and the largest. The figure is nude, with the sheet that presumably covered him cast off onto the skeleton beneath his legs. He is clearly massive, but well-proportioned and muscular, following classical models for male beauty. Von Holst visually connects the Monster to the skeleton beneath him by placing their legs and feet in parallel position, and by emphasizing the bone structure beneath the skin and flesh of the Monster's foot and hand, indicating to the viewer that the newly alive Monster was assembled from fragments of death. There are bright rays of light slanting from Victor Frankenstein to the Monster, but the light source is unclear. These lines, therefore, seem more designed to connect these two figures, to imply a transfer of the divine spark of life from this deeply flawed "god" to his creation, who reclines on the ground in a languid post that loosely recalls that of Michelangelo's painting of Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Here, though, instead of reaching out to his creation, this creator flees in horror.

Viewing Questions

What is the meaning of the Creature's wide-eyed expression? And what is the basis, in this image, of Frankenstein's fear and flight?

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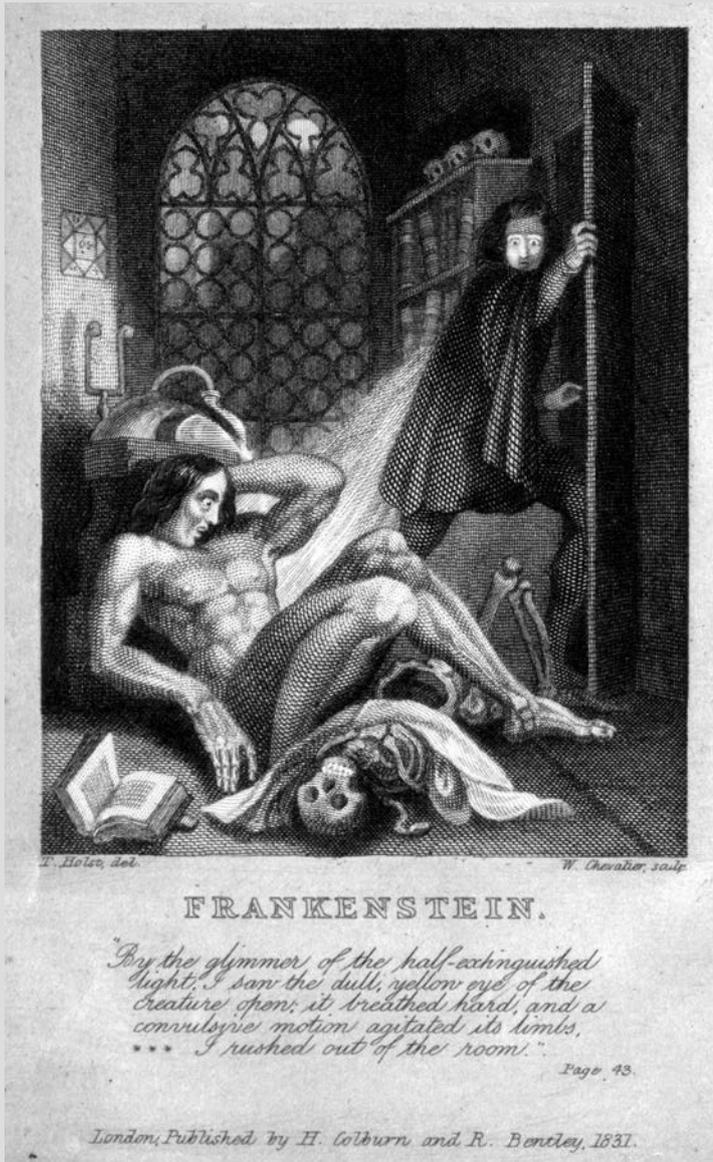


Figure 7. Frankenstein Frontispiece, Theodor Richard Edward von Holst, Nineteenth Century (1831). First published in Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1831), number 9 in Bentley's Standard Novels series, with revised text, introduction, and engraved title page.

EDGAR ALLAN POE, “WILLIAM WILSON”

Critical Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) was at the height of his career when he wrote “William Wilson” in 1839. The short story illustrates many key traits of the American Gothic: like “The Fall of the House of Usher,” this short story features suspenseful and mysterious atmospheres that include supernatural occurrences and unsettling emotional states—among them the sense that one is on the verge of madness. The sprawling Elizabethan schoolhouse described in the beginning of “William Wilson,” likely modelled after Poe’s own childhood school, is common for the Gothic narrative as well. It is at this schoolhouse that the protagonist, William Wilson, meets another William Wilson, a boy with physical features strikingly similar to his own. Their relationship is largely adversarial, with the schoolmate continually harassing William throughout his life until the two have a deadly altercation. As the story ends, the reader is left to wonder from whom the blood truly drips.

This story is an early example of the complicated monsters that will appear in later texts. The “monster” in this story bears no obvious signs of monstrousness, and one may be tempted to argue that he is no monster at all. If one does grant that William Wilson is a monster, deciding *which William* is the monster becomes quite difficult. Poe’s story is introspective, psychological. It prefigures psychoanalytic ideas as it demonstrates that confronting a self that *is outside of oneself*, something both familiar and unfamiliar, is terrifyingly complicated. The difference between the self that is known and a version of the self that is unknown or disfavoured is difficult (if not impossible) to identify, and, as Poe may be alluding to, the true monster might actually be returning our gaze in the mirror.

Reading Questions

Who or what is the monster that Poe is portraying in this story? When you come to a conclusion, consider the monstrous traits you relied on to make your decision: what about this monster is fear-inducing or “wrong”? Do those traits correlate with other monsters in this volume or those that exist in works not included here?

Sigmund Freud’s theory on the uncanny discusses the possibility that *Doppelgänger*—doubles of a person—are omens of death. Consider next that the word “monster” is derived from the Latin *monstrare*, “to show.” How does this information clarify or complicate your reading of the monster in “William Wilson”?

Editorial Notes

The version of the story reproduced here comes from Poe’s *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* published in 1840. There are some minor differences from previous publications, but we have chosen to produce it exactly as it appeared in this edition. Poe’s own spelling and punctuation have been retained. All explanatory footnotes are our own insertions.

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“WILLIAM WILSON”

EDGAR ALLAN POE

What say of it? what say of conscience grim,
That spectre in my path?

*Chamberlaine's Pharronida.*¹

Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation. This has been already too much an object for the scorn, for the horror, for the detestation of my race. To the uttermost regions of the globe have not the indignant winds bruited² its unparalleled infamy? Oh, outcast of all outcasts most abandoned! To the earth art thou not forever dead? to its honors, to its flowers, to its golden aspirations?—and a cloud, dense, dismal, and limitless, does it not hang eternally between thy hopes and heaven?

I would not, if I could, here or to-day, embody a record of my later years of unspeakable misery, and unpardonable crime. This epoch—these later years—took unto themselves a sudden elevation in turpitude, whose origin alone it is my present purpose to assign. Men usually grow base by degrees. From me, in an instant, all virtue dropped bodily as a mantle. I shrouded my nakedness in triple guilt. From comparatively trivial wickedness I passed, with the stride of a giant, into more than the enormities of an Elah-Gabalus.³ What chance, what one event brought this evil thing to pass, bear with me while I relate. Death approaches; and the shadow which fore-runs him has thrown a softening influence over my spirit. I long, in passing through the dim valley, for the sympathy—I had nearly said for the pity—of my fellow-men. I would fain have them believe that I have been, in some measure, the slave of circumstances beyond human control. I would wish them to seek out for me, in the details I am about to give, some little oasis of *fatality* amid a wilderness of error. I would have them allow—what they cannot refrain from allowing—

that, although temptation may have erewhile existed as great, man was never *thus*, at least, tempted before—certainly, never *thus* fell. And therefore has he never thus suffered. Have I not indeed been living in a dream? And am I not now dying a victim to the horror and the mystery of the wildest of all sublunary visions?

I am come of a race whose imaginative and easily excitable temperament has at all times rendered them remarkable; and, in my earliest infancy, I gave evidence of having fully inherited the family character. As I advanced in years it was more strongly developed; becoming, for many reasons, a cause of serious disquietude to my friends, and of positive injury to myself. I grew self-willed, addicted to the wildest caprices, and a prey to the most ungovernable passions. Weak-minded, and beset with constitutional infirmities akin to my own, my parents could do but little to check the evil propensities which distinguished me. Some feeble and ill-directed efforts resulted in complete failure on their part, and, of course, in total triumph on mine. Thenceforward my voice was a household law; and at an age when few children have abandoned their leading-strings, I was left to the guidance of my own will, and became, in all but name, the master of my own actions.

My earliest recollections of a school-life are connected with a large, rambling, cottage-built, and somewhat decayed building in a misty-looking village of England, where were a vast number of gigantic and gnarled trees, and where all the houses were excessively ancient and inordinately tall. In truth, it was a dream-like and spirit-soothing place, that venerable old town. At this moment, in fancy, I feel the refreshing chilliness of its deeply-shadowed avenues, inhale the fragrance of its thousand shrubberies, and thrill anew with undefinable delight, at the deep, hollow note of the church-bell, breaking each hour, with sullen and sudden roar, upon the stillness of the dusky atmosphere in which the old, fretted, Gothic steeple⁴ lay imbedded and asleep.

It gives me, perhaps, as much of pleasure as I can now in any manner experience, to dwell upon minute recollections of the school and its concerns. Steeped in misery as I am—

¹ The lines are from the Restoration poet William Chamberlayne; they are not, however, from *Pharronida*, but instead from his play called *Love's Victory*. It is unclear whether the misattribution is purposeful or accidental.

² “bruited”: spread widely

³ Poe is here referring to the Emperor Elagabalus, who ruled Rome for four years and was known for scandals revolving around religion and sex.

⁴ A style of architecture most closely associated with western European churches in the Middle Ages.

misery, alas! only too real—I shall be pardoned for seeking relief, however slight and temporary, in the weakness of a few rambling details. These, moreover, utterly trivial, and even ridiculous in themselves, assume, to my fancy, adventitious importance as connected with a period and a locality, when and where I recognise the first ambiguous monitions of the destiny which afterwards so fully overshadowed me. Let me then remember.

The house, I have said, was old, irregular, and cottage-built. The grounds were extensive, and an enormously high and solid brick wall, topped with a bed of mortar and broken glass, encompassed the whole. This prison-like rampart formed the limit of our domain; beyond it we saw but thrice a week—once every Saturday afternoon, when, attended by two ushers, we were permitted to take brief walks in a body through some of the neighbouring fields—and twice during Sunday, when we were paraded in the same formal manner to the morning and evening service in the one church of the village. Of this church the principal of our school was pastor. With how deep a spirit of wonder and perplexity was I wont to regard him from our remote pew in the gallery, as, with step solemn and slow, he ascended the pulpit! This reverend man, with countenance so demurely benign, with robes so glossy and so clerically flowing, with wig so minutely powdered, so rigid and so vast—could this be he who of late, with sour visage, and in snuffy habiliments, administered, ferule in hand, the Draconian laws of the academy? Oh, gigantic paradox, too utterly monstrous for solution!

At an angle of the ponderous wall frowned a more ponderous gate. It was riveted and studded with iron bolts, and surmounted with jagged iron spikes. What impressions of deep awe it inspired! It was never opened save for the three periodical egressions and ingressions already mentioned; then, in every creak of its mighty hinges we found a plenitude of mystery, a world of matter for solemn remark, or for more solemn meditation.

The extensive enclosure was irregular in form, having many capacious recesses. Of these, three or four of the largest constituted the play-ground. It was level, and covered with fine, hard gravel. I well remember it had no trees, nor benches, nor anything similar within it. Of course it was in the rear of the house. In front lay a small parterre, planted with box and other shrubs; but through this sacred division we passed only upon rare occasions indeed, such as a first advent to school or final departure thence, or perhaps, when a parent or friend having called for us, we joyfully took our way home for the Christmas or Midsummer holydays.

But the house—how quaint an old building was this!—to me how veritably a palace of enchantment! There was really no end to its windings, to its incomprehensible subdivisions. It was impossible, at any given time, to say with certainty upon which of its two stories one happened to be. From each room to every other there were sure to be found three or four steps either in ascent or descent. Then the lateral branches were innumerable—inconceivable—and so returning in upon themselves, that our most exact ideas in regard to the whole mansion were not very far different from those with which we pondered upon infinity. During the five years of my residence here I was never able to ascertain with precision, in what remote locality lay the little sleeping apartment assigned to myself and some eighteen or twenty other scholars.

The school-room was the largest in the house—I could not help thinking in the world. It was very long, narrow, and dimly low, with pointed Gothic windows and a ceiling of oak. In a remote and terror-inspiring angle was a square enclosure of eight or ten feet, comprising the sanctum, "during hours," of our principal, the Reverend Dr. Bransby. It was a solid structure, with massy door, sooner than open which in the absence of the "Dominie," we would all have willingly perished by the *peine forte et dure*.⁵ In other angles were two other similar boxes, far less revered, indeed, but still greatly matters of awe. One of these was the pulpit of "the classical" usher, one of the "English and mathematical." Interspersed about the room, crossing and recrossing in endless irregularity, were innumerable benches and desks, black, ancient, and time-worn, piled desperately with much-bethumbed books, and so beset with initial letters, names at full length, meaningless gashes, grotesque figures, and other multiplied efforts of the knife, as to have entirely lost what little of original form might have been their portion in days long departed. A huge bucket with water stood at one extremity of the room, and a clock of stupendous dimensions at the other.

Encompassed by the massy walls of this venerable academy I passed, yet not in tedium or disgust, the years of the third lustrum⁶ of my life. The teeming brain of childhood requires no external world of incident to occupy or amuse it, and the apparently dismal monotony of a school was replete with more intense excitement than my riper youth

⁵ A dominie is the headmaster of a school. *Peine forte et dure* was a French method of torture in which the accused would have progressively heavier stones placed on the chest.

⁶ A lustrum is a period of five years, so Wilson is referring to his life between the ages of ten and fifteen years of age.

has derived from luxury, or my full manhood from crime. Yet I must believe that my first mental development had in it much of the uncommon, even much of the *outré*.⁷ Upon mankind at large the events of very early existence rarely leave in mature age any definite impression. All is gray shadow—a weak and irregular remembrance—an indistinct regathering of feeble pleasures and phantasmagoric pains. With me this is not so. In childhood I must have felt with the energy of a man what I now find stamped upon memory in lines as vivid, as deep, and as durable as the exergues of the Carthaginian medals.⁸

Yet in fact—in the fact of the world's view—how little was there to remember! The morning's awakening, the nightly summons to bed; the connings,⁹ the recitations; the periodical half-holidays, and perambulations; the play-ground, with its broils, its pastimes, its intrigues—these, by a mental sorcery long forgotten, were made to involve a wilderness of sensation, a world of rich incident, an universe of varied emotion, of excitement the most passionate and spirit-stirring. "*Oh, le bon temps, que ce siecle de fer!*"¹⁰

In truth, the ardency, the enthusiasm, and the imperiousness of my disposition, soon rendered me a marked character among my schoolmates, and by slow, but natural gradations, gave me an ascendancy over all not greatly older than myself—over all with one single exception. This exception was found in the person of a scholar, who, although no relation, bore the same Christian and surname as myself—a circumstance, in fact, little remarkable, for, notwithstanding a noble descent, mine was one of those every-day appellations which seem, by prescriptive right, to have been, time out of mind, the common property of the mob. In this narrative I have therefore designated myself as William Wilson—a fictitious title not very dissimilar to the real. My namesake alone, of those who in school phraseology constituted "our set," presumed to compete with me in the studies of the class, in the sports and broils of the play-ground—to refuse implicit belief in my assertions, and submission to my will—indeed to interfere with my arbitrary dictation in any respect whatsoever. If there be on earth a supreme and unqualified despotism, it

is the despotism of a master mind in boyhood over the less energetic spirits of its companions.

Wilson's rebellion was to me a source of the greatest embarrassment—the more so as, in spite of the bravado with which in public I made a point of treating him and his pretensions, I secretly felt that I feared him, and could not help thinking the equality which he maintained so easily with myself, a proof of his true superiority, since not to be overcome cost me a perpetual struggle. Yet this superiority—even this equality—was in truth acknowledged by no one but myself; our associates, by some unaccountable blindness, seemed not even to suspect it. Indeed, his competition, his resistance, and especially his impertinent and dogged interference with my purposes, were not more pointed than private. He appeared to be utterly destitute alike of the ambition which urged, and of the passionate energy of mind which enabled me to excel. In his rivalry he might have been supposed actuated solely by a whimsical desire to thwart, astonish, or mortify myself; although there were times when I could not help observing, with a feeling made up of wonder, abasement, and pique, that he mingled with his injuries, his insults, or his contradictions, a certain most inappropriate, and assuredly most unwelcome *affectionateness* of manner. I could only conceive this singular behaviour to arise from a consummate self-conceit assuming the vulgar airs of patronage and protection.

Perhaps it was this latter trait in Wilson's conduct, conjoined with our identity of name, and the mere accident of our having entered the school upon the same day, which set afloat the notion that we were brothers, among the senior classes in the academy. These do not usually inquire with much strictness into the affairs of their juniors. I have before said, or should have said, that Wilson was not, in the most remote degree, connected with my family. But assuredly if we *had* been brothers we must have been twins, for, after leaving Dr. Bransby's, I casually learned that my namesake—a somewhat remarkable coincidence—was born on the nineteenth of January, 1809—and this is precisely the day of my own nativity.

It may seem strange that in spite of the continual anxiety occasioned me by the rivalry of Wilson, and his intolerable spirit of contradiction, I could not bring myself to hate him altogether. We had, to be sure, nearly every day a quarrel, in which, yielding me publicly the palm of victory, he, in some manner, contrived to make me feel that it was he who had deserved it; yet a sense of pride upon my part, and a veritable dignity upon his own, kept us always upon what are called "speaking terms," while there were many points of strong congeniality in our tempers, operating to awake in me a sen-

⁷ *Ouvé* is a borrowed French term meaning strange or unusual.

⁸ An exergue is a small inscription on a coin or medal. Carthage was an ancient civilization in what is now Tunisia; it was destroyed by Rome in the Third Punic War (ca. 146 BCE).

⁹ An argument, performed much like a debate.

¹⁰ "Oh, the happy days in this age of iron!" The line is taken from Voltaire's poem, "Le Mondain."

timent which our position alone, perhaps, prevented from ripening into friendship. It is difficult, indeed, to define, or even to describe, my real feelings towards him. They were formed of a heterogeneous mixture—some petulant animosity, which was not yet hatred, some esteem, more respect, much fear, with a world of uneasy curiosity. To the moralist fully acquainted with the minute springs of human action, it will be unnecessary to say, in addition, that Wilson and myself were the most inseparable of companions.

It was no doubt the anomalous state of affairs existing between us which turned all my attacks upon him (and they were many, either open or covert) into the channel of banter or practical joke (giving pain while assuming the aspect of mere fun) rather than into that of a more serious and determined hostility. But my endeavors on this head were by no means uniformly successful, even when my plans were the most wittily concocted; for my namesake had much about him, in character, of that unassuming and quiet austerity which, while enjoying the poignancy of its own jokes, has no heel of Achilles in itself, and absolutely refuses to be laughed at. I could find, indeed, but one vulnerable point, and that, lying in a personal peculiarity, arising, perhaps, from constitutional disease, would have been spared by any antagonist less at his wit's end than myself—my rival had a weakness in the faucial or guttural organs,¹¹ which precluded him from raising his voice at any time above a very low whisper. Of this defect I did not fail to take what poor advantage lay in my power.

Wilson's retaliations in kind were many, and there was one form of his practical wit that disturbed me beyond measure. How his sagacity first discovered at all that so petty a thing would vex me is a question I never could solve—but, having discovered, he habitually practised the annoyance. I had always felt aversion to my uncourtly patronymic, and its very common, if not plebeian praenomen.¹² The words were venom in my ears; and when, upon the day of my arrival, a second William Wilson came also to the academy, I felt angry with him for bearing the name, and doubly disgusted with the name because a stranger bore it, who would be the cause of its twofold repetition, who would be constantly in my presence, and whose concerns, in the ordinary routine of the

school business, must, inevitably, on account of the detestable coincidence, be often confounded with my own.

The feeling of vexation thus engendered grew stronger with every circumstance tending to show resemblance, moral or physical, between my rival and myself. I had not then discovered the remarkable fact that we were of the same age; but I saw that we were of the same height, and I perceived that we were not altogether unlike in general contour of person and outline of feature. I was galled, too, by the rumor touching a relationship which had grown current in the upper forms. In a word, nothing could more seriously disturb me (although I scrupulously concealed such disturbance), than any allusion to a similarity of mind, person, or condition existing between us. But, in truth, I had no reason to believe that (with the exception of the matter of relationship, and in the case of Wilson himself), this similarity had ever been made a subject of comment, or even observed at all by our schoolfellows. That *he* observed it in all its bearings, and as fixedly as I, was apparent, but that he could discover in such circumstances so fruitful a field of annoyance for myself can only be attributed, as I said before, to his more than ordinary penetration.

His cue, which was to perfect an imitation of myself, lay both in words and in actions; and most admirably did he play his part. My dress it was an easy matter to copy; my gait and general manner, were, without difficulty, appropriated; in spite of his constitutional defect, even my voice did not escape him. My louder tones were, of course, unattempted, but then the key, it was identical; and his singular whisper, it grew the very echo of my own.

How greatly this most exquisite portraiture harassed me (for it could not justly be termed a caricature), I will not now venture to describe. I had but one consolation—in the fact that the imitation, apparently, was noticed by myself alone, and that I had to endure only the knowing and strangely sarcastic smiles of my namesake himself. Satisfied with having produced in my bosom the intended effect, he seemed to chuckle in secret over the sting he had inflicted, and was characteristically disregarding of the public applause which the success of his witty endeavors might have so easily elicited. That the school, indeed, did not feel his design, perceive its accomplishment, and participate in his sneer, was, for many anxious months, a riddle I could not resolve. Perhaps the *gradation* of his copy rendered it not so readily perceptible, or, more possibly, I owed my security to the masterly air of the copyist, who, disdainful of the letter, which in a painting is all the obtuse can see, gave but the full spirit of his original for my individual contemplation and chagrin.

¹¹ Fauces refers to the portion of the oral cavity directly behind the soft palate but before the pharynx and larynx. The glottis refers to the area involving the vocal chords.

¹² A patronymic is a name relating to one's father (in this case, Will's son) and functions in the West as a last name; a praenomen is one's first name.

I have already more than once spoken of the disgusting air of patronage which he assumed towards me, and of his frequent officious interference with my will. This interference often took the ungracious character of advice; advice not openly given, but hinted or insinuated. I received it with a repugnance which gained strength as I grew in years. Yet, at this distant day, let me do him the simple justice to acknowledge that I can recall no occasion when the suggestions of my rival were on the side of those errors or follies so usual to his immature age, and seeming inexperience; that his moral sense, at least, if not his general talents and worldly wisdom, was far keener than my own; and that I might, today, have been a better, and thus a happier man, had I more seldom rejected the counsels embodied in those meaning whispers which I then but too cordially hated, and too bitterly derided.

As it was, I at length grew restive in the extreme, under his distasteful supervision, and daily resented more and more openly what I considered his intolerable arrogance. I have said that, in the first years of our connexion as schoolmates, my feelings in regard to him might have been easily ripened into friendship; but, in the latter months of my residence at the academy, although the intrusion of his ordinary manner had, beyond doubt, in some measure, abated, my sentiments, in nearly similar proportion, partook very much of positive hatred. Upon one occasion he saw this, I think, and afterwards avoided, or made a show of avoiding me.

It was about the same period, if I remember aright, that, in an altercation of violence with him, in which he was more than usually thrown off his guard, and spoke and acted with an openness of demeanor rather foreign to his nature, I discovered, or fancied I discovered, in his accent, his air, and general appearance, a something which first startled, and then deeply interested me, by bringing to mind dim visions of my earliest infancy—wild, confused and thronging memories of a time when memory herself was yet unborn. I cannot better describe the sensation which oppressed me than by saying that I could with difficulty shake off the belief that myself and the being who stood before me had been acquainted at some epoch very long ago; some point of the past even infinitely remote. The delusion, however, faded rapidly as it came; and I mention it at all but to define the day of the last conversation I there held with my singular namesake.

The huge old house, with its countless subdivisions, had several enormously large chambers communicating with each other, where slept the greater number of the students. There were, however, as must necessarily happen in a building so awkwardly planned, many little nooks or recesses, the odds

and ends of the structure; and these the economic ingenuity of Dr. Bransby had also fitted up as dormitories—although, being the merest closets, they were capable of accommodating only a single individual. One of these small apartments was occupied by Wilson.

It was upon a gloomy and tempestuous night of an early autumn, about the close of my fifth year at the school, and immediately after the altercation just mentioned, that, finding every one wrapped in sleep, I arose from bed, and, lamp in hand, stole through a wilderness of narrow passages from my own bedroom to that of my rival. I had been long plotting one of those ill-natured pieces of practical wit at his expense in which I had hitherto been so uniformly unsuccessful. It was my intention, now, to put my scheme in operation, and I resolved to make him feel the whole extent of the malice with which I was imbued. Having reached his closet, I noiselessly entered, leaving the lamp, with a shade over it, on the outside. I advanced a step, and listened to the sound of his tranquil breathing. Assured of his being asleep, I returned, took the light, and with it again approached the bed. Close curtains were around it, which, in the prosecution of my plan, I slowly and quietly withdrew, when the bright rays fell vividly upon the sleeper, and my eyes, at the same moment, upon his countenance. I looked, and a numbness, an iciness of feeling instantly pervaded my frame. My breast heaved, my knees tottered, my whole spirit became possessed with an objectless yet intolerable horror. Gasping for breath, I lowered the lamp in still nearer proximity to the face. Were these—*these* the lineaments of William Wilson? I saw, indeed, that they were his, but I shook as with a fit of the ague in fancying they were not. What *was* there about them to confound me in this manner? I gazed—while my brain reeled with a multitude of incoherent thoughts. Not thus he appeared—assuredly not thus—in the vivacity of his waking hours. The same name; the same contour of person; the same day of arrival at the academy! And then his dogged and meaningless imitation of my gait, my voice, my habits, and my manner! Was it, in truth, within the bounds of human possibility that *what I now witnessed* was the result of the habitual practice of this sarcastic imitation? Awe-stricken, and with a creeping shudder, I extinguished the lamp, passed silently from the chamber, and left, at once, the halls of that old academy, never to enter them again.

After a lapse of some months, spent at home in mere idleness, I found myself a student at Eton.¹³ The brief interval had been sufficient to enfeeble my remembrance of the events

¹³ Eton College is a prestigious boarding school in England.

at Dr. Bransby's, or at least to effect a material change in the nature of the feelings with which I remembered them. The truth—the tragedy—of the drama was no more. I could now find room to doubt the evidence of my senses: and seldom called up the subject at all but with wonder at the extent of human credulity, and a smile at the vivid force of the imagination which I hereditarily possessed. Neither was this species of scepticism likely to be diminished by the character of the life I led at Eton. The vortex of thoughtless folly into which I there so immediately and so recklessly plunged, washed away all but the froth of my past hours—engulfed at once every solid or serious impression, and left to memory only the veriest levities of a former existence.

I do not wish, however, to trace the course of my miserable profligacy here—a profligacy which set at defiance the laws, while it eluded the vigilance of the institution. Three years of folly, passed without profit, had but given me rooted habits of vice, and added, in a somewhat unusual degree, to my bodily stature, when, after a week of soulless dissipation, I invited a small party of the most dissolute students to a secret carousal in my chamber. We met at a late hour of the night, for our debaucheries were to be faithfully protracted until morning. The wine flowed freely, and there were not wanting other, perhaps more dangerous, seductions; so that the gray dawn had already faintly appeared in the east, while our delirious extravagance was at its height. Madly flushed with cards and intoxication, I was in the act of insisting upon a toast of more than intolerable profanity, when my attention was suddenly diverted by the violent, although partial unclosing of the door of the apartment, and by the eager voice from without of a servant. He said that some person, apparently in great haste, demanded to speak with me in the hall.

Wildly excited with the potent *Vin de Barac*,¹⁴ the unexpected interruption rather delighted than surprised me. I staggered forward at once, and a few steps brought me to the vestibule of the building. In this low and small room there hung no lamp; and now no light at all was admitted, save that of the exceedingly feeble dawn which made its way through a semicircular window. As I put my foot over the threshold I became aware of the figure of a youth about my own height, and (what then peculiarly struck my mad fancy) habited in a white cassimere morning frock, cut in the novel fashion of the one I myself wore at the moment. This the faint light enabled me to perceive—but the features of his face I could not distin-

guish. Immediately upon my entering he strode hurriedly up to me, and, seizing me by the arm with a gesture of petulant impatience, whispered the words "William Wilson!" in my ear. I grew perfectly sober in an instant.

There was that in the manner of the stranger, and in the tremulous shake of his uplifted finger, as he held it between my eyes and the light, which filled me with unqualified amazement—but it was not this which had so violently moved me. It was the pregnancy of solemn admonition in the singular, low, hissing utterance; and, above all, it was the character, the tone, *the key*, of those few, simple, and familiar, yet whispered, syllables, which came with a thousand thronging memories of by-gone days, and struck upon my soul with the shock of a galvanic battery. Ere I could recover the use of my senses he was gone.

Although this event failed not of a vivid effect upon my disordered imagination, yet was it evanescent as vivid. For some weeks, indeed, I busied myself in earnest inquiry, or was wrapped in a cloud of morbid speculation. I did not pretend to disguise from my perception the identity of the singular individual who thus perseveringly interfered with my affairs, and harassed me with his insinuated counsel. But who and what was this Wilson?—and whence came he?—and what were his purposes? Upon neither of these points could I be satisfied—merely ascertaining, in regard to him, that a sudden accident in his family had caused his removal from Dr. Bransby's academy on the afternoon of the day in which I myself had eloped. But in a brief period I ceased to think upon the subject; my attention being all absorbed in a contemplated departure for Oxford. Thither I soon went; the uncalculating vanity of my parents furnishing me with an outfit, and annual establishment, which would enable me to indulge at will in the luxury already so dear to my heart—to vie in profuseness of expenditure with the haughtiest heirs of the wealthiest earldoms in Great Britain.

Excited by such appliances to vice, my constitutional temperament broke forth with redoubled ardor, and I spurned even the common restraints of decency in the mad infatuation of my revels. But it were absurd to pause in the detail of my extravagance. Let it suffice, that among spendthrifts I out-heroded Herod,¹⁵ and that, giving name to a multitude of novel follies, I added no brief appendix to the long catalogue of vices then usual in the most dissolute university of Europe.

¹⁴ Possibly a mistake for *vin de Barsac*, a sweet French wine from the Bordeaux region. In other editions, Poe simply writes "wine."

¹⁵ In Christian accounts, Herod the Great and his son, Herod Antipas, are characterized as lavish spenders, building an incredible number of public works in Judea.

It could hardly be credited, however, that I had, even here, so utterly fallen from the gentlemanly estate as to seek acquaintance with the vilest arts of the gambler by profession, and, having become an adept in his despicable science, to practise it habitually as a means of increasing my already enormous income at the expense of the weak-minded among my fellow-collegians. Such, nevertheless, was the fact. And the very enormity of this offence against all manly and honourable sentiment proved, beyond doubt, the main, if not the sole reason of the impunity with which it was committed. Who, indeed, among my most abandoned associates, would not rather have disputed the clearest evidence of his senses, than have suspected of such courses the gay, the frank, the generous William Wilson—the noblest and most liberal commoner at Oxford—him whose follies (said his parasites) were but the follies of youth and unbridled fancy—whose errors but inimitable whim—whose darkest vice but a careless and dashing extravagance?

I had been now two years successfully busied in this way, when there came to the university a young *parvenu*¹⁶ nobleman, Glendinning—rich, said report, as Herodes Atticus¹⁷—his riches, too, as easily acquired. I soon found him of weak intellect, and, of course, marked him as a fitting subject for my skill. I frequently engaged him in play, and contrived, with a gambler's usual art, to let him win considerable sums, the more effectually to entangle him in my snares. At length, my schemes being ripe, I met him (with the full intention that this meeting should be final and decisive) at the chambers of a fellow-commoner (Mr. Preston), equally intimate with both, but who, to do him justice, entertained not even a remote suspicion of my design. To give to this a better coloring, I had contrived to have assembled a party of some eight or ten, and was solicitously careful that the introduction of cards should appear accidental, and originate in the proposal of my contemplated dupe himself. To be brief upon a vile topic, none of the low finesse was omitted, so customary upon similar occasions that it is a just matter for wonder how any are still found so besotted as to fall its victim.

We had protracted our sitting far into the night, and I had at length effected the manœuvre of getting Glendinning as

my sole antagonist. The game, too, was my favorite *écarté*.¹⁸ The rest of the company, interested in the extent of our play, had abandoned their own cards, and were standing around us as spectators. The *parvenu*, who had been induced by my artifices in the early part of the evening to drink deeply, now shuffled, dealt, or played, with a wild nervousness of manner for which his intoxication, I thought, might partially, but could not altogether account. In a very short period he had become my debtor to a large amount of money, when, having taken a long draught of port, he did precisely what I had been coolly anticipating, he proposed to double our already extravagant stakes. With a well-feigned show of reluctance, and not until after my repeated refusal had seduced him into some angry words which gave a color of *pique* to my compliance, did I finally comply. The result, of course, did but prove how entirely the prey was in my toils—in less than a single hour he had quadrupled his debt. For some time his countenance had been losing the florid tinge lent it by the wine—but now, to my astonishment, I perceived that it had grown to a pallor truly fearful. I say to my astonishment. Glendinning had been represented to my eager inquiries as immeasurably wealthy; and the sums which he had as yet lost, although in themselves vast, could not, I supposed, very seriously annoy, much less so violently affect him. That he was overcome by the wine just swallowed, was the idea which most readily presented itself; and, rather with a view to the preservation of my own character in the eyes of my associates, than from any less interested motive, I was about to insist, peremptorily, upon a discontinuance of the play, when some expressions at my elbow from among the company, and an ejaculation evincing utter despair on the part of Glendinning, gave me to understand that I had effected his total ruin under circumstances which, rendering him an object for the pity of all, should have protected him from the ill offices even of a fiend.

What now might have been my conduct it is difficult to say. The pitiable condition of my dupe had thrown an air of embarrassed gloom over all, and, for some moments, a profound and unbroken silence was maintained, during which I could not help feeling my cheeks tingle with the many burning glances of scorn or reproach cast upon me by the less abandoned of the party. I will even own that an intolerable weight of anxiety was for a brief instant lifted from my bosom by the sudden and extraordinary interruption which ensued. The wide, heavy, folding doors of the apartment were all at

¹⁶ An upstart, one of "new money" about whose origins little is known.

¹⁷ Herodes Atticus was a Roman senator and later consul of Greek birth in the 100s CE. He is known both as a scholar and an influential patron of artists and writers.

¹⁸ A two-player card game similar to euchre.

once thrown open, to their full extent, with a vigorous and rushing impetuosity that extinguished, as if by magic, every candle in the room. Their light, in dying, enabled us just to perceive that a stranger had entered, of about my own height, and closely muffled in a cloak. The darkness, however, was now total; and we could only feel that he was standing in our midst. Before any one of us could recover from the extreme astonishment into which this rudeness had thrown all, we heard the voice of the intruder.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a low, distinct, and never-to-be-forgotten *whisper* which thrilled to the very marrow of my bones, "Gentlemen, I make no apology for this behaviour, because in thus behaving I am but fulfilling a duty. You are, beyond doubt, uninformed of the true character of the person who has to-night won at *écarté* a large sum of money from Lord Glendinning. I will therefore put you upon an expeditious and decisive plan of obtaining this very necessary information. Please to examine, at your leisure, the inner linings of the cuff of his left sleeve, and the several little packages which may be found in the somewhat capacious pockets of his embroidered morning wrapper."

While he spoke, so profound was the stillness that one might have heard a pin dropping upon the floor. In ceasing, he at once departed, and as abruptly as he had entered. Can I—shall I describe my sensations?—must I say that I felt all the horrors of the damned? Most assuredly I had little time given for reflection. Many hands roughly seized me upon the spot, and lights were immediately reprocurd. A search ensued. In the lining of my sleeve were found all of the court-cards essential in *écarté*, and, in the pockets of my wrapper, a number of packs, facsimiles of those used at our sittings, with the single exception that mine were of the species called, technically, *arrondées*; the honors being slightly convex at the ends, the lower cards slightly convex at the sides.¹⁹ In this disposition, the dupe who cuts, as customary, at the breadth of the pack, will invariably find that he cuts his antagonist an honor; while the gambler, cutting at the length, will, as certainly, cut nothing for his victim which may count in the records of the game. Any outrageous burst of indignation upon this shameful discovery would have affected me less than the silent contempt, or the sarcastic composure with which it was received.

"Mr. Wilson," said our host, stooping to remove from beneath his feet an exceedingly luxurious cloak of rare furs, "Mr. Wilson, this is your property." (The weather was cold;

and, upon quitting my own room, I had thrown a cloak over my dressing wrapper, putting it off upon reaching the scene of play.) "I presume it is supererogatory²⁰ to seek here (eyeing the folds of the garment with a bitter smile), for any farther evidence of your skill. Indeed we have had enough. You will see the necessity, I hope, of quitting Oxford—at all events, of quitting, instantly, my chambers."

Abased, humbled to the dust as I then was, it is probable that I should have resented this galling language by immediate personal violence, had not my whole attention been at the moment arrested, by a fact of the most startling character. The cloak which I had worn was of a rare description of fur; how rare, how extravagantly costly, I shall not venture to say. Its fashion, too, was of my own fantastic invention; for I was fastidious, to a degree of absurd coxcombry,²¹ in matters of this frivolous nature. When, therefore, Mr. Preston reached me that which he had picked up upon the floor, and near the folding doors of the apartment, it was with an astonishment nearly bordering upon terror; that I perceived my own already hanging on my arm, (where I had no doubt unwittingly placed it,) and that the one presented me was but its exact counterpart in every, in even the minutest possible particular. The singular being who had so disastrously exposed me, had been muffled, I remembered, in a cloak; and none had been worn at all by any of the members of our party with the exception of myself. Retaining some presence of mind, I took the one offered me by Preston, placed it, unnoticed, over my own, left the apartment with a resolute scowl of defiance, and, next morning ere dawn of day, commenced a hurried journey from Oxford to the continent, in a perfect agony of horror and of shame.

I fled in vain. My evil destiny pursued me as if in exultation, and proved, indeed, that the exercise of its mysterious dominion had as yet only begun. Scarcely had I set foot in Paris ere I had fresh evidence of the detestable interest taken by this Wilson in my concerns. Years flew, while I experienced no relief. Villain!—at Rome, with how untimely, yet with how spectral an officiousness, stepped he in between me and my ambition! At Vienna, too, at Berlin, and at Moscow! Where, in truth, had I *not* bitter cause to curse him within my heart? From his inscrutable tyranny did I at length flee, panic-stricken, as from a pestilence; and to the very ends of the earth *I fled in vain.*

¹⁹ Poe is describing a manner of marking cards, though the term *arrondées* seems to have been of his own invention.

²⁰ Going beyond what is required, in this instance, to prove guilt.

²¹ Being overly concerned with one's appearance.

And again, and again, in secret communion with my own spirit, would I demand the questions "Who is he?—whence came he?—and what are his objects?" But no answer was there found. And now I scrutinized, with a minute scrutiny, the forms, and the methods, and the leading traits of his impertinent supervision. But even here there was very little upon which to base a conjecture. It was noticeable, indeed, that, in no one of the multiplied instances in which he had of late crossed my path, had he so crossed it except to frustrate those schemes, or to disturb those actions, which, fully carried out, might have resulted in bitter mischief. Poor justification this, in truth, for an authority so imperiously assumed! Poor indemnity for natural rights of self-agency so pertinaciously, so insultingly denied!

I had also been forced to notice that my tormentor, for a very long period of time (while scrupulously and with miraculous dexterity maintaining his whim of an identity of apparel with myself) had so contrived it, in the execution of his varied interference with my will, that I saw not, at any moment, the features of his face. Be Wilson what he might, *this*, at least, was but the veriest of affectation, or of folly. Could he, for an instant, have supposed that, in my admonisher at Eton, in the destroyer of my honor at Oxford, in him who thwarted my ambition at Rome, my revenge in Paris, my passionate love at Naples, or what he falsely termed my avarice in Egypt, that in this, my arch-enemy and evil genius, I could fail to recognise the William Wilson of my schoolboy days, the namesake, the companion, the rival, the hated and dreaded rival at Dr. Bransby's? Impossible!—But let me hasten to the last eventful scene of the drama.

Thus far I had succumbed supinely to this imperious domination. The sentiments of deep awe with which I habitually regarded the elevated character, the majestic wisdom, the apparent omnipresence and omnipotence of Wilson, added to a feeling of even terror, with which certain other traits in his nature and assumptions inspired me, had operated, hitherto, to impress me with an idea of my own utter weakness and helplessness, and to suggest an implicit, although bitterly reluctant submission to his arbitrary will. But, of late days, I had given myself up entirely to wine; and its maddening influence upon my hereditary temper rendered me more and more impatient of control. I began to murmur, to hesitate, to resist. And was it only fancy which induced me to believe that, with the increase of my own firmness, that of my tormentor underwent a proportional diminution? Be this as it may, I now began to feel the inspiration of a burning hope, and at length nurtured in my secret thoughts a stern and desperate resolution that I would submit no longer to be enslaved.

It was at Rome, during the carnival of 18—, that I attended a masquerade in the palazzo of the Neapolitan Duke Di Broglio.²² I had indulged more freely than usual in the excesses of the wine-table; and now the suffocating atmosphere of the crowded rooms irritated me beyond endurance. The difficulty, too, of forcing my way through the mazes of the company contributed not a little to the ruffling of my temper; for I was anxiously seeking, let me not say with what unworthy motive, the young, the gay, the beautiful wife of the aged and doting Di Broglio. With a too unscrupulous confidence she had previously communicated to me the secret of the costume in which she would be habited, and now, having caught a glimpse of her person, I was hurrying to make my way into her presence. At this moment I felt a light hand placed upon my shoulder, and that ever-remembered, low, damnable whisper within my ear.

In a perfect whirlwind of wrath, I turned at once upon him who had thus interrupted me, and seized him violently by the collar. He was attired, as I had expected, like myself; wearing a large Spanish cloak, and a mask of black silk which entirely covered his features.

"Scoundrel!" I said, in a voice husky with rage, while every syllable I uttered seemed as new fuel to my fury, "scoundrel! impostor! accursed villain! you shall not—you shall *not* dog me unto death! Follow me, or I stab you where you stand," and I broke my way from the room into a small ante-chamber adjoining, dragging him unresistingly with me as I went.

Upon entering, I thrust him furiously from me. He staggered against the wall, while I closed the door with an oath, and commanded him to draw. He hesitated but for an instant, then, with a slight sigh, drew in silence, and put himself upon his defence.

The contest was brief indeed. I was frantic with every species of wild excitement, and felt within my single arm the energy and the power of a multitude. In a few seconds I forced him by sheer strength against the wainscoting, and thus, getting him at mercy, plunged my sword, with brute ferocity, repeatedly through and through his bosom.

At this instant some person tried the latch of the door. I hastened to prevent an intrusion, and then immediately returned to my dying antagonist. But what human language

²² A duke of Naples, Italy. The region ceased to be a duchy in 1137, and the editors can find no mention of such a nobleman. It is likely Poe created the name from the Italian *broglio*, which connotes fraud and which fits well with the masquerade at which the face is concealed.

can adequately portray *that* astonishment, *that* horror which possessed me at the spectacle then presented to view. The brief moment in which I averted my eyes had been sufficient to produce, apparently, a material change in the arrangements at the upper or farther end of the room. A large mirror, it appeared to me, now stood where none had been perceptible before; and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced, with a feeble and tottering gait, to meet me.

Thus it appeared, I say, but was not. It was my antagonist—it was Wilson, who then stood before me in the agonies of his dissolution. Not a line in all the marked and singular lineaments of that face which was not, even identically, mine own! His mask and cloak lay where he had thrown them, upon the floor.

It was Wilson, but he spoke no longer in a whisper, and I could have fancied that I myself was speaking while he said—

"You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforward art thou also dead—dead to the world and its hopes. In me didst thou exist—and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI, “GOBLIN MARKET”

Critical Introduction

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894) was closely associated with the Pre-Raphaelites, including her brother, Dante Rossetti; her poetry, therefore, often concerns itself with unconventional approaches in order to get to what is seen as the truth while at the same time holding a real reverence for Christianity. Poems such as “No Thank You, John” and “Promises Like Pie-Crust” depict women with great inner strength, a departure from Victorian female characters who are vacuous or rely on men for their identity. The same is true of “Goblin Market” (1859), which is generally read as a meditation on female desire and sexuality, and depicts male sexuality as polluting and transactional.

The reader is meant to sympathize with Laura and Lizzie, who are innocent and whose sexual experiences read more like sexual assault. The goblin men, with their insistence that the protagonists “buy” their fruit, are aggressive and intrude upon the idyllic life depicted up to that point. The wares that they sell are sexual in nature: fruit contains the seeds of the plant, making it (especially apples and peaches) an inviting sexual metaphor for poets of every age. The fact that they sell their fruit also inserts a financial motif into the poem, which could very well be a social commentary on the arranged marriages that were common in nineteenth-century England. Whatever the interpretation of Laura, Lizzie, and the goblin men, there is no doubting the seductive nature of these monsters. Although Rossetti deflects the desire from the goblin men onto the fruit they sell, they nevertheless attract Laura in a way that few monsters in this collection do, while also repelling her sister because of their dangerous nature.

Reading Questions

As you read the poem, keep in mind the gender politics it depicts. The protagonists are female and endangered by the monsters; the monsters are male. This is, however, complicated by the fact that the goblin men attract Laura. Both female protagonists *go to* the monsters, a reversal of the usual structure in which the monster invades or somehow initiates the conflict. Why might this be so? Are there cultural, narrative, or psychological reasons for this departure?

If the conflict with a monster is successful, the protagonist usually vanquishes it. This, in a way, happens in the poem, but the victory is complicated. How does Lizzie achieve this victory, and what are about the larger implications of bringing the monstrousness (or at least a symbol of it) back into her own world?

Further Reading

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“GOBLIN MARKET”

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

Morning and evening Maids heard the goblins cry: “Come buy our orchard fruits, Come buy, come buy: Apples and quinces, Lemons and oranges, Plump unpecked cherries, Melons and raspberries, Bloom-down-cheeked peaches, Swart-headed mulberries, 10 Wild free-born cranberries, Crab-apples, dewberries, Pine-apples, blackberries, Apricots, strawberries;— All ripe together In summer weather,— Morns that pass by, Fair eves that fly; Come buy, come buy: Our grapes fresh from the vine, 20 Pomegranates full and fine, Dates and sharp bullaces, ¹ Rare pears and greengages, ² Damsons and bilberries, ³ Taste them and try: Currants and gooseberries, Bright-fire-like barberries, ⁴ Figs to fill your mouth, Citrons from the South, Sweet to tongue and sound to eye; 30 Come buy, come buy.”	With tingling cheeks and finger tips. “Lie close,” Laura said, 40 Pricking up her golden head: “We must not look at goblin men, We must not buy their fruits: Who knows upon what soil they fed Their hungry thirsty roots?” “Come buy,” call the goblins Hobbling down the glen. “Oh,” cried Lizzie, “Laura, Laura, You should not peep at goblin men.” Lizzie covered up her eyes, 50 Covered close lest they should look; Laura reared her glossy head, And whispered like the restless brook: “Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie, Down the glen tramp little men. One hauls a basket, One bears a plate, One lugs a golden dish Of many pounds weight. How fair the vine must grow 60 Whose grapes are so luscious; How warm the wind must blow Through those fruit bushes.” “No,” said Lizzie : “No, no, no; Their offers should not charm us, Their evil gifts would harm us.” She thrust a dimpled finger In each ear, shut eyes and ran: Curious Laura chose to linger Wondering at each merchant man. 70 One had a cat’s face, One whisked a tail, One tramped at a rat’s pace, One crawled like a snail, One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry, One like a ratel ⁵ tumbled hurry skurry. She heard a voice like voice of doves Cooing all together: They sounded kind and full of loves In the pleasant weather. 80
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1 “bullaces”: a type of plum

2 “greengages”: a plum of green colour when ripe

3 “damsons and bilberries”: damsons are plums, and bilberries look much like blueberries but with a much darker colouration

4 “barberries”: a yellow berry used mostly in Middle Eastern cuisine and known for its acidic and tart flavour

Laura stretched her gleaming neck
Like a rush-imbedded swan,

5 “ratel”: a honey badger

Like a lily from the beck,
 Like a moonlit poplar branch,
 Like a vessel at the launch
 When its last restraint is gone.

Backwards up the mossy glen
 Turned and trooped the goblin men,
 With their shrill repeated cry,
 "Come buy, come buy," 90

When they reached where Laura was
 They stood stock still upon the moss,
 Leering at each other,
 Brother with queer brother;
 Signalling each other,
 Brother with sly brother.
 One set his basket down,
 One reared his plate;

One began to weave a crown
 Of tendrils, leaves and rough nuts brown 100
 (Men sell not such in any town);

One heaved the golden weight
 Of dish and fruit to offer her:
 "Come buy, come buy," was still their cry.

Laura stared but did not stir,
 Longed but had no money:
 The whisk-tailed merchant bade her taste

In tones as smooth as honey,
 The cat-faced purr'd,
 The rat-faced spoke a word 110

Of welcome, and the snail-paced even was heard;
 One parrot-voiced and jolly
 Cried "Pretty Goblin" still for "Pretty Polly;"—
 One whistled like a bird.

But sweet-tooth Laura spoke in haste:
 "Good folk, I have no coin;
 To take were to purloin:

I have no copper in my purse,
 I have no silver either,
 And all my gold is on the furze⁶ 120

That shakes in windy weather
 Above the rusty heather."
 "You have much gold upon your head,"

They answered all together:
 "Buy from us with a golden curl."
 She clipped a precious golden lock,

She dropped a tear more rare than pearl,
 Then sucked their fruit globes fair or red:
 Sweeter than honey from the rock,
 Stronger than man-rejoicing wine, 130

Clearer than water flowed that juice;
 She never tasted such before,
 How should it cloy with length of use?
 She sucked and sucked and sucked the more
 Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;

She sucked until her lips were sore;
 Then flung the emptied rinds away
 But gathered up one kernel-stone,⁷

And knew not was it night or day
 As she turned home alone. 140

Lizzie met her at the gate
 Full of wise upbraidings:
 "Dear, you should not stay so late,
 Twilight is not good for maidens;

Should not loiter in the glen
 In the haunts of goblin men.
 Do you not remember Jeanie,

How she met them in the moonlight,
 Took their gifts both choice and many,
 Ate their fruits and wore their flowers 150

Plucked from bowers
 Where summer ripens at all hours?
 But ever in the moonlight

She pined and pined away;
 Sought them by night and day,
 Found them no more but dwindled and grew grey;

Then fell with the first snow,
 While to this day no grass will grow
 Where she lies low:

I planted daisies there a year ago 160
 That never blow.
 You should not loiter so."

"Nay, hush," said Laura:
 "Nay, hush, my sister:
 I ate and ate my fill,

Yet my mouth waters still;
 To-morrow night I will
 Buy more:" and kissed her:

"Have done with sorrow;
 I'll bring you plums to-morrow 170

Fresh on their mother twigs,
 Cherries worth getting;
 You cannot think what figs

My teeth have met in,
 What melons icy-cold
 Piled on a dish of gold

Too huge for me to hold,
 What peaches with a velvet nap,

⁶ "furze": a yellow-flowering shrub; Laura is saying that the only gold she has is the flowers of the furze

⁷ "kernel stone": akin to a peach or plum pit, specifically in reference to apricots

Pellucid grapes without one seed:
 Odorous indeed must be the mead 180
 Whereon they grow, and pure the wave they drink
 With lilies at the brink,
 And sugar-sweet their sap."

Golden head by golden head,
 Like two pigeons in one nest
 Folded in each other's wings,
 They lay down in their curtained bed:
 Like two blossoms on one stem,
 Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,
 Like two wands of ivory 190
 Tipped with gold for awful kings.
 Moon and stars gazed in at them,
 Wind sang to them lullaby,
 Lumbering owls forbore to fly,
 Not a bat flapped to and fro
 Round their rest:
 Cheek to cheek and breast to breast
 Locked together in one nest.

Early in the morning
 When the first cock crowed his warning, 200
 Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,
 Laura rose with Lizzie:
 Fetched in honey, milked the cows,
 Aired and set to rights the house,
 Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
 Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,
 Next churned butter, whipped up cream,
 Fed their poultry, sat and sewed;
 Talked as modest maidens should:
 Lizzie with an open heart, 210
 Laura in an absent dream,
 One content, one sick in part;
 One warbling for the mere bright day's delight,
 One longing for the night.

At length slow evening came:
 They went with pitchers to the reedy brook;
 Lizzie most placid in her look,
 Laura most like a leaping flame.
 They drew the gurgling water from its deep;
 Lizzie plucked purple and rich golden flags, 220
 Then turning homewards said: "The sunset flushes
 Those furthest loftiest crags;
 Come, Laura, not another maiden lags,
 No wilful squirrel wags,
 The beasts and birds are fast asleep."
 But Laura loitered still among the rushes
 And said the bank was steep.

And said the hour was early still,
 The dew not fall'n, the wind not chill:
 Listening ever, but not catching 230
 The customary cry,
 "Come buy, come buy,"
 With its iterated jingle
 Of sugar-baited words:
 Not for all her watching
 Once discerning even one goblin
 Racing, whisking, tumbling, hobbling;
 Let alone the herds
 That used to tramp along the glen,
 In groups or single, 240
 Of brisk fruit-merchant men.

Till Lizzie urged, "O Laura, come;
 I hear the fruit-call but I dare not look:
 You should not loiter longer at this brook:
 Come with me home.
 The stars rise, the moon bends her arc,
 Each glowworm winks her spark,
 Let us get home before the night grows dark:
 For clouds may gather
 Though this is summer weather, 250
 Put out the lights and drench us through;
 Then if we lost our way what should we do?"

Laura turned cold as stone
 To find her sister heard that cry alone,
 That goblin cry,
 "Come buy our fruits, come buy."
 Must she then buy no more such dainty fruits?
 Must she no more that succous pasture find,
 Gone deaf and blind?
 Her tree of life drooped from the root: 260
 She said not one word in her heart's sore ache;
 But peering thro' the dimness, nought discerning,
 Trudged home, her pitcher dripping all the way;
 So crept to bed, and lay
 Silent till Lizzie slept;
 Then sat up in a passionate yearning,
 And gnashed her teeth for baulked desire, and wept
 As if her heart would break.

Day after day, night after night,
 Laura kept watch in vain 270
 In sullen silence of exceeding pain.
 She never caught again the goblin cry:
 "Come buy, come buy;"—
 She never spied the goblin men
 Hawking their fruits along the glen:
 But when the noon waxed bright

Her hair grew thin and grey;
 She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn
 To swift decay and burn
 Her fire away. 280

One day remembering her kernel-stone
 She set it by a wall that faced the south;
 Dewed it with tears, hoped for a root,
 Watched for a waxing shoot,
 But there came none;
 It never saw the sun,
 It never felt the trickling moisture run:
 While with sunk eyes and faded mouth
 She dreamed of melons, as a traveller sees
 False waves in desert drouth⁸ 290
 With shade of leaf-crowned trees,
 And burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze.

She no more swept the house,
 Tended the fowls or cows,
 Fetched honey, kneaded cakes of wheat,
 Brought water from the brook:
 But sat down listless in the chimney-nook
 And would not eat.

Tender Lizzie could not bear
 To watch her sister's cankerous care 300
 Yet not to share.
 She night and morning
 Caught the goblins' cry:
 "Come buy our orchard fruits,
 Come buy, come buy:"—
 Beside the brook, along the glen,
 She heard the tramp of goblin men,
 The voice and stir
 Poor Laura could not hear;
 Longed to buy fruit to comfort her, 310
 But feared to pay too dear.
 She thought of Jeanie in her grave,
 Who should have been a bride;
 But who for joys brides hope to have
 Fell sick and died
 In her gay prime,
 In earliest Winter time,
 With the first glazing rime,
 With the first snow-fall of crisp Winter time.

Till Laura dwindling 320
 Seemed knocking at Death's door:
 Then Lizzie weighed no more

Better and worse;
 But put a silver penny in her purse,
 Kissed Laura, crossed the heath with clumps of furze
 At twilight, halted by the brook:
 And for the first time in her life
 Began to listen and look.

Laughed every goblin
 When they spied her peeping: 330
 Came towards her hobbling,
 Flying, running, leaping,
 Puffing and blowing,
 Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
 Clucking and gobbling,
 Mopping and mowing,
 Full of airs and graces,
 Pulling wry faces,
 Demure grimaces,

Cat-like and rat-like, 340
 Ratel- and wombat-like,
 Snail-paced in a hurry,
 Parrot-voiced and whistler,
 Helter skelter, hurry skurry,
 Chattering like magpies,
 Fluttering like pigeons,
 Gliding like fishes,—
 Hugged her and kissed her,
 Squeezed and caressed her:

Stretched up their dishes, 350
 Panniers,⁹ and plates:
 "Look at our apples
 Russet and dun,
 Bob at our cherries,
 Bite at our peaches,
 Citrons and dates,
 Grapes for the asking,
 Pears red with basking
 Out in the sun,
 Plums on their twigs; 360
 Pluck them and suck them,
 Pomegranates, figs."—

"Good folk," said Lizzie,
 Mindful Of Jeanie:
 "Give me much and many:"—
 Held out her apron,
 Tossed them her penny.
 "Nay, take a seat with us,
 Honour and eat with us,"
 They answered grinning: 370

8 "drouth": drought

9 "panniers": a kind of basket

"Our feast is but beginning,
 Night yet is early,
 Warm and dew-pearly,
 Wakeful and starry:
 Such fruits as these
 No man can carry;
 Half their bloom would fly,
 Half their dew would dry,
 Half their flavour would pass by. 380
 Sit down and feast with us,
 Be welcome guest with us,
 Cheer you and rest with us."—
 "Thank you," said Lizzie: "But one waits
 At home alone for me:
 So without further parleying,
 If you will not sell me any
 Of your fruits though much and many,
 Give me back my silver penny
 I tossed you for a fee."— 390
 They began to scratch their pates,
 No longer wagging, purring,
 But visibly demurring,
 Grunting and snarling.
 One called her proud,
 Cross-grained, uncivil;
 Their tones waxed loud,
 Their looks were evil.
 Lashing their tail
 They trod and hustled her,
 Elbowed and jostled her, 400
 Clawed with their nails,
 Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,
 Tore her gown and soiled her stocking,
 Twitched her hair out by the roots,
 Stamped upon her tender feet,
 Held her hands and squeezed their fruits
 Against her mouth to make her eat.

 White and golden Lizzie stood,
 Like a lily in a flood,— 410
 Like a rock of blue-veined stone
 Lashed by tides obstreperously,—
 Like a beacon left alone
 In a hoary roaring sea,
 Sending up a golden fire,—
 Like a fruit-crowned orange-tree
 White with blossoms honey-sweet
 Sore beset by wasp and bee,—
 Like a royal virgin town
 Topped with gilded dome and spire
 Close beleaguered by a fleet 420
 Mad to tug her standard down.

One may lead a horse to water,
 Twenty cannot make him drink.
 Though the goblins cuffed and caught her,
 Coaxed and fought her,
 Bullied and besought her,
 Scratched her, pinched her black as ink,
 Kicked and knocked her,
 Mauled and mocked her,
 Lizzie uttered not a word; 430
 Would not open lip from lip
 Lest they should cram a mouthful in:
 But laughed in heart to feel the drip
 Of juice that syrugged all her face,
 And lodged in dimples of her chin,
 And streaked her neck which quaked like curd.
 At last the evil people
 Worn out by her resistance
 Flung back her penny, kicked their fruit
 Along whichever road they took, 440
 Not leaving root or stone or shoot;
 Some writhed into the ground,
 Some dived into the brook
 With ring and ripple,
 Some scudded on the gale without a sound,
 Some vanished in the distance.

 In a smart, ache, tingle,
 Lizzie went her way;
 Knew not was it night or day;
 Sprang up the bank, tore thro' the furze, 450
 Threaded copse and dingle,¹⁰
 And heard her penny jingle
 Bouncing in her purse,—
 Its bounce was music to her ear.
 She ran and ran
 As if she feared some goblin man
 Dogged her with gibe or curse
 Or something worse:
 But not one goblin skurried after,
 Nor was she pricked by fear; 460
 The kind heart made her windy-paced
 That urged her home quite out of breath with haste
 And inward laughter.

 She cried "Laura," up the garden,
 "Did you miss me?
 Come and kiss me.
 Never mind my bruises,
 Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
 Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
 Goblin pulp and goblin dew. 470

¹⁰ "dingle": a dell or trough between two hills

Eat me, drink me, love me;
 Laura, make much of me:
 For your sake I have braved the glen
 And had to do with goblin merchant men."

Laura started from her chair,
 Flung her arms up in the air,
 Clutched her hair:
 "Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted
 For my sake the fruit forbidden?
 Must your light like mine be hidden, 480
 Your young life like mine be wasted,
 Undone in mine undoing
 And ruined in my ruin,
 Thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden?"—
 She clung about her sister,
 Kissed and kissed and kissed her:
 Tears once again
 Refreshed her shrunken eyes,
 Dropping like rain
 After long sultry drouth; 490
 Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,
 She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth.

Her lips began to scorch,
 That juice was wormwood to her tongue,
 She loathed the feast:
 Writhing as one possessed she leaped and sung,
 Rent all her robe, and wrung
 Her hands in lamentable haste,
 And beat her breast.
 Her locks streamed like the torch 500
 Borne by a racer at full speed,
 Or like the mane of horses in their flight,
 Or like an eagle when she stems the light
 Straight toward the sun,
 Or like a caged thing freed,
 Or like a flying flag when armies run.

Swift fire spread through her veins, knocked at her heart,
 Met the fire smouldering there
 And overbore its lesser flame;
 She gorged on bitterness without a name: 510
 Ah! fool, to choose such part
 Of soul-consuming care!
 Sense failed in the mortal strife:
 Like the watch-tower of a town
 Which an earthquake shatters down,
 Like a lightning-stricken mast,
 Like a wind-uprooted tree
 Spun about,
 Like a foam-topped waterspout
 Cast down headlong in the sea, 520

She fell at last;
 Pleasure past and anguish past,
 Is it death or is it life?

Life out of death.
 That night long Lizzie watched by her,
 Counted her pulse's flagging stir,
 Felt for her breath,
 Held water to her lips, and cooled her face
 With tears and fanning leaves:
 But when the first birds chirped about their eaves, 530
 And early reapers plodded to the place
 Of golden sheaves,
 And dew-wet grass
 Bowed in the morning winds so brisk to pass,
 And new buds with new day
 Opened of cup-like lilies on the stream,
 Laura awoke as from a dream,
 Laughed in the innocent old way,
 Hugged Lizzie but not twice or thrice;
 Her gleaming locks showed not one thread of grey, 540
 Her breath was sweet as May
 And light danced in her eyes.

Days, weeks, months, years,
 Afterwards, when both were wives
 With children of their own;
 Their mother-hearts beset with fears,
 Their lives bound up in tender lives;
 Laura would call the little ones
 And tell them of her early prime,
 Those pleasant days long gone 550
 Of not-returning time:
 Would talk about the haunted glen,
 The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,
 Their fruits like honey to the throat
 But poison in the blood;
 (Men sell not such in any town:)
 Would tell them how her sister stood
 In deadly peril to do her good,
 And win the fiery antidote:
 Then joining hands to little hands 560
 Would bid them cling together,
 "For there is no friend like a sister
 In calm or stormy weather;
 To cheer one on the tedious way,
 To fetch one if one goes astray,
 To lift one if one totters down,
 To strengthen whilst one stands."



ILLUSTRATION OF BUY FROM US WITH A GOLDEN CURL

Critical Introduction

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882) was among the leading artists of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of artists in nineteenth-century England who actively rejected the prevailing styles and themes of the Royal Academy, which set the standards for art of the era. As their name indicates, the Pre-Raphaelites favoured art that predated the High Renaissance, seeking instead to revive the beauty, craft, colours, and themes of late medieval and early Renaissance art. They found support in the English Gothic Revival, which led to the construction of neo-Gothic buildings throughout the country, and to works of art and literature with what were consid-

Figure 8. Illustration of *Buy From Us With A Golden Curl*, engraved by Charles Faulkner after a design by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Nineteenth Century (1862). First published as frontispiece to Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market and other Poems* (Cambridge, London: Macmillan and Co., 1862).

ered “gothic” themes—including monsters. Here, Rossetti illustrates “Goblin Market,” a poem by his sister Christina focused on themes of temptation and the loss of innocence. As in much Pre-Raphaelite work, both the poem and image contain tensions between moralizing messages and sensual, even erotic, appeals. In Christina’s poem, two sisters are lured by the constant calls of the “goblin men,” who beckon them with the ripest fruits, described in overtly sexual and anthropomorphizing terms. In the image, the goblins are presented as humanoids with animal heads. They are the standard animals of English children’s literature—cat and mouse, owl and badger, all dressed in tweed suits—but this is a parody of the genre, as the “girls” are clearly grown women. The wise sister flees to safety with a backward glance; the reckless

sister stays to bargain with the goblins. Since she has no gold but her golden hair, she cuts off a lock, offering something of her own body to trade for the fruit. Perhaps she is buying the owl’s pomegranate, bursting open with vaginal ripeness and filled with seeds. While she seems only to see the glistening fruit, her sister—and the viewer—can see the danger lurking in this forbidden goblin fruit.

Viewing Questions

What do the tension between the fairy-tale characters and the adult theme of sexuality tell you about this image? About the two sisters? What are the various images and techniques that the artist uses to imply that this transaction is really about sex? Does this image discourage or encourage such transactions, and why?

LEWIS CARROLL, “JABBERWOCKY”

Critical Introduction

Lewis Carroll was the pen name for Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832–1898), the British author who penned *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1871). It is from the latter that the poem “Jabberwocky” is taken. Truth be told, it has very little impact on the narrative in which it appears, though that has not affected its popularity with the reading public, as it is often found in anthologies of British literature. The poem is most known for its wordplay: the majority of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are invented by Carroll. It is with this wordplay, however, that the poem conjures up the Jabberwock in the reader’s mind through evocative words that lack any real meaning.

But for all its inventiveness, “Jabberwocky” still follows the narrative pattern of *Gilgamesh* or *Beowulf*: the young hero is warned of the dangerous monster “out there,” he seeks out that monster, kills it, and returns victorious. That plot outline, of course, flattens the poem considerably. In reality hero tales spend a good deal of time on scenes of conflict; in “Jabberwocky,” however, the battle is over in two lines, “snicker-snack.” Carroll seems more concerned—rather like an Impressionist painter—with evoking the scene and the characters in the reader’s mind than with developing the narrative. The lack of proper names, character motivations and backstories, or even description gives the reader enormous power to shape the poem: one reader may associate the Jabberwock’s “whiffling” with “whistling” and imagine him rushing through the woods, whereas another might associate it with a whiffle ball and consider it light, airy, and of little danger. We disagree with Alice that it is “hard to understand” because an understanding of the poem is as natural as it is individual—but we do agree that, as she says, “it seems to fill my head with ideas.”

Reading Questions

The young hero with the vorpal sword has indeed returned victorious after slaying the terrifying Jabberwock. This, of course, raises his prestige and would seemingly put his father more at ease about the “slithy toves.” The final stanza, however, repeats the first. Does this suggest that the young man’s work has made no impact on the world of the poem? If the end is the same as the beginning, has anything really changed? Can we assume the Jabberwock will return to be killed again?

As many who study monsters have pointed out, they *mean* or *represent* but do not fit into standard knowledge systems. As we can tell from Tenniel’s illustration, Carroll envisioned a taxonomic hodgepodge of species-mingling, but it might be interesting to consider how language plays a part in this hybridity. What sort of interplay might be going on here? Does the monster push Carroll so far that in order to grapple with it he “breaks” the English language? Or does Carroll’s love for nonsense verse that exists outside the linguistic order make a monster the perfect subject?

Editorial Notes

To provide some small context, we have elected to include the prose of *Through the Looking Glass* which precedes and follows the poem. The only editorial changes are regularization of single quotation marks to double quotation marks.

Further Reading

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“JABBERWOCKY”

LEWIS CARROLL

There was a book lying near Alice on the table, and while she sat watching the White King (for she was still a little anxious about him, and had the ink all ready to throw over him, in case he fainted again), she turned over the leaves, to find some part that she could read, “—for it’s all in some language I don’t know,” she said to herself.

It was like this.

YKCOWREBBAJ

sevot yhtils eht dna, gillirb sawT
ebaw eht ni elbmig dna eryg diD
,sevogorob eht erew ysmim lIA
.ebargtuo shtar emom eht dnA

She puzzled over this for some time, but at last a bright thought struck her. “Why, it’s a Looking-glass book, of course! And if I hold it up to a glass, the words will all go the right way again.”

This was the poem that Alice read.

JABBERWOCKY

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outrabe.

‘Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!’

He took his vorpal sword in hand:

Long time the manxome foe he sought—
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffing through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

‘And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!’
He chortled in his joy.

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outrabe.

“It seems very pretty,” she said when she had finished it, “but it’s rather hard to understand!” (You see she didn’t like to confess, ever to herself, that she couldn’t make it out at all.) “Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don’t exactly know what they are! However, somebody killed something: that’s clear, at any rate—”



Figure 9. Illustration of *Jabberwocky* by John Tenniel. Victorian, 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ \times 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. First published in Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (London: Macmillan 1871).

ILLUSTRATION OF *JABBERWOCKY*

Critical Introduction

Sir John Tenniel (1820–1914) was an English illustrator who worked closely with Lewis Carroll on both *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and on its sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass*. This image was originally planned as the frontispiece for the book, but was later replaced with an image of the White Knight because Carroll worried that “it is too terrible a monster, and likely to alarm nervous and imaginative children.” It is, indeed, an alarming image, a giant, winged, clawed, large-toothed, bug-eyed monster that dwarfs the small figure who seems barely able to raise his large “vorpel sword” to defend himself. The Jabberwock is a richly hybrid monster in the image, though the text gives only scant clues about its possible appearance. From Carroll’s poem, we only learn that it has “jaws that bite” and “claws that catch,” as well as “eyes of flame”—a very common feature of monsters, as found also in *Beowulf’s* description of Grendel. Much of the poem is comprised of nonsense words that sound dangerous and prickly but do not mean anything in particular.

Despite the clear horror of the Jabberwock, there is something prototypically Victorian about it: it is wearing a waistcoat. This was, for Tenniel and his contemporaries, a hallmark of Englishness and a form of domestication. There is, though, something deeply strange in seeing the same sort of costume we might associate with Mr. Toad and his friends from Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) on this fierce and unknowable monster.

Viewing Questions

What familiar and ordinary animals seem to be visible in the Jabberwock’s hybrid body? Do the fragments of the familiar and domestic render the Jabberwock more frightening or less so?

AMBROSE BIERCE, “THE DAMNED THING”

Critical Introduction

Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914?) was an American journalist and fiction writer best known for the satirical *Devil’s Dictionary* and the short story, “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge.” Twenty years before he mysteriously disappeared in 1913, he published a science-fiction/horror story that rivals the work of Jules Verne or Edgar Allan Poe. Following a documentary approach (like that in *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*), Bierce begins his story at the end of the action and works backward, slowly filling in gaps and details as he goes: what starts as a typical mystery slowly reveals itself to be a science-fiction/horror tale.

Bierce was not the first to incorporate an invisible adversary: Fitz James O’Brien included one in “What Was It?” in 1859. However, Bierce brings a depth to the story that had been lacking before. Here, we never know just *what* the invisible thing is. The mystery is never solved, and the ending of the story is not the ending of the creature (if it is, indeed, a creature at all). Bierce gives us just enough detail to believe in the existence of the creature, but not enough to picture it in our mind’s eye. By the end of the narrative, the characters and readers are left in the classic situation that monsters cause: we must rely on known events and classifications that do not quite fit the facts or accept the presence of something outside our ken based on imperfect evidence. The characters, despite the evidence, choose the former and label the death due to a mountain lion. The story—from the title onwards—seems to delight in foiling the reader’s attempts to do the same.

Reading Questions

The beginning of Bierce’s story is unsettling and confusing for most first-time readers, though on a second reading one can see what he is up to. Why do you think Bierce chose to fragment the plot line in such a way? Why would he want to confuse or mislead the reader?

The purposes of both the story’s form and some of its characters are to provide answers. What is it about this monster (and monsters in general) that seem to defeat those purposes? Can you think of any other texts you’ve read that show this same tension? How do monsters in other texts compare to Bierce’s creation?

Editorial Note

All explanatory footnotes are our own insertions.

Further Reading

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“THE DAMNED THING”

AMBROSE BIERCE

I

By the light of a tallow candle, which had been placed on one end of a rough table, a man was reading something written in a book. It was an old account book, greatly worn; and the writing was not, apparently, very legible, for the man sometimes held the page close to the flame of the candle to get a stronger light upon it. The shadow of the book would then throw into obscurity a half of the room, darkening a number of faces and figures; for besides the reader, eight other men were present. Seven of them sat against the rough log walls, silent and motionless, and, the room being small, not very far from the table. By extending an arm any one of them could have touched the eighth man, who lay on the table, face upward, partly covered by a sheet, his arms at his sides. He was dead.

The man with the book was not reading aloud, and no one spoke; all seemed to be waiting for something to occur; the dead man only was without expectation. From the blank darkness outside came in, through the aperture that served for a window, all the ever unfamiliar noises of night in the wilderness—the long, nameless note of a distant coyote; the stilly pulsing thrill of tireless insects in trees; strange cries of night birds, so different from those of the birds of day; the drone of great blundering beetles, and all that mysterious chorus of small sounds that seem always to have been but half heard when they have suddenly ceased, as if conscious of an indiscretion. But nothing of all this was noted in that company; its members were not overmuch addicted to idle interest in matters of no practical importance; that was obvious in every line of their rugged faces—obvious even in the dim light of the single candle. They were evidently men of the vicinity—farmers and woodmen.

The person reading was a trifle different; one would have said of him that he was of the world, worldly, albeit there was that in his attire which attested a certain fellowship with the organisms of his environment. His coat would hardly have passed muster in San Francisco: his footgear was not of urban origin, and the hat that lay by him on the floor (he was the only one uncovered) was such that if one had considered it as an article of mere personal adornment he would have missed its meaning. In countenance the man was rather prepossessing, with just a hint of sternness; though that he may have

assumed or cultivated, as appropriate to one in authority. For he was a coroner. It was by virtue of his office that he had possession of the book in which he was reading; it had been found among the dead man's effects—in his cabin, where the inquest was now taking place.

When the coroner had finished reading he put the book into his breast pocket. At that moment the door was pushed open and a young man entered. He, clearly, was not of mountain birth and breeding; he was clad as those who dwell in cities. His clothing was dusty, however, as from travel. He had, in fact, been riding hard to attend the inquest.

The coroner nodded; no one else greeted him.

“We have waited for you,” said the coroner. “It is necessary to have done with this business to-night.”

The young man smiled. “I am sorry to have kept you,” he said. “I went away, not to evade your summons, but to post to my newspaper an account of what I suppose I am called back to relate.”

The coroner smiled.

“The account that you posted to your newspaper,” he said, “differs probably from that which you will give here under oath.”

“That,” replied the other, rather hotly and with a visible flush, “is as you choose. I used manifold paper and have a copy of what I sent. It was not written as news, for it is incredible, but as fiction. It may go as a part of my testimony under oath.”

“But you say it is incredible.”

“That is nothing to you, sir, if I also swear that it is true.”

The coroner was apparently not greatly affected by the young man's manifest resentment. He was silent for some moments, his eyes upon the floor. The men about the sides of the cabin talked in whispers, but seldom withdrew their gaze from the face of the corpse. Presently the coroner lifted his eyes and said: “We will resume the inquest.”

The men removed their hats. The witness was sworn.

“What is your name?” the coroner asked.

“William Harker.”

“Age?”

“Twenty-seven.”

“You knew the deceased, Hugh Morgan?”

“Yes.”

"You were with him when he died?"

"Near him."

"How did that happen—your presence, I mean?"

"I was visiting him at this place to shoot and fish. A part of my purpose, however, was to study him, and his odd, solitary way of life. He seemed a good model for a character in fiction. I sometimes write stories."

"I sometimes read them."

"Thank you."

"Stories in general—not yours."

Some of the jurors laughed. Against a sombre background humor shows high lights. Soldiers in the intervals of battle laugh easily, and a jest in the death chamber conquers by surprise.

"Relate the circumstances of this man's death," said the coroner. "You may use any notes or memoranda that you please."

The witness understood. Pulling a manuscript from his breast pocket he held it near the candle, and turning the leaves until he found the passage that he wanted, began to read.

II

"... The sun had hardly risen when we left the house. We were looking for quail, each with a shotgun, but we had only one dog. Morgan said that our best ground was beyond a certain ridge that he pointed out, and we crossed it by a trail through the chaparral. On the other side was comparatively level ground, thickly covered with wild oats. As we emerged from the chaparral, Morgan was but a few yards in advance. Suddenly, we heard, at a little distance to our right, and partly in front, a noise as of some animal thrashing about in the bushes, which we could see were violently agitated.

"'We've started a deer,' I said. 'I wish we had brought a rifle.'"

"Morgan, who had stopped and was intently watching the agitated chaparral, said nothing, but had cocked both barrels of his gun, and was holding it in readiness to aim. I thought him a trifle excited, which surprised me, for he had a reputation for exceptional coolness, even in moments of sudden and imminent peril.

"'O, come!' I said. 'You are not going to fill up a deer with quail-shot, are you?'"

"Still he did not reply; but, catching a sight of his face as he turned it slightly toward me, I was struck by the pallor of it. Then I understood that we had serious business on hand, and my first conjecture was that we had 'jumped' a grizzly. I advanced to Morgan's side, cocking my piece as I moved.

"The bushes were now quiet, and the sounds had ceased, but Morgan was as attentive to the place as before.

"'What is it? What the devil is it?' I asked.

"'That Damned Thing!' he replied, without turning his head. His voice was husky and unnatural. He trembled visibly.

"I was about to speak further, when I observed the wild oats near the place of the disturbance moving in the most inexplicable way. I can hardly describe it. It seemed as if stirred by a streak of wind, which not only bent it, but pressed it down—crushed it so that it did not rise, and this movement was slowly prolonging itself directly toward us.

"Nothing that I had ever seen had affected me so strangely as this unfamiliar and unaccountable phenomenon, yet I am unable to recall any sense of fear. I remember—and tell it here because, singularly enough, I recollected it then—that once, in looking carelessly out of an open window, I momentarily mistook a small tree close at hand for one of a group of larger trees at a little distance away. It looked the same size as the others, but, being more distinctly and sharply defined in mass and detail, seemed out of harmony with them. It was a mere falsification of the law of aerial perspective, but it startled, almost terrified me. We so rely upon the orderly operation of familiar natural laws that any seeming suspension of them is noted as a menace to our safety, a warning of unthinkable calamity. So now the apparently causeless movement of the herbage, and the slow, undeviating approach of the line of disturbance were distinctly disquieting. My companion appeared actually frightened, and I could hardly credit my senses when I saw him suddenly throw his gun to his shoulders and fire both barrels at the agitated grass! Before the smoke of the discharge had cleared away I heard a loud savage cry—a scream like that of a wild animal—and, flinging his gun upon the ground, Morgan sprang away and ran swiftly from the spot. At the same instant I was thrown violently to the ground by the impact of something unseen in the smoke—some soft, heavy substance that seemed thrown against me with great force.

"Before I could get upon my feet and recover my gun, which seemed to have been struck from my hands, I heard Morgan crying out as if in mortal agony, and mingling with his cries were such hoarse savage sounds as one hears from fighting dogs. Inexpressibly terrified, I struggled to my feet and looked in the direction of Morgan's retreat; and may heaven in mercy spare me from another sight like that! At a distance of less than thirty yards was my friend, down upon one knee, his head thrown back at a frightful angle, hatless, his long hair in disorder and his whole body in violent move-

ment from side to side, backward and forward. His right arm was lifted and seemed to lack the hand—at least, I could see none. The other arm was invisible. At times, as my memory now reports this extraordinary scene, I could discern but a part of his body; it was as if he had been partly blotted out—I can not otherwise express it—then a shifting of his position would bring it all into view again.

"All this must have occurred within a few seconds, yet in that time Morgan assumed all the postures of a determined wrestler vanquished by superior weight and strength. I saw nothing but him, and him not always distinctly. During the entire incident his shouts and curses were heard, as if through an enveloping uproar of such sounds of rage and fury as I had never heard from the throat of man or brute!

"For a moment only I stood irresolute, then, throwing down my gun, I ran forward to my friend's assistance. I had a vague belief that he was suffering from a fit or some form of convulsion. Before I could reach his side he was down and quiet. All sounds had ceased, but, with a feeling of such terror as even these awful events had not inspired, I now saw the same mysterious movement of the wild oats prolonging itself from the trampled area about the prostrate man toward the edge of a wood. It was only when it had reached the wood that I was able to withdraw my eyes and look at my companion. He was dead."

III

The coroner rose from his seat and stood beside the dead man. Lifting an edge of the sheet he pulled it away, exposing the entire body, altogether naked and showing in the candle light a clay-like yellow. It had, however, broad maculations¹ of bluish-black, obviously caused by extravasated blood² from contusions. The chest and sides looked as if they had been beaten with a bludgeon. There were dreadful lacerations; the skin was torn in strips and shreds.

The coroner moved round to the end of the table and undid a silk handkerchief, which had been passed under the chin and knotted on the top of the head.³ When the handkerchief was drawn away it exposed what had been the

¹ "maculations": spots or blemishes

² "extravasated blood": blood which has been forced from the veins into the body general

³ This technique, perhaps best known in Marley's ghost from *A Christmas Carol*, was a common way to keep a corpse's mouth closed before embalming.

throat. Some of the jurors who had risen to get a better view repented their curiosity, and turned away their faces. Witness Harker went to the open window and leaned out across the sill, faint and sick. Dropping the handkerchief upon the dead man's neck, the coroner stepped to an angle of the room, and from a pile of clothing produced one garment after another, each of which he held up a moment for inspection. All were torn, and stiff with blood. The jurors did not make a closer inspection. They seemed rather uninterested. They had, in truth, seen all this before; the only thing that was new to them being Harker's testimony.

"Gentlemen," the coroner said, "we have no more evidence, I think. Your duty has been already explained to you; if there is nothing you wish to ask you may go outside and consider your verdict."

The foreman rose—a tall, bearded man of sixty, coarsely clad.

"I should like to ask one question, Mr. Coroner," he said. "What asylum did this yer last witness escape from?"

"Mr. Harker," said the coroner, gravely and tranquilly, "from what asylum did you last escape?"

Harker flushed crimson again, but said nothing, and the seven jurors rose and solemnly filed out of the cabin.

"If you have done insulting me, sir," said Harker, as soon as he and the officer were left alone with the dead man, "I suppose I am at liberty to go?"

"Yes."

Harker started to leave, but paused, with his hand on the door latch. The habit of his profession was strong in him—stronger than his sense of personal dignity. He turned about and said:

"The book that you have there—I recognize it as Morgan's diary. You seemed greatly interested in it; you read in it while I was testifying. May I see it? The public would like—"

"The book will cut no figure in this matter," replied the official, slipping it into his coat pocket; "all the entries in it were made before the writer's death."

As Harker passed out of the house the jury reentered and stood about the table on which the now covered corpse showed under the sheet with sharp definition. The foreman seated himself near the candle, produced from his breast pocket a pencil and scrap of paper, and wrote rather laboriously the following verdict, which with various degrees of effort all signed:

"We, the jury, do find that the remains come to their death at the hands of a mountain lion, but some of us thinks, all the same, they had fits."

IV

In the diary of the late Hugh Morgan are certain interesting entries having, possibly, a scientific value as suggestions. At the inquest upon his body the book was not put in evidence; possibly the coroner thought it not worth while to confuse the jury. The date of the first of the entries mentioned can not be ascertained; the upper part of the leaf is torn away; the part of the entry remaining is as follows:

"... would run in a half circle, keeping his head turned always toward the centre and again he would stand still, barking furiously. At last he ran away into the brush as fast as he could go. I thought at first that he had gone mad, but on returning to the house found no other alteration in his manner than what was obviously due to fear of punishment.

"Can a dog see with his nose? Do odors impress some olfactory centre with images of the thing emitting them?..."

"Sept 2.—Looking at the stars last night as they rose above the crest of the ridge east of the house, I observed them successively disappear—from left to right. Each was eclipsed but an instant, and only a few at the same time, but along the entire length of the ridge all that were within a degree or two of the crest were blotted out. It was as if something had passed along between me and them; but I could not see it, and the stars were not thick enough to define its outline. Ugh! I don't like this..."

Several weeks' entries are missing, three leaves being torn from the book.

"Sept. 27.—It has been about here again—I find evidences of its presence every day. I watched again all of last night in the same cover, gun in hand, double-charged with buckshot. In the morning the fresh footprints were there, as before. Yet I would have sworn that I did not sleep—indeed, I hardly sleep at all. It is terrible, insupportable! If these amazing experiences are real I shall go mad; if they are fanciful I am mad already.

"Oct. 3.—I shall not go—it shall not drive me away. No, this is my house, my land. God hates a coward....

"Oct. 5.—I can stand it no longer; I have invited Harker to pass a few weeks with me—he has a level head. I can judge from his manner if he thinks me mad.

"Oct. 7.—I have the solution of the problem; it came to me last night—suddenly, as by revelation. How simple—how terribly simple!

"There are sounds that we can not hear. At either end of the scale are notes that stir no chord of that imperfect instrument, the human ear. They are too high or too grave. I have observed a flock of blackbirds occupying an entire treetop—

the tops of several trees—and all in full song. Suddenly—in a moment—at absolutely the same instant—all spring into the air and fly away. How? They could not all see one another—whole treetops intervened. At no point could a leader have been visible to all. There must have been a signal of warning or command, high and shrill above the din, but by me unheard. I have observed, too, the same simultaneous flight when all were silent, among not only blackbirds, but other birds—quail, for example, widely separated by bushes—even on opposite sides of a hill.

"It is known to seamen that a school of whales basking or sporting on the surface of the ocean, miles apart, with the convexity of the earth between them, will sometimes dive at the same instant—all gone out of sight in a moment. The signal has been sounded—too grave for the ear of the sailor at the masthead and his comrades on the deck—who nevertheless feel its vibrations in the ship as the stones of a cathedral are stirred by the bass of the organ.

"As with sounds, so with colors. At each end of the solar spectrum the chemist can detect the presence of what are known as 'actinic' rays.⁴ They represent colors—integral colors in the composition of light—which we are unable to discern. The human eye is an imperfect instrument; its range is but a few octaves of the real 'chromatic scale.' I am not mad; there are colors that we can not see.

"And, God help me! the Damned Thing is of such a color!"

⁴ "actinic rays": rays (presumably of light) capable of producing photochemical reactions

BRAM STOKER, *DRACULA* — Selections

Critical Introduction

Bram Stoker's (1847–1912) *Dracula* is, like Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a major icon in the history of monsters. While there are vampire narratives that predate its publication, Stoker's creation is really the origin of the modern image that we have of the vampire, which has become vastly more popular in literature, art, cinema, and television since its publication than it was before. Stoker very loosely based his character on the legend of the fifteenth-century Romanian ruler, Vlad Dracula, more commonly known as Vlad Tepes or Vlad the Impaler, renowned for his cruelty and violence. The Irish novelist never visited the Transylvanian sites in which the novel is set, but instead created a dark fantasy of craggy peaks, ruined castles, and colourful, superstitious peasants.

The familiar image of the pale, powerful, elegant, courtly monster is established in the first moment that Count Dracula reveals himself to the everyman narrator, Jonathan Harker. His powers are somewhat diffuse, not spelled out at any one point. It seem, though, that he can become a bat, a wolf, even a cloud of mist. He is uncannily strong, can climb walls like a lizard, can mesmerize people, has some control over those he has bitten, and, of course, can live indefinitely by drinking the blood of humans. Much criticism of the novel has pointed out its exploration of the dangers of sex and sexuality, which were highly potent fears in the restrained and repressive Victorian era in which Stoker lived. *Dracula* is not, though, a sympathetic or sexually appealing character, as are many more recent vampires.

The novel's action takes place in a series of classic gothic settings, most notably Castle Dracula, in the remote Carpathian mountains. However, much of the drama of the novel is driven by Dracula's movement. He is frightening enough in his ancestral castle in a remote corner of central Europe; for the novel's original English audience, though, much of the terror is based on the vampire's arrival in Whitby, on the eastern coast of Britain. Dracula, with hooked "aquiline" nose, Eastern origins, and old-fashioned clothes, would have recalled to contemporary English readers another group they greatly

feared and rendered monstrous through the lens of bigotry: Jewish immigrants, often accused in the period of bringing forms of contagion and corruption to England.

Here, we present a series of excerpts containing descriptions of Dracula, and introducing his strange powers and menacing aspects. Through the eyes of Jonathan Harker, we slowly learn more and more about the vampire and the danger he embodies. We encourage you to read the whole of the novel; though it is long, you will find the experience a rewarding one.

Reading Questions

How does Stoker establish a gothic setting for his story? What elements of the description of Dracula are what you would and would not expect from the many pop-culture versions of the character you have seen?

Editorial Notes

The text here is from the first widely-circulated edition, published in 1897 by Archibald Constable & Company. We have indicated omitted sections with ellipses, and have provided summaries in italics. No changes have been made to the text.

Further Reading

- Arata, Stephen D. "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization." *Victorian Studies* 33 (1990): 621–45.
- Auerbach, Nina, and David J. Skal, eds. *Dracula: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Reviews and Reactions, Dramatic and Film Variations, Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997.
- McNally, Raymond T., and Radu Florescu. *In Search of Dracula: The History of Dracula and Vampires*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1992.
- Senf, Carol. "Dracula: The Unseen Face in the Mirror." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 9 (1979): 160–70.

DRACULA

Selections (London: Archibald Constable and Company, 1897)

BRAM STOKER

THE NARRATIVE OF Dracula begins with the journal entries of Jonathan Harker, an attorney from London who travels to the strange area of Transylvania (present-day Romania) to facilitate a real estate deal with Count Dracula. On this way to the meeting point, he meets a number of locals who seem horrified by his actions—attempting to dissuade him and offering tokens for his protection. The below excerpt begins as the coachman, clearly unsettled, waits for Dracula’s servant to pick up Harker.

5 May—The Castle

“There is no carriage here. The Herr is not expected after all. He will now come on to Bukovina, and return to-morrow or the next day; better the next day.” Whilst he was speaking the horses began to neigh and snort and plunge wildly, so that the driver had to hold them up. Then, amongst a chorus of screams from the peasants and a universal crossing of themselves, a calèche,¹ with four horses, drove up behind us, overtook us, and drew up beside the coach. I could see from the flash of our lamps, as the rays fell on them, that the horses were coal-black and splendid animals. They were driven by a tall man, with a long brown beard and a great black hat, which seemed to hide his face from us. I could only see the gleam of a pair of very bright eyes, which seemed red in the lamplight, as he turned to us. He said to the driver:—

“You are early to-night, my friend.” The man stammered in reply:—

“The English Herr was in a hurry,” to which the stranger replied:—

“That is why, I suppose, you wished him to go on to Bukovina. You cannot deceive me, my friend; I know too much, and my horses are swift.” As he spoke he smiled, and the lamplight fell on a hard-looking mouth, with very red lips and sharp-looking teeth, as white as ivory. One of my companions whispered to another the line from Burger’s “Lenore”:

“Denn die Todten reiten schnell!”—

(“For the dead travel fast.”)²

The strange driver evidently heard the words, for he looked up with a gleaming smile. The passenger turned his face away, at the same time putting out his two fingers and crossing himself. “Give me the Herr’s luggage,” said the driver; and with exceeding alacrity my bags were handed out and put in the calèche. Then I descended from the side of the coach, as the calèche was close alongside, the driver helping me with a hand which caught my arm in a grip of steel; his strength must have been prodigious. Without a word he shook his reins, the horses turned, and we swept into the darkness of the Pass. As I looked back I saw the steam from the horses of the coach by the light of the lamps, and projected against it the figures of my late companions crossing themselves. Then the driver cracked his whip and called to his horses, and off they swept on their way to Bukovina. As they sank into the darkness I felt a strange chill, and a lonely feeling came over me; but a cloak was thrown over my shoulders, and a rug across my knees....

By-and-by, however, as I was curious to know how time was passing, I struck a match, and by its flame looked at my watch; it was within a few minutes of midnight. This gave me a sort of shock, for I suppose the general superstition about midnight was increased by my recent experiences. I waited with a sick feeling of suspense.

Then a dog began to howl somewhere in a farmhouse far down the road—a long, agonised wailing, as if from fear. The sound was taken up by another dog, and then another and another, till, borne on the wind which now sighed softly through the Pass, a wild howling began, which seemed to come from all over the country, as far as the imagination could grasp it through the gloom of the night. At the first howl the horses began to strain and rear, but the driver spoke to them soothingly, and they quieted down, but shivered and sweated as though after a run-away from sudden fright. Then, far off in the distance, from the mountains on each side of us began a louder and a sharper howling—that of wolves—which affected both the horses and myself in the same way—for I was minded to jump from the calèche and run, whilst they

¹ “calèche”: a four-wheeled, horse-drawn carriage that was generally open

² “Lenore” by Gottfried August Bürger is a gothic ballad detailing the story of separated lovers Lenore and William. Lenore curses God and

wishes for her lover, who is presumed lost at war. One night, a figure who looks like William arrives and takes her on a wild, break-neck ride to a graveyard where William’s body lies. The poem ends with dancing devils surrounding a dying Lenore.

reared again and plunged madly, so that the driver had to use all his great strength to keep them from bolting. In a few minutes, however, my own ears got accustomed to the sound, and the horses so far became quiet that the driver was able to descend and to stand before them. He petted and soothed them, and whispered something in their ears, as I have heard of horse-tamers doing, and with extraordinary effect, for under his caresses they became quite manageable again, though they still trembled. The driver again took his seat, and shaking his reins, started off at a great pace. This time, after going to the far side of the Pass, he suddenly turned down a narrow roadway which ran sharply to the right.

Soon we were hemmed in with trees, which in places arched right over the roadway till we passed as through a tunnel; and again great frowning rocks guarded us boldly on either side. Though we were in shelter, we could hear the rising wind, for it moaned and whistled through the rocks, and the branches of the trees crashed together as we swept along. It grew colder and colder still, and fine, powdery snow began to fall, so that soon we and all around us were covered with a white blanket. The keen wind still carried the howling of the dogs, though this grew fainter as we went on our way. The baying of the wolves sounded nearer and nearer, as though they were closing round on us from every side. I grew dreadfully afraid, and the horses shared my fear. The driver, however, was not in the least disturbed; he kept turning his head to left and right, but I could not see anything through the darkness.

Suddenly, away on our left, I saw a faint flickering blue flame. The driver saw it at the same moment; he at once checked the horses, and, jumping to the ground, disappeared into the darkness. I did not know what to do, the less as the howling of the wolves grew closer; but while I wondered the driver suddenly appeared again, and without a word took his seat, and we resumed our journey. I think I must have fallen asleep and kept dreaming of the incident, for it seemed to be repeated endlessly, and now looking back, it is like a sort of awful nightmare. Once the flame appeared so near the road, that even in the darkness around us I could watch the driver's motions. He went rapidly to where the blue flame arose—it must have been very faint, for it did not seem to illumine the place around it at all—and gathering a few stones, formed them into some device. Once there appeared a strange optical effect: when he stood between me and the flame he did not obstruct it, for I could see its ghostly flicker all the same. This startled me, but as the effect was only momentary, I took it that my eyes deceived me straining through the dark-

ness. Then for a time there were no blue flames, and we sped onwards through the gloom, with the howling of the wolves around us, as though they were following in a moving circle.

At last there came a time when the driver went further afield than he had yet gone, and during his absence, the horses began to tremble worse than ever and to snort and scream with fright. I could not see any cause for it, for the howling of the wolves had ceased altogether; but just then the moon, sailing through the black clouds, appeared behind the jagged crest of a beetling, pine-clad rock, and by its light I saw around us a ring of wolves, with white teeth and lolling red tongues, with long, sinewy limbs and shaggy hair. They were a hundred times more terrible in the grim silence which held them than even when they howled. For myself, I felt a sort of paralysis of fear. It is only when a man feels himself face to face with such horrors that he can understand their true import.

All at once the wolves began to howl as though the moonlight had had some peculiar effect on them. The horses jumped about and reared, and looked helplessly round with eyes that rolled in a way painful to see; but the living ring of terror encompassed them on every side; and they had perforce to remain within it. I called to the coachman to come, for it seemed to me that our only chance was to try to break out through the ring and to aid his approach. I shouted and beat the side of the calèche, hoping by the noise to scare the wolves from that side, so as to give him a chance of reaching the trap. How he came there, I know not, but I heard his voice raised in a tone of imperious command, and looking towards the sound, saw him stand in the roadway. As he swept his long arms, as though brushing aside some impalpable obstacle, the wolves fell back and back further still. Just then a heavy cloud passed across the face of the moon, so that we were again in darkness.

When I could see again the driver was climbing into the calèche, and the wolves had disappeared. This was all so strange and uncanny that a dreadful fear came upon me, and I was afraid to speak or move. The time seemed interminable as we swept on our way, now in almost complete darkness, for the rolling clouds obscured the moon. We kept on ascending, with occasional periods of quick descent, but in the main always ascending. Suddenly, I became conscious of the fact that the driver was in the act of pulling up the horses in the courtyard of a vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no ray of light, and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the moonlit sky....

When the calèche stopped, the driver jumped down and held out his hand to assist me to alight. Again I could not but

notice his prodigious strength. His hand actually seemed like a steel vice that could have crushed mine if he had chosen. Then he took out my traps, and placed them on the ground beside me as I stood close to a great door, old and studded with large iron nails, and set in a projecting doorway of massive stone. I could see even in the dim light that the stone was massively carved, but that the carving had been much worn by time and weather. As I stood, the driver jumped again into his seat and shook the reins; the horses started forward, and trap and all disappeared down one of the dark openings.

I stood in silence where I was, for I did not know what to do. Of bell or knocker there was no sign; through these frowning walls and dark window openings it was not likely that my voice could penetrate. The time I waited seemed endless, and I felt doubts and fears crowding upon me. What sort of place had I come to, and among what kind of people? What sort of grim adventure was it on which I had embarked? Was this a customary incident in the life of a solicitor's clerk sent out to explain the purchase of a London estate to a foreigner? Solicitor's clerk! Mina³ would not like that. Solicitor for just before leaving London I got word that my examination was successful; and I am now a full-blown solicitor! I began to rub my eyes and pinch myself to see if I were awake. It all seemed like a horrible nightmare to me, and I expected that I should suddenly awake, and find myself at home, with the dawn struggling in through the windows, as I had now and again felt in the morning after a day of overwork. But my flesh answered the pinching test, and my eyes were not to be deceived. I was indeed awake and among the Carpathians. All I could do now was to be patient, and to wait the coming of the morning.

Just as I had come to this conclusion I heard a heavy step approaching behind the great door, and saw through the chinks the gleam of a coming light. Then there was the sound of rattling chains and the clanking of massive bolts drawn back. A key was turned with the loud grating noise of long disuse, and the great door swung back.

Within, stood a tall old man, clean shaven save for a long white moustache, and clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of colour about him anywhere. He held in his hand an antique silver lamp, in which the flame burned without chimney or globe of any kind, throwing long quivering shadows as it flickered in the draught of the open door. The old man motioned me in with his right hand with a

courtly gesture, saying in excellent English, but with a strange intonation:—

"Welcome to my house! Enter freely and of your own will!" He made no motion of stepping to meet me, but stood like a statue, as though his gesture of welcome had fixed him into stone. The instant, however, that I had stepped over the threshold, he moved impulsively forward, and holding out his hand grasped mine with a strength which made me wince, an effect which was not lessened by the fact that it seemed as cold as ice—more like the hand of a dead than a living man. Again he said:—

"Welcome to my house. Come freely. Go safely; and leave something of the happiness you bring!" The strength of the handshake was so much akin to that which I had noticed in the driver, whose face I had not seen, that for a moment I doubted if it were not the same person to whom I was speaking; so to make sure, I said interrogatively:—

"Count Dracula?" He bowed in a courtly way as he replied:—

"I am Dracula; and I bid you welcome, Mr. Harker, to my house. Come in; the night air is chill, and you must need to eat and rest." As he was speaking, he put the lamp on a bracket on the wall, and stepping out, took my luggage; he had carried it in before I could forestall him. I protested but he insisted:—

"Nay, sir, you are my guest. It is late, and my people are not available. Let me see to your comfort myself." He insisted on carrying my traps along the passage, and then up a great winding stair, and along another great passage, on whose stone floor our steps rang heavily. At the end of this he threw open a heavy door, and I rejoiced to see within a well-lit room in which a table was spread for supper, and on whose mighty hearth a great fire of logs, freshly replenished, flamed and flared.

The Count halted, putting down my bags, closed the door, and crossing the room, opened another door, which led into a small octagonal room lit by a single lamp, and seemingly without a window of any sort. Passing through this, he opened another door, and motioned me to enter. It was a welcome sight; for here was a great bedroom well lighted and warmed with another log fire, also added to but lately, for the top logs were fresh which sent a hollow roar up the wide chimney. The Count himself left my luggage inside and withdrew, saying, before he closed the door:—

"You will need, after your journey, to refresh yourself by making your toilet. I trust you will find all you wish. When you are ready, come into the other room, where you will find your supper prepared."

³ Mina Murray, Jonathan's fiancée. They will be married later in the novel, and she is usually known as Mina Harker.

The light and warmth and the Count's courteous welcome seemed to have dissipated all my doubts and fears. Having then reached my normal state, I discovered that I was half famished with hunger; so making a hasty toilet, I went into the other room.

I found supper already laid out. My host, who stood on one side of the great fireplace, leaning against the stonework, made a graceful wave of his hand to the table, and said:—

"I pray you, be seated and sup how you please. You will, I trust, excuse me that I do not join you; but I have dined already, and I do not sup."

I handed to him the sealed letter which Mr. Hawkins⁴ had entrusted to me. He opened it and read it gravely; then, with a charming smile, he handed it to me to read. One passage of it, at least, gave me a thrill of pleasure.

"I must regret that an attack of gout, from which malady I am a constant sufferer, forbids absolutely any travelling on my part for some time to come; but I am happy to say I can send a sufficient substitute, one in whom I have every possible confidence. He is a young man, full of energy and talent in his own way, and of a very faithful disposition. He is discreet and silent, and has grown into manhood in my service. He shall be ready to attend on you when you will during his stay, and shall take your instructions in all matters."

The Count himself came forward and took off the cover of a dish, and I fell to at once on an excellent roast chicken. This, with some cheese and a salad and a bottle of old Tokay,⁵ of which I had two glasses, was my supper. During the time I was eating it the Count asked me many questions as to my journey, and I told him by degrees all I had experienced.

By this time I had finished my supper, and by my host's desire had drawn up a chair by the fire and begun to smoke a cigar which he offered me, at the same time excusing himself that he did not smoke. I had now an opportunity of observing him, and found him of a very marked physiognomy.⁶

His face was a strong—a very strong—aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very

massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale, and at the tops extremely pointed; the chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor.

Hitherto I had noticed the backs of his hands as they lay on his knees in the firelight, and they had seemed rather white and fine; but seeing them now close to me, I could not but notice that they were rather coarse, broad, with squat fingers. Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point. As the Count leaned over me and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder. It may have been that his breath was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which, do what I would, I could not conceal. The Count, evidently noticing it, drew back; and with a grim sort of smile, which showed more than he had yet done his protuberant teeth, sat himself down again on his own side of the fireplace. We were both silent for a while; and as I looked towards the window I saw the first dim streak of the coming dawn. There seemed a strange stillness over everything; but as I listened I heard as if from down below in the valley the howling of many wolves. The Count's eyes gleamed, and he said:—

"Listen to them—the children of the night. What music they make!" Seeing, I suppose, some expression in my face strange to him, he added:—

"Ah, sir, you dwellers in the city cannot enter into the feelings of the hunter." Then he rose and said:—

"But you must be tired. Your bedroom is all ready, and tomorrow you shall sleep as late as you will. I have to be away till the afternoon; so sleep well and dream well!" With a courteous bow, he opened for me himself the door to the octagonal room, and I entered my bedroom....

In the intervening action, Harker discusses Dracula's estate purchase just outside of London, and Dracula—under the guise of an Anglophile—seeks as much information about London as he can glean from Harker.

8 May.

I only slept a few hours when I went to bed, and feeling that I could not sleep any more, got up. I had hung my shaving glass by the window, and was just beginning to shave. Suddenly I

⁴ Peter Hawkins, the kindly solicitor who employs Jonathan Harker and sent him to Transylvania.

⁵ Tokay (Tokaji) is a kind of wine which comes from the Tokaj region in Hungary and Slovakia.

⁶ Physiognomy is a now-discredited branch of science that sought to attach personality characteristics to particular facial and cranial features.

felt a hand on my shoulder, and heard the Count's voice saying to me, "Good-morning." I started, for it amazed me that I had not seen him, since the reflection of the glass covered the whole room behind me. In starting I had cut myself slightly, but did not notice it at the moment. Having answered the Count's salutation, I turned to the glass again to see how I had been mistaken. This time there could be no error; for the man was close to me, and I could see him over my shoulder. But there was no reflection of him in the mirror! The whole room behind me was displayed; but there was no sign of a man in it, except myself. This was startling, and, coming on the top of so many strange things, was beginning to increase that vague feeling of uneasiness which I always have when the Count is near; but at the instant I saw that the cut had bled a little, and the blood was trickling over my chin. I laid down the razor, turning as I did so half round to look for some sticking plaster. When the Count saw my face, his eyes blazed with a sort of demoniac fury, and he suddenly made a grab at my throat. I drew away, and his hand touched the string of beads which held the crucifix. It made an instant change in him, for the fury passed so quickly that I could hardly believe that it was ever there.

"Take care," he said, "take care how you cut yourself. It is more dangerous than you think in this country." Then seizing the shaving glass, he went on: "And this is the wretched thing that has done the mischief. It is a foul bauble of man's vanity. Away with it!" and opening the heavy window with one wrench of his terrible hand, he flung out the glass, which was shattered into a thousand pieces on the stones of the courtyard far below.

Then he withdrew without a word. It is very annoying, for I do not see how I am to shave, unless in my watch-case or the bottom of the shaving-pot, which is fortunately of metal.

When I went into the dining-room, breakfast was prepared; but I could not find the Count anywhere. So I breakfasted alone. It is strange that as yet I have not seen the Count eat or drink. He must be a very peculiar man! After breakfast I did a little exploring in the castle. I went out on the stairs, and found a room looking towards the South. The view was magnificent, and from where I stood there was every opportunity of seeing it. The castle is on the very edge of a terrible precipice. A stone falling from the window would fall a thousand feet without touching anything! As far as the eye can reach is a sea of green tree tops, with occasionally a deep rift where there is a chasm. Here and there are silver threads where the rivers wind in deep gorges through the forests.

But I am not in heart to describe beauty, for when I had seen the view I explored further; doors, doors, doors everywhere, and all locked and bolted. In no place save from the windows in the castle walls is there an available exit.

The castle is a veritable prison, and I am a prisoner!

As the days pass and Dracula's behaviour seems stranger and stranger, Harker's terror begins to rise and he resolves to explore the castle as fully as he can and discover a way to escape.

12 May.

"I trust you will forgive me, but I have much work to do in private this evening. You will, I hope, find all things as you wish." At the door he turned, and after a moment's pause said:—

"Let me advise you, my dear young friend—nay, let me warn you with all seriousness, that should you leave these rooms you will not by any chance go to sleep in any other part of the castle. It is old, and has many memories, and there are bad dreams for those who sleep unwisely. Be warned! Should sleep now or ever overcome you, or be like to do, then haste to your own chamber or to these rooms, for your rest will then be safe. But if you be not careful in this respect, then"—He finished his speech in a gruesome way, for he motioned with his hands as if he were washing them. I quite understood; my only doubt was as to whether any dream could be more terrible than the unnatural, horrible net of gloom and mystery which seemed closing around me.

Later.—I endorse the last words written, but this time there is no doubt in question. I shall not fear to sleep in any place where he is not. I have placed the crucifix over the head of my bed—I imagine that my rest is thus freer from dreams; and there it shall remain.

When he left me I went to my room. After a little while, not hearing any sound, I came out and went up the stone stair to where I could look out towards the South. There was some sense of freedom in the vast expanse, inaccessible though it was to me, as compared with the narrow darkness of the courtyard. Looking out on this, I felt that I was indeed in prison, and I seemed to want a breath of fresh air, though it were of the night. I am beginning to feel this nocturnal existence tell on me. It is destroying my nerve. I start at my own shadow, and am full of all sorts of horrible imaginings. God knows that there is ground for my terrible fear in this accursed place! I looked out over the beautiful expanse, bathed in soft yellow moonlight till it was almost as light as day. In the soft light the distant hills became melted, and the

shadows in the valleys and gorges of velvety blackness. The mere beauty seemed to cheer me; there was peace and comfort in every breath I drew. As I leaned from the window my eye was caught by something moving a storey below me, and somewhat to my left, where I imagined, from the order of the rooms, that the windows of the Count's own room would look out. The window at which I stood was tall and deep, stone-mullioned, and though weatherworn, was still complete; but it was evidently many a day since the case had been there. I drew back behind the stonework, and looked carefully out.

What I saw was the Count's head coming out from the window. I did not see the face, but I knew the man by the neck and the movement of his back and arms. In any case I could not mistake the hands which I had had so many opportunities of studying. I was at first interested and somewhat amused, for it is wonderful how small a matter will interest and amuse a man when he is a prisoner. But my very feelings changed to repulsion and terror when I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, *face down* with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings. At first I could not believe my eyes. I thought it was some trick of the moonlight, some weird effect of shadow; but I kept looking, and it could be no delusion. I saw the fingers and toes grasp the corners of the stones, worn clear of the mortar by the stress of years, and by thus using every projection and inequality move downwards with considerable speed, just as a lizard moves along a wall.

What manner of man is this, or what manner of creature is it in the semblance of man? I feel the dread of this horrible place overpowering me; I am in fear—in awful fear—and there is no escape for me; I am encompassed about with terrors that I dare not think of...

In the course of his explorations, Harker has discovered some disused rooms. Once fine places, they are now dilapidated and covered in a thick layer of dust.

Later: the Morning of 16 May.—

The Count's mysterious warning frightened me at the time; it frightens me more now when I think of it, for in future he has a fearful hold upon me. I shall fear to doubt what he may say!

When I had written in my diary and had fortunately replaced the book and pen in my pocket I felt sleepy. The Count's warning came into my mind, but I took a pleasure in disobeying it. The sense of sleep was upon me, and with it

the obstinacy which sleep brings as outrider. The soft moonlight soothed, and the wide expanse without gave a sense of freedom which refreshed me. I determined not to return to-night to the gloom-haunted rooms, but to sleep here, where, of old, ladies had sat and sung and lived sweet lives whilst their gentle breasts were sad for their menfolk away in the midst of remorseless wars. I drew a great couch out of its place near the corner, so that as I lay, I could look at the lovely view to east and south, and unthinking of and uncaring for the dust, composed myself for sleep. I suppose I must have fallen asleep; I hope so, but I fear, for all that followed was startlingly real so real that now sitting here in the broad, full sunlight of the morning, I cannot in the least believe that it was all sleep.

I was not alone. The room was the same, unchanged in any way since I came into it; I could see along the floor, in the brilliant moonlight, my own footsteps marked where I had disturbed the long accumulation of dust. In the moonlight opposite me were three young women, ladies by their dress and manner. I thought at the time that I must be dreaming when I saw them, for, though the moonlight was behind them, they threw no shadow on the floor. They came close to me, and looked at me for some time, and then whispered together. Two were dark, and had high aquiline noses, like the Count, and great dark, piercing eyes that seemed to be almost red when contrasted with the pale yellow moon. The other was fair, as fair as can be, with great wavy masses of golden hair and eyes like pale sapphires. I seemed somehow to know her face, and to know it in connection with some dreamy fear, but I could not recollect at the moment how or where. All three had brilliant white teeth that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. It is not good to note this down, lest some day it should meet Mina's eyes and cause her pain; but it is the truth. They whispered together, and then they all three laughed—such a silvery, musical laugh, but as hard as though the sound never could have come through the softness of human lips. It was like the intolerable, tingling sweetness of water-glasses when played on by a cunning hand. The fair girl shook her head coquettishly, and the other two urged her on. One said:—

“Go on! You are first, and we shall follow; yours is the right to begin.” The other added:—

“He is young and strong; there are kisses for us all.” I lay quiet, looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delight-

ful anticipation. The fair girl advanced and bent over me till I could feel the movement of her breath upon me. Sweet it was in one sense, honey-sweet, and sent the same tingling through the nerves as her voice, but with a bitter underlying the sweet, a bitter offensiveness, as one smells in blood.

I was afraid to raise my eyelids, but looked out and saw perfectly under the lashes. The girl went on her knees, and bent over me, simply gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth. Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat. Then she paused, and I could hear the churning sound of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips, and could feel the hot breath on my neck. Then the skin of my throat began to tingle as one's flesh does when the hand that is to tickle it approaches nearer—nearer. I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the super-sensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with beating heart.

But at that instant, another sensation swept through me as quick as lightning. I was conscious of the presence of the Count, and of his being as if lapped in a storm of fury. As my eyes opened involuntarily I saw his strong hand grasp the slender neck of the fair woman and with giant's power draw it back, the blue eyes transformed with fury, the white teeth champing with rage, and the fair cheeks blazing red with passion. But the Count! Never did I imagine such wrath and fury, even to the demons of the pit. His eyes were positively blazing. The red light in them was lurid, as if the flames of heft-fire blazed behind them. His face was deathly pale, and the lines of it were hard like drawn wires; the thick eyebrows that met over the nose now seemed like a heaving bar of white-hot metal. With a fierce sweep of his arm, he hurled the woman from him, and then motioned to the others, as though he were beating them back; it was the same imperious gesture that I had seen used to the wolves. In a voice which, though low and almost in a whisper seemed to cut through the air and then ring round the room he said:—

“How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him, or you'll have to deal with me.” The fair girl, with a laugh of ribald coquetry, turned to answer him:—

“You yourself never loved; you never love!” On this the other women joined, and such a mirthless, hard, soulless laughter rang through the room that it almost made me faint to hear; it seemed like the pleasure of fiends. Then the Count turned, after looking at my face attentively, and said in a soft whisper:—

“Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past. Is it not so? Well, now I promise you that when I am done with him you shall kiss him at your will. Now go! go! I must awaken him, for there is work to be done.”

“Are we to have nothing to-night?” said one of them, with a low laugh, as she pointed to the bag which he had thrown upon the floor, and which moved as though there were some living thing within it. For answer he nodded his head. One of the women jumped forward and opened it. If my ears did not deceive me there was a gasp and a low wail, as of a half-smothered child. The women closed round, whilst I was aghast with horror; but as I looked they disappeared, and with them the dreadful bag. There was no door near them, and they could not have passed me without my noticing. They simply seemed to fade into the rays of the moonlight and pass out through the window, for I could see outside the dim, shadowy forms for a moment before they entirely faded away.

Then the horror overcame me, and I sank down unconscious.

DRACULA



6d.

BY
BRAM
STOKER

6d.

WESTMINSTER
Archibald Constable & Co Ltd
2 WHITEHALL GARDENS

Figure 10. Frontispiece to Bram Stoker, *Dracula*. "Nathan." Victorian (1901). First published as Frontispiece to Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (London: Archibald Constable & Co. Ltd, 1901).

FRONTISPIECE TO BRAM STOKER, *DRACULA*

Critical Introduction

Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* was first published in 1897, but the 1901 edition was the first to have an illustration, and this is the only illustration approved by Stoker himself.

How to sum up the complex and highly variable character of Dracula in a single image? We might be leered at by the giant bat or greeted by the genteel lord and owner of his castle ("a tall old man, clean-shaven save for a long white mustache, clad in black from head to foot, and without a single speck of colour about him anywhere"). We might see the wolf howling at the moon or the humanoid form dissolving into a mist in the moonlight. We might see a moment of great violence or the sleeping form of the monster in his coffin. Instead, this frontispiece presents a vertiginous scene that incorporates several elements. Dracula defies gravity as "he went down the wall, lizard fashion." He seems winged, though it is not clear if he bears actual batwings or if this is his cloak. His hands and feet are splayed, somehow simian—or at least not quite human—and his head suits well Stoker's description of the "lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples but profusely elsewhere." The castle tower provides a classic element of gothic atmosphere. From the text, we learn that in this moment, Harker's horror is compounded by an additional realization: "I drew back and watched carefully, and saw the whole man emerge. It was a new shock to me to find that he had on the suit of clothes which I had worn whilst travelling here."

The print is bold and graphic, with strong lines. The image is sharply contained within the black bounding lines of the page, which is ultimately dominated not by the image of the vampire, but by his name, "DRACULA," which appears in thick capital letters across the top of the page, like a shouting news headline. The serifs on the letters—the little projections on the ends of lines in the typeface—are just a bit more pointed than we might expect, such that the "D" almost seems fanged.

Viewing Questions

Is this what you would expect from an image of Dracula? How would this image prepare you for the novel that follows it? Does it conflict with or reinforce the preconceptions formed by films and advertisements?

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD, “ANCIENT SORCERIES”

Critical Introduction

Typically considered a ghost tale writer, Algernon Blackwood (1869–1951) published “Ancient Sorceries” in 1908—and although the antagonists are cats, the supernatural still pervades the short story. As in the later “[Shambleau](#),” by C. L. Moore, feline characteristics are closely associated with female characters and feminine desirability. With that sexual desirability comes a portion of power over the male protagonist: Vezin is almost incapable of resisting Ilse and the town. Indeed, European pagan practices—especially witches and their covens—tend to subvert the Christian patriarchal dynamic, putting women closer to the center of power than men. So it is no surprise that Ilse and her mother (and, of course, Vezin’s two female relatives who were convicted as witches) are the lynchpins of the town’s Satanic power and the avenue through which Vezin comes into contact with it.

Blackwood, however, complicates this by adding an internal desire for the pagan past: before Ilse stokes his desire for her, Vezin’s soul has “tuned” itself to the town, as evidenced in his “purring” as he first enters it. Vezin, it seems, has the cat (the animal, the feminine) in him all along. And although Dr. Silence and the narrator attempt to explain the tale as a purely psychological event, the story leaves open the possibility that Vezin, Silence, the narrator, and the reader all have the monster inside us just waiting to come out.

Reading Questions

Blackwood uses the frame narrative in this text to create something akin to a detective story in which Dr. Silence and the narrator solve the mystery. In doing so, he sets up a dichotomy between rationalism and the mysterious supernatural. As you read the story, try to identify the rational and the supernatural aspects: where do they come into conflict with each other? Where does one or the other come out on top? Does the story itself seem to choose one side over the other or leave them hanging in balance?

The story makes mention of lycanthropy, so why do you think Blackwood chooses cats over dogs? Compare this story to Marie de France’s [Bisclavret](#) or any number of werewolf movies (e.g. *The Wolf-Man*, 1941, or *The Howling*, 1981): how does the nature of the animal involved shape the narrative, the conflict, and monster itself?

Editorial Notes

We have silently amended the dialogue punctuation from the original by adding opening quotation marks at the beginning of paragraphs that continue a character’s words.

Further Reading

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“ANCIENT SORCERIES”

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

I

There are, it would appear, certain wholly unremarkable persons, with none of the characteristics that invite adventure, who yet once or twice in the course of their smooth lives undergo an experience so strange that the world catches its breath—and looks the other way! And it was cases of this kind, perhaps, more than any other, that fell into the wide-spread net of John Silence, the psychic doctor, and, appealing to his deep humanity, to his patience, and to his great qualities of spiritual sympathy, led often to the revelation of problems of the strangest complexity, and of the profoundest possible human interest.

Matters that seemed almost too curious and fantastic for belief he loved to trace to their hidden sources. To unravel a tangle in the very soul of things—and to release a suffering human soul in the process—was with him a veritable passion. And the knots he untied were, indeed, after passing strange.

The world, of course, asks for some plausible basis to which it can attach credence—something it can, at least, pretend to explain. The adventurous type it can understand: such people carry about with them an adequate explanation of their exciting lives, and their characters obviously drive them into the circumstances which produce the adventures. It expects nothing else from them, and is satisfied. But dull, ordinary folk have no right to out-of-the-way experiences, and the world having been led to expect otherwise, is disappointed with them, not to say shocked. Its complacent judgment has been rudely disturbed.

“Such a thing happened to *that* man!” it cries—“a commonplace person like that! It is too absurd! There must be something wrong!”

Yet there could be no question that something did actually happen to little Arthur Vezin, something of the curious nature he described to Dr. Silence. Outwardly or inwardly, it happened beyond a doubt, and in spite of the jeers of his few friends who heard the tale, and observed wisely that “such a thing might perhaps have come to Iszard, that crack-brained Iszard, or to that odd fish Minski, but it could never have happened to commonplace little Vezin, who was fore-ordained to live and die according to scale.”

But, whatever his method of death was, Vezin certainly did not “live according to scale” so far as this particular event in

his otherwise uneventful life was concerned; and to hear him recount it, and watch his pale delicate features change, and hear his voice grow softer and more hushed as he proceeded, was to know the conviction that his halting words perhaps failed sometimes to convey. He lived the thing over again each time he told it. His whole personality became muffled in the recital. It subdued him more than ever, so that the tale became a lengthy apology for an experience that he deprecated. He appeared to excuse himself and ask your pardon for having dared to take part in so fantastic an episode. For little Vezin was a timid, gentle, sensitive soul, rarely able to assert himself, tender to man and beast, and almost constitutionally unable to say No, or to claim many things that should rightly have been his. His whole scheme of life seemed utterly remote from anything more exciting than missing a train or losing an umbrella on an omnibus. And when this curious event came upon him he was already more years beyond forty than his friends suspected or he cared to admit.

John Silence, who heard him speak of his experience more than once, said that he sometimes left out certain details and put in others; yet they were all obviously true. The whole scene was unforgettably cinematographed on to his mind. None of the details were imagined or invented. And when he told the story with them all complete, the effect was undeniable. His appealing brown eyes shone, and much of the charming personality, usually so carefully repressed, came forward and revealed itself. His modesty was always there, of course, but in the telling he forgot the present and allowed himself to appear almost vividly as he lived again in the past of his adventure.

He was on the way home when it happened, crossing northern France from some mountain trip or other where he buried himself solitary-wise every summer. He had nothing but an unregistered bag in the rack, and the train was jammed to suffocation, most of the passengers being unredeemed holiday English. He disliked them, not because they were his fellow-countrymen, but because they were noisy and obtrusive, obliterating with their big limbs and tweed clothing all the quieter tints of the day that brought him satisfaction and enabled him to melt into insignificance and forget that he was anybody. These English clashed about him like a brass band,

making him feel vaguely that he ought to be more self-assertive and obstreperous, and that he did not claim insistently enough all kinds of things that he didn't want and that were really valueless, such as corner seats, windows up or down, and so forth.

So that he felt uncomfortable in the train, and wished the journey were over and he was back again living with his unmarried sister in Surbiton.¹

And when the train stopped for ten panting minutes at the little station in northern France, and he got out to stretch his legs on the platform, and saw to his dismay a further batch of the British Isles debouching from another train, it suddenly seemed impossible to him to continue the journey. Even *his* flabby soul revolted, and the idea of staying a night in the little town and going on next day by a slower, emptier train, flashed into his mind. The guard was already shouting "*en voiture*"² and the corridor of his compartment was already packed when the thought came to him. And, for once, he acted with decision and rushed to snatch his bag.

Finding the corridor and steps impassable, he tapped at the window (for he had a corner seat) and begged the Frenchman who sat opposite to hand his luggage out to him, explaining in his wretched French that he intended to break the journey there. And this elderly Frenchman, he declared, gave him a look, half of warning, half of reproach, that to his dying day he could never forget; handed the bag through the window of the moving train; and at the same time poured into his ears a long sentence, spoken rapidly and low, of which he was able to comprehend only the last few words: "*a cause du sommeil et a cause des chats*."

In reply to Dr. Silence, whose singular psychic acuteness at once seized upon this Frenchman as a vital point in the adventure, Vezin admitted that the man had impressed him favourably from the beginning, though without being able to explain why. They had sat facing one another during the four hours of the journey, and though no conversation had passed between them—Vezin was timid about his stuttering French—he confessed that his eyes were being continually drawn to his face, almost, he felt, to rudeness, and that each, by a dozen nameless little politenesses and attentions, had evinced the desire to be kind. The men liked each other and their personalities did not clash, or would not have clashed had they chanced to come to terms of acquaintance. The

Frenchman, indeed, seemed to have exercised a silent protective influence over the insignificant little Englishman, and without words or gestures betrayed that he wished him well and would gladly have been of service to him.

"And this sentence that he hurled at you after the bag?" asked John Silence, smiling that peculiarly sympathetic smile that always melted the prejudices of his patient, "were you unable to follow it exactly?"

"It was so quick and low and vehement," explained Vezin, in his small voice, "that I missed practically the whole of it. I only caught the few words at the very end, because he spoke them so clearly, and his face was bent down out of the carriage window so near to mine."

"*A cause du sommeil et a cause des chats*?" repeated Dr. Silence, as though half speaking to himself.

"That's it exactly," said Vezin; "which, I take it, means something like 'because of sleep and because of the cats,' doesn't it?"

"Certainly, that's how I should translate it," the doctor observed shortly, evidently not wishing to interrupt more than necessary.

"And the rest of the sentence—all the first part I couldn't understand, I mean—was a warning not to do something—not to stop in the town, or at some particular place in the town, perhaps. That was the impression it made on me."

Then, of course, the train rushed off, and left Vezin standing on the platform alone and rather forlorn.

The little town climbed in straggling fashion up a sharp hill rising out of the plain at the back of the station, and was crowned by the twin towers of the ruined cathedral peeping over the summit. From the station itself it looked uninteresting and modern, but the fact was that the mediaeval position lay out of sight just beyond the crest. And once he reached the top and entered the old streets, he stepped clean out of modern life into a bygone century. The noise and bustle of the crowded train seemed days away. The spirit of this silent hill-town, remote from tourists and motor-cars, dreaming its own quiet life under the autumn sun, rose up and cast its spell upon him. Long before he recognised this spell he acted under it. He walked softly, almost on tiptoe, down the winding narrow streets where the gables all but met over his head, and he entered the doorway of the solitary inn with a deprecating and modest demeanour that was in itself an apology for intruding upon the place and disturbing its dream.

At first, however, Vezin said, he noticed very little of all this. The attempt at analysis came much later. What struck him then was only the delightful contrast of the silence and

¹ One of the many suburban communities of London.

² The French equivalent of "all aboard!"

peace after the dust and noisy rattle of the train. He felt soothed and stroked like a cat.

"Like a cat, you said?" interrupted John Silence, quickly catching him up.

"Yes. At the very start I felt that." He laughed apologetically. "I felt as though the warmth and the stillness and the comfort made me purr. It seemed to be the general mood of the whole place—then."

The inn, a rambling ancient house, the atmosphere of the old coaching days still about it, apparently did not welcome him too warmly. He felt he was only tolerated, he said. But it was cheap and comfortable, and the delicious cup of afternoon tea he ordered at once made him feel really very pleased with himself for leaving the train in this bold, original way. For to him it had seemed bold and original. He felt something of a dog. His room, too, soothed him with its dark panelling and low irregular ceiling, and the long sloping passage that led to it seemed the natural pathway to a real Chamber of Sleep—a little dim cubby hole out of the world where noise could not enter. It looked upon the courtyard at the back. It was all very charming, and made him think of himself as dressed in very soft velvet somehow, and the floors seemed padded, the walls provided with cushions. The sounds of the streets could not penetrate there. It was an atmosphere of absolute rest that surrounded him.

On engaging the two-franc room he had interviewed the only person who seemed to be about that sleepy afternoon, an elderly waiter with Dundreary whiskers³ and a drowsy courtesy, who had ambled lazily towards him across the stone yard; but on coming downstairs again for a little promenade in the town before dinner he encountered the proprietress herself. She was a large woman whose hands, feet, and features seemed to swim towards him out of a sea of person. They emerged, so to speak. But she had great dark, vivacious eyes that counteracted the bulk of her body, and betrayed the fact that in reality she was both vigorous and alert. When he first caught sight of her she was knitting in a low chair against the sunlight of the wall, and something at once made him see her as a great tabby cat, dozing, yet awake, heavily sleepy, and yet at the same time prepared for instantaneous action. A great mouser on the watch occurred to him.

She took him in with a single comprehensive glance that was polite without being cordial. Her neck, he noticed, was extraordinarily supple in spite of its proportions, for it turned

so easily to follow him, and the head it carried bowed so very flexibly.

"But when she looked at me, you know," said Vezin, with that little apologetic smile in his brown eyes, and that faintly deprecating gesture of the shoulders that was characteristic of him, "the odd notion came to me that really she had intended to make quite a different movement, and that with a single bound she could have leaped at me across the width of that stone yard and pounced upon me like some huge cat upon a mouse."

He laughed a little soft laugh, and Dr. Silence made a note in his book without interrupting, while Vezin proceeded in a tone as though he feared he had already told too much and more than we could believe.

"Very soft, yet very active she was, for all her size and mass, and I felt she knew what I was doing even after I had passed and was behind her back. She spoke to me, and her voice was smooth and running. She asked if I had my luggage, and was comfortable in my room, and then added that dinner was at seven o'clock, and that they were very early people in this little country town. Clearly, she intended to convey that late hours were not encouraged."

Evidently, she contrived by voice and manner to give him the impression that here he would be "managed," that everything would be arranged and planned for him, and that he had nothing to do but fall into the groove and obey. No decided action or sharp personal effort would be looked for from him. It was the very reverse of the train. He walked quietly out into the street feeling soothed and peaceful. He realised that he was in a *milieu* that suited him and stroked him the right way. It was so much easier to be obedient. He began to purr again, and to feel that all the town purred with him.

About the streets of that little town he meandered gently, falling deeper and deeper into the spirit of repose that characterised it. With no special aim he wandered up and down, and to and fro. The September sunshine fell slantingly over the roofs. Down winding alleyways, fringed with tumbling gables and open casements, he caught fairylike glimpses of the great plain below, and of the meadows and yellow copses lying like a dream-map in the haze. The spell of the past held very potently here, he felt.

The streets were full of picturesquely garbed men and women, all busy enough, going their respective ways; but no one took any notice of him or turned to stare at his obviously English appearance. He was even able to forget that with his tourist appearance he was a false note in a charming picture, and he melted more and more into the scene, feeling delight-

³ Dundreary whiskers are a kind of bushy sideburns named after Lord Dundreary in the 1858 Tom Taylor play, *Our American Cousin*.

fully insignificant and unimportant and unselfconscious. It was like becoming part of a softly coloured dream which he did not even realise to be a dream.

On the eastern side the hill fell away more sharply, and the plain below ran off rather suddenly into a sea of gathering shadows in which the little patches of woodland looked like islands and the stubble fields like deep water. Here he strolled along the old ramparts of ancient fortifications that once had been formidable, but now were only vision-like with their charming mingling of broken grey walls and wayward vine and ivy. From the broad coping on which he sat for a moment, level with the rounded tops of clipped plane trees, he saw the esplanade far below lying in shadow. Here and there a yellow sunbeam crept in and lay upon the fallen yellow leaves, and from the height he looked down and saw that the townsfolk were walking to and fro in the cool of the evening. He could just hear the sound of their slow footfalls, and the murmur of their voices floated up to him through the gaps between the trees. The figures looked like shadows as he caught glimpses of their quiet movements far below.

He sat there for some time pondering, bathed in the waves of murmurs and half-lost echoes that rose to his ears, muffled by the leaves of the plane trees. The whole town, and the little hill out of which it grew as naturally as an ancient wood, seemed to him like a being lying there half asleep on the plain and crooning to itself as it dozed.

And, presently, as he sat lazily melting into its dream, a sound of horns and strings and wood instruments rose to his ears, and the town band began to play at the far end of the crowded terrace below to the accompaniment of a very soft, depth-throated drum. Vezin was very sensitive to music, knew about it intelligently, and had even ventured, unknown to his friends, upon the composition of quiet melodies with low-running chords which he played to himself with the soft pedal when no one was about. And this music floating up through the trees from an invisible and doubtless very picturesque band of the townspeople wholly charmed him. He recognised nothing that they played, and it sounded as though they were simply improvising without a conductor. No definitely marked time ran through the pieces, which ended and began oddly after the fashion of wind through an Aeolian harp.⁴ It was part of the place and scene, just as the dying sunlight and faintly breathing wind were part of the scene and hour, and

the mellow notes of old-fashioned plaintive horns, pierced here and there by the sharper strings, all half smothered by the continuous booming of the deep drum, touched his soul with a curiously potent spell that was almost too engrossing to be quite pleasant.

There was a certain queer sense of bewitchment in it all. The music seemed to him oddly unartificial. It made him think of trees swept by the wind, of night breezes singing among wires and chimney-stacks, or in the rigging of invisible ships; or—and the simile leaped up in his thoughts with a sudden sharpness of suggestion—a chorus of animals, of wild creatures, somewhere in desolate places of the world, crying and singing as animals will, to the moon. He could fancy he heard the wailing, half-human cries of cats upon the tiles at night, rising and falling with weird intervals of sound, and this music, muffled by distance and the trees, made him think of a queer company of these creatures on some roof far away in the sky, uttering their solemn music to one another and the moon in chorus.

It was, he felt at the time, a singular image to occur to him, yet it expressed his sensation pictorially better than anything else. The instruments played such impossibly odd intervals, and the crescendos and diminuendos were so very suggestive of cat-land on the tiles at night, rising swiftly, dropping without warning to deep notes again, and all in such strange confusion of discords and accords. But, at the same time a plaintive sweetness resulted on the whole, and the discords of these half-broken instruments were so singular that they did not distress his musical soul like fiddles out of tune.

He listened a long time, wholly surrendering himself as his character was, and then strolled homewards in the dusk as the air grew chilly.

"There was nothing to alarm?" put in Dr. Silence briefly.

"Absolutely nothing," said Vezin; "but you know it was all so fantastical and charming that my imagination was profoundly impressed.

"Perhaps, too," he continued, gently explanatory, "it was this stirring of my imagination that caused other impressions; for, as I walked back, the spell of the place began to steal over me in a dozen ways, though all intelligible ways. But there were other things I could not account for in the least, even then."

"Incidents, you mean?"

"Hardly incidents, I think. A lot of vivid sensations crowded themselves upon my mind and I could trace them to no causes. It was just after sunset and the tumbled old buildings traced magical outlines against an opalescent sky of gold and red. The dusk was running down the twisted streets.

⁴ The Aeolian harp, a favourite image of British Romantic poets, is a stringed musical instrument that produces sound based on air currents flowing over the strings rather than human manipulation.

All round the hill the plain pressed in like a dim sea, its level rising with the darkness. The spell of this kind of scene, you know, can be very moving, and it was so that night. Yet I felt that what came to me had nothing directly to do with the mystery and wonder of the scene."

"Not merely the subtle transformations of the spirit that come with beauty," put in the doctor, noticing his hesitation.

"Exactly," Vezin went on, duly encouraged and no longer so fearful of our smiles at his expense. "The impressions came from somewhere else. For instance, down the busy main street where men and women were bustling home from work, shopping at stalls and barrows, idly gossiping in groups, and all the rest of it, I saw that I aroused no interest and that no one turned to stare at me as a foreigner and stranger. I was utterly ignored, and my presence among them excited no special interest or attention.

"And then, quite suddenly, it dawned upon me with conviction that all the time this indifference and inattention were merely feigned.

"Everybody as a matter of fact was watching me closely. Every movement I made was known and observed. Ignoring me was all a pretence—an elaborate pretence."

He paused a moment and looked at us to see if we were smiling, and then continued, reassured—"It is useless to ask me how I noticed this, because I simply cannot explain it. But the discovery gave me something of a shock. Before I got back to the inn, however, another curious thing rose up strongly in my mind and forced my recognition of it as true. And this, too, I may as well say at once, was equally inexplicable to me. I mean I can only give you the fact, as fact it was to me."

The little man left his chair and stood on the mat before the fire. His diffidence lessened from now onwards, as he lost himself again in the magic of the old adventure. His eyes shone a little already as he talked.

"Well," he went on, his soft voice rising somewhat with his excitement, "I was in a shop when it came to me first—though the idea must have been at work for a long time subconsciously to appear in so complete a form all at once. I was buying socks, I think," he laughed, "and struggling with my dreadful French, when it struck me that the woman in the shop did not care two pins whether I bought anything or not. She was indifferent whether she made a sale or did not make a sale. She was only pretending to sell.

"This sounds a very small and fanciful incident to build upon what follows. But really it was not small. I mean it was the spark that lit the line of powder and ran along to the big blaze in my mind.

"For the whole town, I suddenly realised, was something other than I so far saw it. The real activities and interests of the people were elsewhere and otherwise than appeared. Their true lives lay somewhere out of sight behind the scenes. Their busy-ness was but the outward semblance that masked their actual purposes. They bought and sold, and ate and drank, and walked about the streets, yet all the while the main stream of their existence lay somewhere beyond my ken, underground, in secret places. In the shops and at the stalls they did not care whether I purchased their articles or not; at the inn, they were indifferent to my staying or going; their life lay remote from my own, springing from hidden, mysterious sources, coursing out of sight, unknown. It was all a great elaborate pretence, assumed possibly for my benefit, or possibly for purposes of their own. But the main current of their energies ran elsewhere. I almost felt as an unwelcome foreign substance might be expected to feel when it has found its way into the human system and the whole body organises itself to eject it or to absorb it. The town was doing this very thing to me.

"This bizarre notion presented itself forcibly to my mind as I walked home to the inn, and I began busily to wonder wherein the true life of this town could lie and what were the actual interests and activities of its hidden life.

"And, now that my eyes were partly opened, I noticed other things too that puzzled me, first of which, I think, was the extraordinary silence of the whole place. Positively, the town was muffled. Although the streets were paved with cobbles the people moved about silently, softly, with padded feet, like cats. Nothing made noise. All was hushed, subdued, muted. The very voices were quiet, low-pitched like purring.

"Nothing clamorous, vehement or emphatic seemed able to live in the drowsy atmosphere of soft dreaming that soothed this little hill-town into its sleep. It was like the woman at the inn—an outward repose screening intense inner activity and purpose.

"Yet there was no sign of lethargy or sluggishness anywhere about it.

"The people were active and alert. Only a magical and uncanny softness lay over them all like a spell."

Vezin passed his hand across his eyes for a moment as though the memory had become very vivid. His voice had run off into a whisper so that we heard the last part with difficulty. He was telling a true thing obviously, yet something that he both liked and hated telling.

"I went back to the inn," he continued presently in a louder voice, "and dined. I felt a new strange world about me.

My old world of reality receded. Here, whether I liked it or no, was something new and incomprehensible. I regretted having left the train so impulsively. An adventure was upon me, and I loathed adventures as foreign to my nature.

"Moreover, this was the beginning apparently of an adventure somewhere deep within me, in a region I could not check or measure, and a feeling of alarm mingled itself with my wonder—alarm for the stability of what I had for forty years recognised as my 'personality.'

"I went upstairs to bed, my mind teeming with thoughts that were unusual to me, and of rather a haunting description. By way of relief I kept thinking of that nice, prosaic noisy train and all those wholesome, blustering passengers. I almost wished I were with them again. But my dreams took me elsewhere. I dreamed of cats, and soft-moving creatures, and the silence of life in a dim muffled world beyond the senses."

II

Vezein stayed on from day to day, indefinitely, much longer than he had intended. He felt in a kind of dazed, somnolent condition. He did nothing in particular, but the place fascinated him and he could not decide to leave. Decisions were always very difficult for him and he sometimes wondered how he had ever brought himself to the point of leaving the train. It seemed as though some one else must have arranged it for him, and once or twice his thoughts ran to the swarthy Frenchman who had sat opposite. If only he could have understood that long sentence ending so strangely with "*a cause du sommeil et a cause des chats*." He wondered what it all meant.

Meanwhile the hushed softness of the town held him prisoner and he sought in his muddling, gentle way to find out where the mystery lay, and what it was all about. But his limited French and his constitutional hatred of active investigation made it hard for him to buttonhole anybody and ask questions. He was content to observe, and watch, and remain negative.

The weather held on calm and hazy, and this just suited him. He wandered about the town till he knew every street and alley. The people suffered him to come and go without let or hindrance, though it became clearer to him every day that he was never free himself from observation. The town watched him as a cat watches a mouse. And he got no nearer to finding out what they were all so busy with or where the main stream of their activities lay. This remained hidden. The people were as soft and mysterious as cats.

But that he was continually under observation became more evident from day to day.

For instance, when he strolled to the end of the town and entered a little green public garden beneath the ramparts and seated himself upon one of the empty benches in the sun, he was quite alone—at first. Not another seat was occupied; the little park was empty, the paths deserted. Yet, within ten minutes of his coming, there must have been fully twenty persons scattered about him, some strolling aimlessly along the gravel walks, staring at the flowers, and others seated on the wooden benches enjoying the sun like himself. None of them appeared to take any notice of him; yet he understood quite well they had all come there to watch. They kept him under close observation. In the street they had seemed busy enough, hurrying upon various errands; yet these were suddenly all forgotten and they had nothing to do but loll and laze in the sun, their duties unremembered. Five minutes after he left, the garden was again deserted, the seats vacant. But in the crowded street it was the same thing again; he was never alone. He was ever in their thoughts.

By degrees, too, he began to see how it was he was so cleverly watched, yet without the appearance of it. The people did nothing *directly*.

They behaved *obliquely*. He laughed in his mind as the thought thus clothed itself in words, but the phrase exactly described it. They looked at him from angles which naturally should have led their sight in another direction altogether. Their movements were oblique, too, so far as these concerned himself. The straight, direct thing was not their way evidently. They did nothing obviously. If he entered a shop to buy, the woman walked instantly away and busied herself with something at the farther end of the counter, though answering at once when he spoke, showing that she knew he was there and that this was only her way of attending to him. It was the fashion of the cat she followed. Even in the dining-room of the inn, the bewhiskered and courteous waiter, lithe and silent in all his movements, never seemed able to come straight to his table for an order or a dish. He came by zigzags, indirectly, vaguely, so that he appeared to be going to another table altogether, and only turned suddenly at the last moment, and was there beside him.

Vezein smiled curiously to himself as he described how he began to realize these things. Other tourists there were none in the hostel, but he recalled the figures of one or two old men, inhabitants, who took their *déjeuner*⁵ and dinner there, and remembered how fantastically they entered the room in similar fashion. First, they paused in the doorway, peering about

⁵ "*déjeuner*": lunch

the room, and then, after a temporary inspection, they came in, as it were, sideways, keeping close to the walls so that he wondered which table they were making for, and at the last minute making almost a little quick run to their particular seats. And again he thought of the ways and methods of cats.

Other small incidents, too, impressed him as all part of this queer, soft town with its muffled, indirect life, for the way some of the people appeared and disappeared with extraordinary swiftness puzzled him exceedingly. It may have been all perfectly natural, he knew, yet he could not make it out how the alleys swallowed them up and shot them forth in a second of time when there were no visible doorways or openings near enough to explain the phenomenon. Once he followed two elderly women who, he felt, had been particularly examining him from across the street—quite near the inn this was—and saw them turn the corner a few feet only in front of him. Yet when he sharply followed on their heels he saw nothing but an utterly deserted alley stretching in front of him with no sign of a living thing. And the only opening through which they could have escaped was a porch some fifty yards away, which not the swiftest human runner could have reached in time.

And in just such sudden fashion people appeared, when he never expected them. Once when he heard a great noise of fighting going on behind a low wall, and hurried up to see what was going on, what should he see but a group of girls and women engaged in vociferous conversation which instantly hushed itself to the normal whispering note of the town when his head appeared over the wall. And even then none of them turned to look at him directly, but slunk off with the most unaccountable rapidity into doors and sheds across the yard. And their voices, he thought, had sounded so like, so strangely like, the angry snarling of fighting animals, almost of cats.

The whole spirit of the town, however, continued to evade him as something elusive, protean, screened from the outer world, and at the same time intensely, genuinely vital; and, since he now formed part of its life, this concealment puzzled and irritated him; more—it began rather to frighten him.

Out of the mists that slowly gathered about his ordinary surface thoughts, there rose again the idea that the inhabitants were waiting for him to declare himself, to take an attitude, to do this, or to do that; and that when he had done so they in their turn would at length make some direct response, accepting or rejecting him. Yet the vital matter concerning which his decision was awaited came no nearer to him.

Once or twice he purposely followed little processions or groups of the citizens in order to find out, if possible, on what

purpose they were bent; but they always discovered him in time and dwindled away, each individual going his or her own way. It was always the same: he never could learn what their main interest was. The cathedral was ever empty, the old church of St. Martin, at the other end of the town, deserted.

They shopped because they had to, and not because they wished to. The booths stood neglected, the stalls unvisited, the little *cafés* desolate. Yet the streets were always full, the townfolk ever on the bustle.

"Can it be," he thought to himself, yet with a deprecating laugh that he should have dared to think anything so odd, "can it be that these people are people of the twilight, that they live only at night their real life, and come out honestly only with the dusk? That during the day they make a sham though brave pretence, and after the sun is down their true life begins? Have they the souls of night-things, and is the whole blessed town in the hands of the cats?"

The fancy somehow electrified him with little shocks of shrinking and dismay. Yet, though he affected to laugh, he knew that he was beginning to feel more than uneasy, and that strange forces were tugging with a thousand invisible cords at the very centre of his being. Something utterly remote from his ordinary life, something that had not waked for years, began faintly to stir in his soul, sending feelers abroad into his brain and heart, shaping queer thoughts and penetrating even into certain of his minor actions. Something exceedingly vital to himself, to his soul, hung in the balance.

And, always when he returned to the inn about the hour of sunset, he saw the figures of the townfolk stealing through the dusk from their shop doors, moving sentry-wise to and fro at the corners of the streets, yet always vanishing silently like shadows at his near approach. And as the inn invariably closed its doors at ten o'clock he had never yet found the opportunity he rather halfheartedly sought to see for himself what account the town could give of itself at night.

"—*a cause du sommeil et a cause des chats*"—the words now rang in his ears more and more often, though still as yet without any definite meaning.

Moreover, something made him sleep like the dead.

III

It was, I think, on the fifth day—though in this detail his story sometimes varied—that he made a definite discovery which increased his alarm and brought him up to a rather sharp climax. Before that he had already noticed that a change was going forward and certain subtle transformations being

brought about in his character which modified several of his minor habits. And he had affected to ignore them. Here, however, was something he could no longer ignore; and it startled him.

At the best of times he was never very positive, always negative rather, compliant and acquiescent; yet, when necessity arose he was capable of reasonably vigorous action and could take a strongish decision. The discovery he now made that brought him up with such a sharp turn was that this power had positively dwindled to nothing. He found it impossible to make up his mind. For, on this fifth day, he realised that he had stayed long enough in the town and that for reasons he could only vaguely define to himself it was wiser and *safer* that he should leave.

And he found that he could not leave!

This is difficult to describe in words, and it was more by gesture and the expression of his face that he conveyed to Dr. Silence the state of impotence he had reached. All this spying and watching, he said, had as it were spun a net about his feet so that he was trapped and powerless to escape; he felt like a fly that had blundered into the intricacies of a great web; he was caught, imprisoned, and could not get away. It was a distressing sensation. A numbness had crept over his will till it had become almost incapable of decision. The mere thought of vigorous action—action towards escape—began to terrify him. All the currents of his life had turned inwards upon himself, striving to bring to the surface something that lay buried almost beyond reach, determined to force his recognition of something he had long forgotten—forgotten years upon years, centuries almost ago. It seemed as though a window deep within his being would presently open and reveal an entirely new world, yet somehow a world that was not unfamiliar. Beyond that, again, he fancied a great curtain hung; and when that too rolled up he would see still farther into this region and at last understand something of the secret life of these extraordinary people.

"Is this why they wait and watch?" he asked himself with rather a shaking heart, "for the time when I shall join them—or refuse to join them? Does the decision rest with me after all, and not with them?"

And it was at this point that the sinister character of the adventure first really declared itself, and he became genuinely alarmed. The stability of his rather fluid little personality was at stake, he felt, and something in his heart turned coward.

Why otherwise should he have suddenly taken to walking stealthily, silently, making as little sound as possible, for ever looking behind him? Why else should he have moved almost

on tiptoe about the passages of the practically deserted inn, and when he was abroad have found himself deliberately taking advantage of what cover presented itself? And why, if he was not afraid, should the wisdom of staying indoors after sundown have suddenly occurred to him as eminently desirable? Why, indeed?

And, when John Silence gently pressed him for an explanation of these things, he admitted apologetically that he had none to give.

"It was simply that I feared something might happen to me unless I kept a sharp look-out. I felt afraid. It was instinctive," was all he could say. "I got the impression that the whole town was after me—wanted me for something; and that if it got me I should lose myself, or at least the Self I knew, in some unfamiliar state of consciousness. But I am not a psychologist, you know," he added meekly, "and I cannot define it better than that."

It was while lounging in the courtyard half an hour before the evening meal that Vezin made this discovery, and he at once went upstairs to his quiet room at the end of the winding passage to think it over alone. In the yard it was empty enough, true, but there was always the possibility that the big woman whom he dreaded would come out of some door, with her pretence of knitting, to sit and watch him. This had happened several times, and he could not endure the sight of her. He still remembered his original fancy, bizarre though it was, that she would spring upon him the moment his back was turned and land with one single crushing leap upon his neck. Of course it was nonsense, but then it haunted him, and once an idea begins to do that it ceases to be nonsense. It has clothed itself in reality.

He went upstairs accordingly. It was dusk, and the oil lamps had not yet been lit in the passages. He stumbled over the uneven surface of the ancient flooring, passing the dim outlines of doors along the corridor—doors that he had never once seen opened—rooms that seemed never occupied. He moved, as his habit now was, stealthily and on tiptoe.

Half-way down the last passage to his own chamber there was a sharp turn, and it was just here, while groping round the walls with outstretched hands, that his fingers touched something that was not wall—something that moved. It was soft and warm in texture, indescribably fragrant, and about the height of his shoulder; and he immediately thought of a furry, sweet-smelling kitten. The next minute he knew it was something quite different.

Instead of investigating, however,—his nerves must have been too overwrought for that, he said,—he shrank back as

closely as possible against the wall on the other side. The thing, whatever it was, slipped past him with a sound of rustling and, retreating with light footsteps down the passage behind him, was gone. A breath of warm, scented air was wafted to his nostrils.

Vezein caught his breath for an instant and paused, stock-still, half leaning against the wall—and then almost ran down the remaining distance and entered his room with a rush, locking the door hurriedly behind him. Yet it was not fear that made him run: it was excitement, pleasurable excitement. His nerves were tingling, and a delicious glow made itself felt all over his body. In a flash it came to him that this was just what he had felt twenty-five years ago as a boy when he was in love for the first time. Warm currents of life ran all over him and mounted to his brain in a whirl of soft delight. His mood was suddenly become tender, melting, loving.

The room was quite dark, and he collapsed upon the sofa by the window, wondering what had happened to him and what it all meant. But the only thing he understood clearly in that instant was that something in him had swiftly, magically changed: he no longer wished to leave, or to argue with himself about leaving. The encounter in the passage-way had changed all that. The strange perfume of it still hung about him, bemusing his heart and mind. For he knew that it was a girl who had passed him, a girl's face that his fingers had brushed in the darkness, and he felt in some extraordinary way as though he had been actually kissed by her, kissed full upon the lips.

Trembling, he sat upon the sofa by the window and struggled to collect his thoughts. He was utterly unable to understand how the mere passing of a girl in the darkness of a narrow passage-way could communicate so electric a thrill to his whole being that he still shook with the sweetness of it. Yet, there it was! And he found it as useless to deny as to attempt analysis. Some ancient fire had entered his veins, and now ran coursing through his blood; and that he was forty-five instead of twenty did not matter one little jot. Out of all the inner turmoil and confusion emerged the one salient fact that the mere atmosphere, the merest casual touch, of this girl, unseen, unknown in the darkness, had been sufficient to stir dormant fires in the centre of his heart, and rouse his whole being from a state of feeble sluggishness to one of tearing and tumultuous excitement.

After a time, however, the number of Vezein's years began to assert their cumulative power; he grew calmer, and when a knock came at length upon his door and he heard the waiter's voice suggesting that dinner was nearly over, he pulled him-

self together and slowly made his way downstairs into the dining-room.

Every one looked up as he entered, for he was very late, but he took his customary seat in the far corner and began to eat. The trepidation was still in his nerves, but the fact that he had passed through the courtyard and hall without catching sight of a petticoat served to calm him a little. He ate so fast that he had almost caught up with the current stage of the *table d'hôte*,⁶ when a slight commotion in the room drew his attention.

His chair was so placed that the door and the greater portion of the long *salle à manger*⁷ were behind him, yet it was not necessary to turn round to know that the same person he had passed in the dark passage had now come into the room. He felt the presence long before he heard or saw any one. Then he became aware that the old men, the only other guests, were rising one by one in their places, and exchanging greetings with some one who passed among them from table to table. And when at length he turned with his heart beating furiously to ascertain for himself, he saw the form of a young girl, lithe and slim, moving down the centre of the room and making straight for his own table in the corner. She moved wonderfully, with sinuous grace, like a young panther, and her approach filled him with such delicious bewilderment that he was utterly unable to tell at first what her face was like, or discover what it was about the whole presentment of the creature that filled him anew with trepidation and delight.

"Ah, Ma'mselle est de retour!"⁸ he heard the old waiter murmur at his side, and he was just able to take in that she was the daughter of the proprietress, when she was upon him, and he heard her voice. She was addressing him. Something of red lips he saw and laughing white teeth, and stray wisps of fine dark hair about the temples; but all the rest was a dream in which his own emotion rose like a thick cloud before his eyes and prevented his seeing accurately, or knowing exactly what he did. He was aware that she greeted him with a charming little bow; that her beautiful large eyes looked searchingly into his own; that the perfume he had noticed in the dark passage again assailed his nostrils, and that she was bending a little towards him and leaning with one hand on the table at this side. She was quite close to him—that was the chief thing he knew—explaining that she had been asking after the com-

⁶ "table d'hôte": a fixed price menu

⁷ "salle à manger": dining room

⁸ "Ma'mselle est de retour": "the young lady is back"

fort of her mother's guests, and now was introducing herself to the latest arrival—himself.

"M'sieur has already been here a few days," he heard the waiter say; and then her own voice, sweet as singing, replied—

"Ah, but M'sieur is not going to leave us just yet, I hope. My mother is too old to look after the comfort of our guests properly, but now I am here I will remedy all that." She laughed deliciously. "M'sieur shall be well looked after."

Vezein, struggling with his emotion and desire to be polite, half rose to acknowledge the pretty speech, and to stammer some sort of reply, but as he did so his hand by chance touched her own that was resting upon the table, and a shock that was for all the world like a shock of electricity, passed from her skin into his body. His soul wavered and shook deep within him. He caught her eyes fixed upon his own with a look of most curious intentness, and the next moment he knew that he had sat down wordless again on his chair, that the girl was already half-way across the room, and that he was trying to eat his salad with a dessert-spoon and a knife.

Longing for her return, and yet dreading it, he gulped down the remainder of his dinner, and then went at once to his bedroom to be alone with his thoughts. This time the passages were lighted, and he suffered no exciting contretemps; yet the winding corridor was dim with shadows, and the last portion, from the bend of the walls onwards, seemed longer than he had ever known it. It ran downhill like the pathway on a mountain side, and as he tiptoed softly down it he felt that by rights it ought to have led him clean out of the house into the heart of a great forest. The world was singing with him. Strange fancies filled his brain, and once in the room, with the door securely locked, he did not light the candles, but sat by the open window thinking long, long thoughts that came unbidden in troops to his mind.

IV

This part of the story he told to Dr. Silence, without special coaxing, it is true, yet with much stammering embarrassment. He could not in the least understand, he said, how the girl had managed to affect him so profoundly, and even before he had set eyes upon her. For her mere proximity in the darkness had been sufficient to set him on fire. He knew nothing of enchantments, and for years had been a stranger to anything approaching tender relations with any member of the opposite sex, for he was encased in shyness, and realised his overwhelming defects only too well. Yet this bewitching

young creature came to him deliberately. Her manner was unmistakable, and she sought him out on every possible occasion. Chaste and sweet she was undoubtedly, yet frankly inviting; and she won him utterly with the first glance of her shining eyes, even if she had not already done so in the dark merely by the magic of her invisible presence.

"You felt she was altogether wholesome and good!" queried the doctor.

"You had no reaction of any sort—for instance, of alarm?"

Vezein looked up sharply with one of his inimitable little apologetic smiles. It was some time before he replied. The mere memory of the adventure had suffused his shy face with blushes, and his brown eyes sought the floor again before he answered.

"I don't think I can quite say that," he explained presently. "I acknowledged certain qualms, sitting up in my room afterwards. A conviction grew upon me that there was something about her—how shall I express it?—well, something unholy. It is not impurity in any sense, physical or mental, that I mean, but something quite indefinable that gave me a vague sensation of the creeps. She drew me, and at the same time repelled me, more than—than—"

He hesitated, blushing furiously, and unable to finish the sentence.

"Nothing like it has ever come to me before or since," he concluded, with lame confusion. "I suppose it was, as you suggested just now, something of an enchantment. At any rate, it was strong enough to make me feel that I would stay in that awful little haunted town for years if only I could see her every day, hear her voice, watch her wonderful movements, and sometimes, perhaps, touch her hand."

"Can you explain to me what you felt was the source of her power?" John Silence asked, looking purposely anywhere but at the narrator.

"I am surprised that you should ask me such a question," answered Vezein, with the nearest approach to dignity he could manage. "I think no man can describe to another convincingly wherein lies the magic of the woman who ensnares him. I certainly cannot. I can only say this slip of a girl bewitched me, and the mere knowledge that she was living and sleeping in the same house filled me with an extraordinary sense of delight.

"But there's one thing I can tell you," he went on earnestly, his eyes aglow, "namely, that she seemed to sum up and synthesise in herself all the strange hidden forces that operated so mysteriously in the town and its inhabitants. She had the silken movements of the panther, going smoothly, silently

to and fro, and the same indirect, oblique methods as the townsfolk, screening, like them, secret purposes of her own—purposes that I was sure had me for their objective. She kept me, to my terror and delight, ceaselessly under observation, yet so carelessly, so consummately, that another man less sensitive, if I may say so—he made a deprecating gesture—“or less prepared by what had gone before, would never have noticed it at all. She was always still, always reposeful, yet she seemed to be everywhere at once, so that I never could escape from her. I was continually meeting the stare and laughter of her great eyes, in the corners of the rooms, in the passages, calmly looking at me through the windows, or in the busiest parts of the public streets.”

Their intimacy, it seems, grew very rapidly after this first encounter which had so violently disturbed the little man's equilibrium. He was naturally very prim, and prim folk live mostly in so small a world that anything violently unusual may shake them clean out of it, and they therefore instinctively distrust originality. But Vezin began to forget his primness after awhile. The girl was always modestly behaved, and as her mother's representative she naturally had to do with the guests in the hotel. It was not out of the way that a spirit of camaraderie should spring up. Besides, she was young, she was charmingly pretty, she was French, and—she obviously liked him.

At the same time, there was something indescribable—a certain indefinable atmosphere of other places, other times—that made him try hard to remain on his guard, and sometimes made him catch his breath with a sudden start. It was all rather like a delirious dream, half delight, half dread, he confided in a whisper to Dr. Silence; and more than once he hardly knew quite what he was doing or saying, as though he were driven forward by impulses he scarcely recognised as his own.

And though the thought of leaving presented itself again and again to his mind, it was each time with less insistence, so that he stayed on from day to day, becoming more and more a part of the sleepy life of this dreamy mediaeval town, losing more and more of his recognisable personality. Soon, he felt, the Curtain within would roll up with an awful rush, and he would find himself suddenly admitted into the secret purposes of the hidden life that lay behind it all. Only, by that time, he would have become transformed into an entirely different being.

And, meanwhile, he noticed various little signs of the intention to make his stay attractive to him: flowers in his bedroom, a more comfortable armchair in the corner, and

even special little extra dishes on his private table in the dining-room. Conversations, too, with “Mademoiselle Ilse” became more and more frequent and pleasant, and although they seldom travelled beyond the weather, or the details of the town, the girl, he noticed, was never in a hurry to bring them to an end, and often contrived to interject little odd sentences that he never properly understood, yet felt to be significant.

And it was these stray remarks, full of a meaning that evaded him, that pointed to some hidden purpose of her own and made him feel uneasy. They all had to do, he felt sure, with reasons for his staying on in the town indefinitely.

“And has M'sieur not even yet come to a decision?” she said softly in his ear, sitting beside him in the sunny yard before *déjeuner*, the acquaintance having progressed with significant rapidity. “Because, if it's so difficult, we must all try together to help him!”

The question startled him, following upon his own thoughts. It was spoken with a pretty laugh, and a stray bit of hair across one eye, as she turned and peered at him half roguishly. Possibly he did not quite understand the French of it, for her near presence always confused his small knowledge of the language distressingly. Yet the words, and her manner, and something else that lay behind it all in her mind, frightened him. It gave such point to his feeling that the town was waiting for him to make his mind up on some important matter.

At the same time, her voice, and the fact that she was there so close beside him in her soft dark dress, thrilled him inexpressibly.

“It is true I find it difficult to leave,” he stammered, losing his way deliciously in the depths of her eyes, “and especially now that Mademoiselle Ilse has come.”

He was surprised at the success of his sentence, and quite delighted with the little gallantry of it. But at the same time he could have bitten his tongue off for having said it.

“Then after all you like our little town, or you would not be pleased to stay on,” she said, ignoring the compliment.

“I am enchanted with it, and enchanted with you,” he cried, feeling that his tongue was somehow slipping beyond the control of his brain. And he was on the verge of saying all manner of other things of the wildest description, when the girl sprang lightly up from her chair beside him, and made to go.

“It is *soupe a l'onion* to-day!” she cried, laughing back at him through the sunlight, “and I must go and see about it. Otherwise, you know, M'sieur will not enjoy his dinner, and then, perhaps, he will leave us!”

He watched her cross the courtyard, moving with all the grace and lightness of the feline race, and her simple black dress clothed her, he thought, exactly like the fur of the same supple species. She turned once to laugh at him from the porch with the glass door, and then stopped a moment to speak to her mother, who sat knitting as usual in her corner seat just inside the hall-way.

But how was it, then, that the moment his eye fell upon this ungainly woman, the pair of them appeared suddenly as other than they were? Whence came that transforming dignity and sense of power that enveloped them both as by magic? What was it about that massive woman that made her appear instantly regal, and set her on a throne in some dark and dreadful scenery, wielding a sceptre over the red glare of some tempestuous orgy? And why did this slender stripling of a girl, graceful as a willow, lithe as a young leopard, assume suddenly an air of sinister majesty, and move with flame and smoke about her head, and the darkness of night beneath her feet?

Vezin caught his breath and sat there transfixed. Then, almost simultaneously with its appearance, the queer notion vanished again, and the sunlight of day caught them both, and he heard her laughing to her mother about the *soupe a l'onion*, and saw her glancing back at him over her dear little shoulder with a smile that made him think of a dew-kissed rose bending lightly before summer airs.

And, indeed, the onion soup was particularly excellent that day, because he saw another cover laid at his small table, and, with fluttering heart, heard the waiter murmur by way of explanation that "Ma'mselle Ilse would honour M'sieur to-day at *déjeuner*, as her custom sometimes is with her mother's guests."

So actually she sat by him all through that delirious meal, talking quietly to him in easy French, seeing that he was well looked after, mixing the salad-dressing, and even helping him with her own hand. And, later in the afternoon, while he was smoking in the courtyard, longing for a sight of her as soon as her duties were done, she came again to his side, and when he rose to meet her, she stood facing him a moment, full of a perplexing sweet shyness before she spoke—

"My mother thinks you ought to know more of the beauties of our little town, and I think so too! Would M'sieur like me to be his guide, perhaps? I can show him everything, for our family has lived here for many generations."

She had him by the hand, indeed, before he could find a single word to express his pleasure, and led him, all unre-sisting, out into the street, yet in such a way that it seemed perfectly natural she should do so, and without the faintest

suggestion of boldness or immodesty. Her face glowed with the pleasure and interest of it, and with her short dress and tumbled hair she looked every bit the charming child of seventeen that she was, innocent and playful, proud of her native town, and alive beyond her years to the sense of its ancient beauty.

So they went over the town together, and she showed him what she considered its chief interest: the tumble-down old house where her forebears had lived; the sombre, aristocratic-looking mansion where her mother's family dwelt for centuries, and the ancient market-place where several hundred years before the witches had been burnt by the score.

She kept up a lively running stream of talk about it all, of which he understood not a fiftieth part as he trudged along by her side, cursing his forty-five years and feeling all the yearnings of his early manhood revive and jeer at him. And, as she talked, England and Surbiton seemed very far away indeed, almost in another age of the world's history. Her voice touched something immeasurably old in him, something that slept deep. It lulled the surface parts of his consciousness to sleep, allowing what was far more ancient to awaken. Like the town, with its elaborate pretence of modern active life, the upper layers of his being became dulled, soothed, muffled, and what lay underneath began to stir in its sleep. That big Curtain swayed a little to and fro. Presently it might lift altogether...

He began to understand a little better at last. The mood of the town was reproducing itself in him. In proportion as his ordinary external self became muffled, that inner secret life, that was far more real and vital, asserted itself. And this girl was surely the high-priestess of it all, the chief instrument of its accomplishment. New thoughts, with new interpretations, flooded his mind as she walked beside him through the winding streets, while the picturesque old gabled town, softly coloured in the sunset, had never appeared to him so wholly wonderful and seductive.

And only one curious incident came to disturb and puzzle him, slight in itself, but utterly inexplicable, bringing white terror into the child's face and a scream to her laughing lips. He had merely pointed to a column of blue smoke that rose from the burning autumn leaves and made a picture against the red roofs, and had then run to the wall and called her to his side to watch the flames shooting here and there through the heap of rubbish. Yet, at the sight of it, as though taken by surprise, her face had altered dreadfully, and she had turned and run like the wind, calling out wild sentences to him as she ran, of which he had not understood a single word, except

that the fire apparently frightened her, and she wanted to get quickly away from it, and to get him away too.

Yet five minutes later she was as calm and happy again as though nothing had happened to alarm or waken troubled thoughts in her, and they had both forgotten the incident.

They were leaning over the ruined ramparts together listening to the weird music of the band as he had heard it the first day of his arrival.

It moved him again profoundly as it had done before, and somehow he managed to find his tongue and his best French. The girl leaned across the stones close beside him. No one was about. Driven by some remorseless engine within he began to stammer something—he hardly knew what—of his strange admiration for her. Almost at the first word she sprang lightly off the wall and came up smiling in front of him, just touching his knees as he sat there. She was hatless as usual, and the sun caught her hair and one side of her cheek and throat.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried, clapping her little hands softly in his face, "so very glad, because that means that if you like me you must also like what I do, and what I belong to."

Already he regretted bitterly having lost control of himself. Something in the phrasing of her sentence chilled him. He knew the fear of embarking upon an unknown and dangerous sea.

"You will take part in our real life, I mean," she added softly, with an indescribable coaxing of manner, as though she noticed his shrinking.

"You will come back to us."

Already this slip of a child seemed to dominate him; he felt her power coming over him more and more; something emanated from her that stole over his senses and made him aware that her personality, for all its simple grace, held forces that were stately, imposing, august. He saw her again moving through smoke and flame amid broken and tempestuous scenery, alarmingly strong, her terrible mother by her side. Dimly this shone through her smile and appearance of charming innocence.

"You will, I know," she repeated, holding him with her eyes.

They were quite alone up there on the ramparts, and the sensation that she was overmastering him stirred a wild sensuousness in his blood. The mingled abandon and reserve in her attracted him furiously, and all of him that was man rose up and resisted the creeping influence, at the same time acclaiming it with the full delight of his forgotten youth. An irresistible desire came to him to question her, to summon what still remained to him of his own little personality in an effort to retain the right to his normal self.

The girl had grown quiet again, and was now leaning on the broad wall close beside him, gazing out across the darkening plain, her elbows on the coping, motionless as a figure carved in stone. He took his courage in both hands.

"Tell me, Ilse," he said, unconsciously imitating her own purring softness of voice, yet aware that he was utterly in earnest, "what is the meaning of this town, and what is this real life you speak of? And why is it that the people watch me from morning to night? Tell me what it all means? And, tell me," he added more quickly with passion in his voice, "what you really are—yourself?"

She turned her head and looked at him through half-closed eyelids, her growing inner excitement betraying itself by the faint colour that ran like a shadow across her face.

"It seems to me,"—he faltered oddly under her gaze—"that I have some right to know—"

Suddenly she opened her eyes to the full. "You love me, then?" she asked softly.

"I swear," he cried impetuously, moved as by the force of a rising tide, "I never felt before—I have never known any other girl who—"

"Then you *have* the right to know," she calmly interrupted his confused confession, "for love shares all secrets."

She paused, and a thrill like fire ran swiftly through him. Her words lifted him off the earth, and he felt a radiant happiness, followed almost the same instant in horrible contrast by the thought of death. He became aware that she had turned her eyes upon his own and was speaking again.

"The real life I speak of," she whispered, "is the old, old life within, the life of long ago, the life to which you, too, once belonged, and to which you still belong."

A faint wave of memory troubled the deeps of his soul as her low voice sank into him. What she was saying he knew instinctively to be true, even though he could not as yet understand its full purport. His present life seemed slipping from him as he listened, merging his personality in one that was far older and greater. It was this loss of his present self that brought to him the thought of death.

"You came here," she went on, "with the purpose of seeking it, and the people felt your presence and are waiting to know what you decide, whether you will leave them without having found it, or whether—"

Her eyes remained fixed upon his own, but her face began to change, growing larger and darker with an expression of age.

"It is their thoughts constantly playing about your soul that makes you feel they watch you. They do not watch you with

their eyes. The purposes of their inner life are calling to you, seeking to claim you. You were all part of the same life long, long ago, and now they want you back again among them."

Vezein's timid heart sank with dread as he listened; but the girl's eyes held him with a net of joy so that he had no wish to escape. She fascinated him, as it were, clean out of his normal self.

"Alone, however, the people could never have caught and held you," she resumed. "The motive force was not strong enough; it has faded through all these years. But I"—she paused a moment and looked at him with complete confidence in her splendid eyes—"I possess the spell to conquer you and hold you: the spell of old love. I can win you back again and make you live the old life with me, for the force of the ancient tie between us, if I choose to use it, is irresistible. And I do choose to use it. I still want you. And you, dear soul of my dim past"—she pressed closer to him so that her breath passed across his eyes, and her voice positively sang—"I mean to have you, for you love me and are utterly at my mercy."

Vezein heard, and yet did not hear; understood, yet did not understand.

He had passed into a condition of exaltation. The world was beneath his feet, made of music and flowers, and he was flying somewhere far above it through the sunshine of pure delight. He was breathless and giddy with the wonder of her words. They intoxicated him. And, still, the terror of it all, the dreadful thought of death, pressed ever behind her sentences. For flames shot through her voice out of black smoke and licked at his soul.

And they communicated with one another, it seemed to him, by a process of swift telepathy, for his French could never have compassed all he said to her. Yet she understood perfectly, and what she said to him was like the recital of verses long since known. And the mingled pain and sweetness of it as he listened were almost more than his little soul could hold.

"Yet I came here wholly by chance—" he heard himself saying.

"No," she cried with passion, "you came here because I called to you. I have called to you for years, and you came with the whole force of the past behind you. You had to come, for I own you, and I claim you."

She rose again and moved closer, looking at him with a certain insolence in the face—the insolence of power.

The sun had set behind the towers of the old cathedral and the darkness rose up from the plain and enveloped them. The music of the band had ceased. The leaves of the plane

trees hung motionless, but the chill of the autumn evening rose about them and made Vezein shiver. There was no sound but the sound of their voices and the occasional soft rustle of the girl's dress. He could hear the blood rushing in his ears. He scarcely realised where he was or what he was doing. Some terrible magic of the imagination drew him deeply down into the tombs of his own being, telling him in no unfaltering voice that her words shadowed forth the truth. And this simple little French maid, speaking beside him with so strange authority, he saw curiously alter into quite another being. As he stared into her eyes, the picture in his mind grew and lived, dressing itself vividly to his inner vision with a degree of reality he was compelled to acknowledge. As once before, he saw her tall and stately, moving through wild and broken scenery of forests and mountain caverns, the glare of flames behind her head and clouds of shifting smoke about her feet. Dark leaves encircled her hair, flying loosely in the wind, and her limbs shone through the merest rags of clothing.

Others were about her, too, and ardent eyes on all sides cast delirious glances upon her, but her own eyes were always for One only, one whom she held by the hand. For she was leading the dance in some tempestuous orgy to the music of chanting voices, and the dance she led circled about a great and awful Figure on a throne, brooding over the scene through lurid vapours, while innumerable other wild faces and forms crowded furiously about her in the dance. But the one she held by the hand he knew to be himself, and the monstrous shape upon the throne he knew to be her mother.

The vision rose within him, rushing to him down the long years of buried time, crying aloud to him with the voice of memory reawakened.... And then the scene faded away and he saw the clear circle of the girl's eyes gazing steadfastly into his own, and she became once more the pretty little daughter of the innkeeper, and he found his voice again.

"And you," he whispered tremblingly—"you child of visions and enchantment, how is it that you so bewitch me that I loved you even before I saw?"

She drew herself up beside him with an air of rare dignity.

"The call of the Past," she said; "and besides," she added proudly, "in the real life I am a princess—"

"A princess!" he cried.

"—and my mother is a queen!"

At this, little Vezein utterly lost his head. Delight tore at his heart and swept him into sheer ecstasy. To hear that sweet singing voice, and to see those adorable little lips utter such things, upset his balance beyond all hope of control. He took her in his arms and covered her unresisting face with kisses.

But even while he did so, and while the hot passion swept him, he felt that she was soft and loathsome, and that her answering kisses stained his very soul.... And when, presently, she had freed herself and vanished into the darkness, he stood there, leaning against the wall in a state of collapse, creeping with horror from the touch of her yielding body, and inwardly raging at the weakness that he already dimly realised must prove his undoing.

And from the shadows of the old buildings into which she disappeared there rose in the stillness of the night a singular, long-drawn cry, which at first he took for laughter, but which later he was sure he recognised as the almost human wailing of a cat.

V

For a long time Vezin leant there against the wall, alone with his surging thoughts and emotions. He understood at length that he had done the one thing necessary to call down upon him the whole force of this ancient Past. For in those passionate kisses he had acknowledged the tie of olden days, and had revived it. And the memory of that soft impalpable caress in the darkness of the inn corridor came back to him with a shudder. The girl had first mastered him, and then led him to the one act that was necessary for her purpose. He had been waylaid, after the lapse of centuries—caught, and conquered.

Dimly he realised this, and sought to make plans for his escape. But, for the moment at any rate, he was powerless to manage his thoughts or will, for the sweet, fantastic madness of the whole adventure mounted to his brain like a spell, and he gloried in the feeling that he was utterly enchanted and moving in a world so much larger and wilder than the one he had ever been accustomed to.

The moon, pale and enormous, was just rising over the sea-like plain, when at last he rose to go. Her slanting rays drew all the houses into new perspective, so that their roofs, already glistening with dew, seemed to stretch much higher into the sky than usual, and their gables and quaint old towers lay far away in its purple reaches.

The cathedral appeared unreal in a silver mist. He moved softly, keeping to the shadows; but the streets were all deserted and very silent; the doors were closed, the shutters fastened. Not a soul was astir. The hush of night lay over everything; it was like a town of the dead, a churchyard with gigantic and grotesque tombstones.

Wondering where all the busy life of the day had so utterly disappeared to, he made his way to a back door that

entered the inn by means of the stables, thinking thus to reach his room unobserved. He reached the courtyard safely and crossed it by keeping close to the shadow of the wall. He sidled down it, mincing along on tiptoe, just as the old men did when they entered the *salle à manger*. He was horrified to find himself doing this instinctively. A strange impulse came to him, catching him somehow in the centre of his body—an impulse to drop upon all fours and run swiftly and silently. He glanced upwards and the idea came to him to leap up upon his window-sill overhead instead of going round by the stairs. This occurred to him as the easiest, and most natural way. It was like the beginning of some horrible transformation of himself into something else. He was fearfully strung up.

The moon was higher now, and the shadows very dark along the side of the street where he moved. He kept among the deepest of them, and reached the porch with the glass doors.

But here there was light; the inmates, unfortunately, were still about.

Hoping to slip across the hall unobserved and reach the stairs, he opened the door carefully and stole in. Then he saw that the hall was not empty. A large dark thing lay against the wall on his left. At first he thought it must be household articles. Then it moved, and he thought it was an immense cat, distorted in some way by the play of light and shadow. Then it rose straight up before him and he saw that it was the proprietress.

What she had been doing in this position he could only venture a dreadful guess, but the moment she stood up and faced him he was aware of some terrible dignity clothing her about that instantly recalled the girl's strange saying that she was a queen. Huge and sinister she stood there under the little oil lamp; alone with him in the empty hall. Awe stirred in his heart, and the roots of some ancient fear. He felt that he must bow to her and make some kind of obeisance. The impulse was fierce and irresistible, as of long habit. He glanced quickly about him.

There was no one there. Then he deliberately inclined his head toward her. He bowed.

"Enfin! M'sieur s'est donc décidé. C'est bien alors. J'en suis contente."⁹

Her words came to him sonorously as through a great open space.

⁹ "At last! The gentleman has decided. It is good, then. I am glad."

Then the great figure came suddenly across the flagged hall at him and seized his trembling hands. Some overpowering force moved with her and caught him.

"On pourrait faire un p'tit tour ensemble, n'est-ce pas? Nous y allons cette nuit et il faut s'exercer un peu d'avance pour cela. Ilse, Ilse, viens donc ici. Viens vite!"¹⁰

And she whirled him round in the opening steps of some dance that seemed oddly and horribly familiar. They made no sound on the stones, this strangely assorted couple. It was all soft and stealthy. And presently, when the air seemed to thicken like smoke, and a red glare as of flame shot through it, he was aware that some one else had joined them and that his hand the mother had released was now tightly held by the daughter. Ilse had come in answer to the call, and he saw her with leaves of vervain¹¹ twined in her dark hair, clothed in tattered vestiges of some curious garment, beautiful as the night, and horribly, odiously, loathsomely seductive.

"To the Sabbath! To the Sabbath!" they cried. "On to the Witches' Sabbath!"

Up and down that narrow hall they danced, the women on each side of him, to the wildest measure he had ever imagined, yet which he dimly, dreadfully remembered, till the lamp on the wall flickered and went out, and they were left in total darkness. And the devil woke in his heart with a thousand vile suggestions and made him afraid.

Suddenly they released his hands and he heard the voice of the mother cry that it was time, and they must go. Which way they went he did not pause to see. He only realised that he was free, and he blundered through the darkness till he found the stairs and then tore up them to his room as though all hell was at his heels.

He flung himself on the sofa, with his face in his hands, and groaned.

Swiftly reviewing a dozen ways of immediate escape, all equally impossible, he finally decided that the only thing to do for the moment was to sit quiet and wait. He must see what was going to happen. At least in the privacy of his own bedroom he would be fairly safe. The door was locked. He crossed over and softly opened the window which gave upon the courtyard and also permitted a partial view of the hall through the glass doors.

¹⁰ "We could dance a little round together, could we not? We will go there tonight, and you must practice a little beforehand. Ilse, Ilse, come here. Come quickly!"

¹¹ Vervain is better known as verbena and has long been associated with the supernatural.

As he did so the hum and murmur of a great activity reached his ears from the streets beyond— the sound of footsteps and voices muffled by distance. He leaned out cautiously and listened. The moonlight was clear and strong now, but his own window was in shadow, the silver disc being still behind the house. It came to him irresistibly that the inhabitants of the town, who a little while before had all been invisible behind closed doors, were now issuing forth, busy upon some secret and unholy errand. He listened intently.

At first everything about him was silent, but soon he became aware of movements going on in the house itself. Rustlings and cheepings came to him across that still, moonlit yard. A concourse of living beings sent the hum of their activity into the night. Things were on the move everywhere. A biting, pungent odour rose through the air, coming he knew not whence. Presently his eyes became glued to the windows of the opposite wall where the moonshine fell in a soft blaze. The roof overhead, and behind him, was reflected clearly in the panes of glass, and he saw the outlines of dark bodies moving with long footsteps over the tiles and along the coping. They passed swiftly and silently, shaped like immense cats, in an endless procession across the pictured glass, and then appeared to leap down to a lower level where he lost sight of them. He just caught the soft thudding of their leaps. Sometimes their shadows fell upon the white wall opposite, and then he could not make out whether they were the shadows of human beings or of cats. They seemed to change swiftly from one to the other. The transformation looked horribly real, for they leaped like human beings, yet changed swiftly in the air immediately afterwards, and dropped like animals.

The yard, too, beneath him, was now alive with the creeping movements of dark forms all stealthily drawing towards the porch with the glass doors. They kept so closely to the wall that he could not determine their actual shape, but when he saw that they passed on to the great congregation that was gathering in the hall, he understood that these were the creatures whose leaping shadows he had first seen reflected in the windowpanes opposite. They were coming from all parts of the town, reaching the appointed meeting-place across the roofs and tiles, and springing from level to level till they came to the yard.

Then a new sound caught his ear, and he saw that the windows all about him were being softly opened, and that to each window came a face. A moment later figures began dropping hurriedly down into the yard. And these figures, as they lowered themselves down from the windows, were human, he

saw; but once safely in the yard they fell upon all fours and changed in the swiftest possible second into—cats—huge, silent cats.

They ran in streams to join the main body in the hall beyond.

So, after all, the rooms in the house had not been empty and unoccupied.

Moreover, what he saw no longer filled him with amazement. For he remembered it all. It was familiar. It had all happened before just so, hundreds of times, and he himself had taken part in it and known the wild madness of it all. The outline of the old building changed, the yard grew larger, and he seemed to be staring down upon it from a much greater height through smoky vapours. And, as he looked, half remembering, the old pains of long ago, fierce and sweet, furiously assailed him, and the blood stirred horribly as he heard the Call of the Dance again in his heart and tasted the ancient magic of Ilse whirling by his side.

Suddenly he started back. A great lithe cat had leaped softly up from the shadows below on to the sill close to his face, and was staring fixedly at him with the eyes of a human. "Come," it seemed to say, "come with us to the Dance! Change as of old! Transform yourself swiftly and come!" Only too well he understood the creature's soundless call.

It was gone again in a flash with scarcely a sound of its padded feet on the stones, and then others dropped by the score down the side of the house, past his very eyes, all changing as they fell and darting away rapidly, softly, towards the gathering point. And again he felt the dreadful desire to do likewise; to murmur the old incantation, and then drop upon hands and knees and run swiftly for the great flying leap into the air. Oh, how the passion of it rose within him like a flood, twisting his very entrails, sending his heart's desire flaming forth into the night for the old, old Dance of the Sorcerers at the Witches' Sabbath! The whirl of the stars was about him; once more he met the magic of the moon. The power of the wind, rushing from precipice and forest, leaping from cliff to cliff across the valleys, tore him away.... He heard the cries of the dancers and their wild laughter, and with this savage girl in his embrace he danced furiously about the dim Throne where sat the Figure with the sceptre of majesty....

Then, suddenly, all became hushed and still, and the fever died down a little in his heart. The calm moonlight flooded a courtyard empty and deserted. They had started. The procession was off into the sky. And he was left behind—alone.

Veizin tiptoed softly across the room and unlocked the door. The murmur from the streets, growing momentarily as

he advanced, met his ears. He made his way with the utmost caution down the corridor. At the head of the stairs he paused and listened. Below him, the hall where they had gathered was dark and still, but through opened doors and windows on the far side of the building came the sound of a great throng moving farther and farther into the distance.

He made his way down the creaking wooden stairs, dreading yet longing to meet some straggler who should point the way, but finding no one; across the dark hall, so lately thronged with living, moving things, and out through the opened front doors into the street. He could not believe that he was really left behind, really forgotten, that he had been purposely permitted to escape. It perplexed him.

Nervously he peered about him, and up and down the street; then, seeing nothing, advanced slowly down the pavement.

The whole town, as he went, showed itself empty and deserted, as though a great wind had blown everything alive out of it. The doors and windows of the houses stood open to the night; nothing stirred; moonlight and silence lay over all. The night lay about him like a cloak. The air, soft and cool, caressed his cheek like the touch of a great furry paw.

He gained confidence and began to walk quickly, though still keeping to the shadowed side. Nowhere could he discover the faintest sign of the great unholy exodus he knew had just taken place. The moon sailed high over all in a sky cloudless and serene.

Hardly realising where he was going, he crossed the open market-place and so came to the ramparts, whence he knew a pathway descended to the high road and along which he could make good his escape to one of the other little towns that lay to the northward, and so to the railway.

But first he paused and gazed out over the scene at his feet where the great plain lay like a silver map of some dream country. The still beauty of it entered his heart, increasing his sense of bewilderment and unreality. No air stirred, the leaves of the plane trees stood motionless, the near details were defined with the sharpness of day against dark shadows, and in the distance the fields and woods melted away into haze and shimmering mistiness.

But the breath caught in his throat and he stood stockstill as though transfixed when his gaze passed from the horizon and fell upon the near prospect in the depth of the valley at his feet. The whole lower slopes of the hill, that lay hid from the brightness of the moon, were aglow, and through the glare he saw countless moving forms, shifting thick and fast between the openings of the trees; while overhead, like leaves

driven by the wind, he discerned flying shapes that hovered darkly one moment against the sky and then settled down with cries and weird singing through the branches into the region that was aflame.

Spellbound, he stood and stared for a time that he could not measure.

And then, moved by one of the terrible impulses that seemed to control the whole adventure, he climbed swiftly upon the top of the broad coping, and balanced a moment where the valley gaped at his feet. But in that very instant, as he stood hovering, a sudden movement among the shadows of the houses caught his eye, and he turned to see the outline of a large animal dart swiftly across the open space behind him, and land with a flying leap upon the top of the wall a little lower down. It ran like the wind to his feet and then rose up beside him upon the ramparts. A shiver seemed to run through the moonlight, and his sight trembled for a second. His heart pulsed fearfully. Ilse stood beside him, peering into his face.

Some dark substance, he saw, stained the girl's face and skin, shining in the moonlight as she stretched her hands towards him; she was dressed in wretched tattered garments that yet became her mightily; rue¹² and vervain twined about her temples; her eyes glittered with unholy light.

He only just controlled the wild impulse to take her in his arms and leap with her from their giddy perch into the valley below.

"See!" she cried, pointing with an arm on which the rags fluttered in the rising wind towards the forest aglow in the distance. "See where they await us! The woods are alive! Already the Great Ones are there, and the dance will soon begin! The salve is here! Anoint yourself and come!"

Though a moment before the sky was clear and cloudless, yet even while she spoke the face of the moon grew dark and the wind began to toss in the crests of the plane trees at his feet. Stray gusts brought the sounds of hoarse singing and crying from the lower slopes of the hill, and the pungent odour he had already noticed about the courtyard of the inn rose about him in the air.

"Transform, transform!" she cried again, her voice rising like a song.

"Rub well your skin before you fly. Come! Come with me to the Sabbath, to the madness of its furious delight, to the sweet abandonment of its evil worship! See! The Great Ones

are there, and the terrible Sacraments prepared. The Throne is occupied. Anoint and come! Anoint and come!"

She grew to the height of a tree beside him, leaping upon the wall with flaming eyes and hair strewn upon the night. He too began to change swiftly. Her hands touched the skin of his face and neck, streaking him with the burning salve that sent the old magic into his blood with the power before which fades all that is good.

A wild roar came up to his ears from the heart of the wood, and the girl, when she heard it, leaped upon the wall in the frenzy of her wicked joy.

"Satan is there!" she screamed, rushing upon him and striving to draw him with her to the edge of the wall. "Satan has come. The Sacraments call us! Come, with your dear apostate soul, and we will worship and dance till the moon dies and the world is forgotten!"

Just saving himself from the dreadful plunge, Vezin struggled to release himself from her grasp, while the passion tore at his reins and all but mastered him. He shrieked aloud, not knowing what he said, and then he shrieked again. It was the old impulses, the old awful habits instinctively finding voice; for though it seemed to him that he merely shrieked nonsense, the words he uttered really had meaning in them, and were intelligible. It was the ancient call. And it was heard below. It was answered.

The wind whistled at the skirts of his coat as the air round him darkened with many flying forms crowding upwards out of the valley. The crying of hoarse voices smote upon his ears, coming closer. Strokes of wind buffeted him, tearing him this way and that along the crumbling top of the stone wall; and Ilse clung to him with her long shining arms, smooth and bare, holding him fast about the neck. But not Ilse alone, for a dozen of them surrounded him, dropping out of the air. The pungent odour of the anointed bodies stifled him, exciting him to the old madness of the Sabbath, the dance of the witches and sorcerers doing honour to the personified Evil of the world.

"Anoint and away! Anoint and away!" they cried in wild chorus about him.

"To the Dance that never dies! To the sweet and fearful fantasy of evil!"

Another moment and he would have yielded and gone, for his will turned soft and the flood of passionate memory all but overwhelmed him, when—so can a small thing after the whole course of an adventure—he caught his foot upon a loose stone in the edge of the wall, and then fell with a sudden crash on to the ground below. But he fell towards

¹² Rue is commonly associated with regret in Anglophone literature.

the houses, in the open space of dust and cobblestones, and fortunately not into the gaping depth of the valley on the farther side.

And they, too, came in a tumbling heap about him, like flies upon a piece of food, but as they fell he was released for a moment from the power of their touch, and in that brief instant of freedom there flashed into his mind the sudden intuition that saved him. Before he could regain his feet he saw them scrabbling awkwardly back upon the wall, as though bat-like they could only fly by dropping from a height, and had no hold upon him in the open. Then, seeing them perched there in a row like cats upon a roof, all dark and singularly shapeless, their eyes like lamps, the sudden memory came back to him of Ilse's terror at the sight of fire.

Quick as a flash he found his matches and lit the dead leaves that lay under the wall.

Dry and withered, they caught fire at once, and the wind carried the flame in a long line down the length of the wall, licking upwards as it ran; and with shrieks and wailings, the crowded row of forms upon the top melted away into the air on the other side, and were gone with a great rush and whirring of their bodies down into the heart of the haunted valley, leaving Vezin breathless and shaken in the middle of the deserted ground.

"Ilse!" he called feebly; "Ilse!" for his heart ached to think that she was really gone to the great Dance without him, and that he had lost the opportunity of its fearful joy. Yet at the same time his relief was so great, and he was so dazed and troubled in mind with the whole thing, that he hardly knew what he was saying, and only cried aloud in the fierce storm of his emotion....

The fire under the wall ran its course, and the moonlight came out again, soft and clear, from its temporary eclipse. With one last shuddering look at the ruined ramparts, and a feeling of horrid wonder for the haunted valley beyond, where the shapes still crowded and flew, he turned his face towards the town and slowly made his way in the direction of the hotel.

And as he went, a great wailing of cries, and a sound of howling, followed him from the gleaming forest below, growing fainter and fainter with the bursts of wind as he disappeared between the houses.

VI

"It may seem rather abrupt to you, this sudden tame ending," said Arthur Vezin, glancing with flushed face and timid eyes

at Dr. Silence sitting there with his notebook, "but the fact is—er—from that moment my memory seems to have failed rather. I have no distinct recollection of how I got home or what precisely I did.

"It appears I never went back to the inn at all. I only dimly recollect racing down a long white road in the moonlight, past woods and villages, still and deserted, and then the dawn came up, and I saw the towers of a bigish town and so came to a station.

"But, long before that, I remember pausing somewhere on the road and looking back to where the hill-town of my adventure stood up in the moonlight, and thinking how exactly like a great monstrous cat it lay there upon the plain, its huge front paws lying down the two main streets, and the twin and broken towers of the cathedral marking its torn ears against the sky. That picture stays in my mind with the utmost vividness to this day.

"Another thing remains in my mind from that escape—namely, the sudden sharp reminder that I had not paid my bill, and the decision I made, standing there on the dusty highroad, that the small baggage I had left behind would more than settle for my indebtedness.

"For the rest, I can only tell you that I got coffee and bread at a cafe on the outskirts of this town I had come to, and soon after found my way to the station and caught a train later in the day. That same evening I reached London."

"And how long altogether," asked John Silence quietly, "do you think you stayed in the town of the adventure?"

Vezin looked up sheepishly.

"I was coming to that," he resumed, with apologetic wriggings of his body. "In London I found that I was a whole week out in my reckoning of time. I had stayed over a week in the town, and it ought to have been September 15th,—instead of which it was only September 10th!"

"So that, in reality, you had only stayed a night or two in the inn?" queried the doctor.

Vezin hesitated before replying. He shuffled upon the mat.

"I must have gained time somewhere," he said at length—"somewhere or somehow. I certainly had a week to my credit. I can't explain it. I can only give you the fact."

"And this happened to you last year, since when you have never been back to the place?"

"Last autumn, yes," murmured Vezin; "and I have never dared to go back. I think I never want to."

"And, tell me," asked Dr. Silence at length, when he saw that the little man had evidently come to the end of his words and had nothing more to say, "had you ever read up the sub-

ject of the old witchcraft practices during the Middle Ages, or been at all interested in the subject?"

"Never!" declared Vezin emphatically. "I had never given a thought to such matters so far as I know—"

"Or to the question of reincarnation, perhaps?"

"Never—before my adventure; but I have since," he replied significantly.

There was, however, something still on the man's mind that he wished to relieve himself of by confession, yet could only with difficulty bring himself to mention; and it was only after the sympathetic tactfulness of the doctor had provided numerous openings that he at length availed himself of one of them, and stammered that he would like to show him the marks he still had on his neck where, he said, the girl had touched him with her anointed hands.

He took off his collar after infinite fumbling hesitation, and lowered his shirt a little for the doctor to see. And there, on the surface of the skin, lay a faint reddish line across the shoulder and extending a little way down the back towards the spine. It certainly indicated exactly the position an arm might have taken in the act of embracing.

And on the other side of the neck, slightly higher up, was a similar mark, though not quite so clearly defined.

"That was where she held me that night on the ramparts," he whispered, a strange light coming and going in his eyes.

* * * * *

It was some weeks later when I again found occasion to consult John Silence concerning another extraordinary case that had come under my notice, and we fell to discussing Vezin's story. Since hearing it, the doctor had made investigations on his own account, and one of his secretaries had discovered that Vezin's ancestors had actually lived for generations in the very town where the adventure came to him. Two of them, both women, had been tried and convicted as witches, and had been burned alive at the stake. Moreover, it had not been difficult to prove that the very inn where Vezin stayed was built about 1700 upon the spot where the funeral pyres stood and the executions took place. The town was a sort of headquarters for all the sorcerers and witches of the entire region, and after conviction they were burnt there literally by scores.

"It seems strange," continued the doctor, "that Vezin should have remained ignorant of all this; but, on the other hand, it was not the kind of history that successive generations would have been anxious to keep alive, or to repeat to their children. Therefore I am inclined to think he still knows nothing about it.

"The whole adventure seems to have been a very vivid revival of the memories of an earlier life, caused by coming directly into contact with the living forces still intense enough to hang about the place, and, by a most singular chance, too, with the very souls who had taken part with him in the events of that particular life. For the mother and daughter who impressed him so strangely must have been leading actors, with himself, in the scenes and practices of witchcraft which at that period dominated the imaginations of the whole country.

"One has only to read the histories of the times to know that these witches claimed the power of transforming themselves into various animals both for the purposes of disguise and also to convey themselves swiftly to the scenes of their imaginary orgies. Lycanthropy, or the power to change themselves into wolves, was everywhere believed in, and the ability to transform themselves into cats by rubbing their bodies with a special salve or ointment provided by Satan himself, found equal credence. The witchcraft trials abound in evidences of such universal beliefs."

Dr. Silence quoted chapter and verse from many writers on the subject, and showed how every detail of Vezin's adventure had a basis in the practices of those dark days.

"But that the entire affair took place subjectively in the man's own consciousness, I have no doubt," he went on, in reply to my questions; "for my secretary who has been to the town to investigate, discovered his signature in the visitors' book, and proved by it that he had arrived on September 8th, and left suddenly without paying his bill. He left two days later, and they still were in possession of his dirty brown bag and some tourist clothes. I paid a few francs in settlement of his debt, and have sent his luggage on to him. The daughter was absent from home, but the proprietress, a large woman very much as he described her, told my secretary that he had seemed a very strange, absent-minded kind of gentleman, and after his disappearance she had feared for a long time that he had met with a violent end in the neighbouring forest where he used to roam about alone.

"I should like to have obtained a personal interview with the daughter so as to ascertain how much was subjective and how much actually took place with her as Vezin told it. For her dread of fire and the sight of burning must, of course, have been the intuitive memory of her former painful death at the stake, and have thus explained why he fancied more than once that he saw her through smoke and flame."

"And that mark on his skin, for instance?" I inquired.

"Merely the marks produced by hysterical brooding," he replied, "like the stigmata¹³ of the *religieuses*, and the bruises which appear on the bodies of hypnotised subjects who have been told to expect them. This is very common and easily explained. Only it seems curious that these marks should have remained so long in Vezin's case. Usually they disappear quickly."

"Obviously he is still thinking about it all, brooding, and living it all over again," I ventured.

"Probably. And this makes me fear that the end of his trouble is not yet. We shall hear of him again. It is a case, alas! I can do little to alleviate."

Dr. Silence spoke gravely and with sadness in his voice.

"And what do you make of the Frenchman in the train?" I asked further—"the man who warned him against the place, *a cause du sommeil et a cause des chats*? Surely a very singular incident?"

"A very singular incident indeed," he made answer slowly, "and one I can only explain on the basis of a highly improbable coincidence—"

"Namely?"

"That the man was one who had himself stayed in the town and undergone there a similar experience. I should like to find this man and ask him.

"But the crystal is useless here, for I have no slightest clue to go upon, and I can only conclude that some singular psychic affinity, some force still active in his being out of the same past life, drew him thus to the personality of Vezin, and enabled him to fear what might happen to him, and thus to warn him as he did.

"Yes," he presently continued, half talking to himself, "I suspect in this case that Vezin was swept into the vortex of forces arising out of the intense activities of a past life, and that he lived over again a scene in which he had often played a leading part centuries before. For strong actions set up forces that are so slow to exhaust themselves, they may be said in a sense never to die. In this case they were not vital enough to render the illusion complete, so that the little man found himself caught in a very distressing confusion of the present and the past; yet he was sufficiently sensitive to recognise that it was true, and to fight against the degradation of returning, even in memory, to a former and lower state of development.

"Ah yes!" he continued, crossing the floor to gaze at the darkening sky, and seemingly quite oblivious of my presence, "subliminal up-rushes of memory like this can be exceedingly painful, and sometimes exceedingly dangerous. I only trust that this gentle soul may soon escape from this obsession of a passionate and tempestuous past. But I doubt it, I doubt it."

His voice was hushed with sadness as he spoke, and when he turned back into the room again there was an expression of profound yearning upon his face, the yearning of a soul whose desire to help is sometimes greater than his power.

13 In Christianity—especially Roman Catholicism—the faithful are believed to sometimes be blessed/afflicted with wounds on their hands and feet in accordance with the wounds suffered by Christ during the crucifixion.

H. P. LOVECRAFT, “THE CALL OF CTHULHU”

Critical Introduction

H. P. Lovecraft (1890–1937) is among the most influential figures in the history of horror fiction. His stories are filled with monsters, looming presences, nightmares, and gothic attics inhabited by malevolent forces. Many of the most frightening elements of his stories are those that are least clearly described. Many elements, he tells us, are unimaginable, inconceivable, or even impossible. Lovecraft’s psyche was a mess of prejudices and paranoid ideas that many readers find odious, but which also fuel the tension and terror in his writing.

His Cthulhu, first appearing in this story in 1928, has spawned an entire mythology that stretches through much of Lovecraft’s fiction and now includes films, games, and even a Metallica song. Cthulhu is envisioned as the chiefest of the “Old Ones,” malevolent entities whose power and lifespan are cosmic in scope. Luckily for humanity, they are largely trapped in a sort of wakeful sleep in the remotest places on Earth; most of their horror, however, comes from the certainty that they will one day return and transform our world to an orgiastic celebration of chaos and violence. Like the Icelandic *Æsir* and *Jötnar*, the Old Ones are largely unconcerned with humanity—though their return is in some ways tied to human beings in ways that Icelandic mythology does not incorporate. Cthulhu, as Lovecraft developed him, is a sort of priest of the Old Ones, and he is thought to be crucial for their return when the stars are right. It is possible that he can influence and communicate with human beings through their dreams and subconscious thoughts.

“The Call of Cthulhu” is a master class in control. Lovecraft describes Cthulhu, but the image he presents in the narrative is unclear. The cults clearly exist, but it is unclear whether or not we should trust the narrator and his uncle as to their nature. Mysterious images and languages crop up, suggesting that our archaeological and historical assumptions about humanity are incorrect—but they seem to be met with a collective shrug by the academic population. Lovecraft gives us a wealth of information, but withholds the most crucial bits, leaving the reader with suspicion but no proof. In doing so, he creates a glimpsed doom, unknown machinations taking place just beyond our perception, a gathering storm of which humanity is only subconsciously aware.

Reading Questions

Like Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker in *Dracula*, Lovecraft chooses to place barriers between the narrative action and the reader. Instead of a third-person omniscient narrator, we receive second- or third-hand information from a narrator who outright states he does not want the reader to know what he knows. As you read, think about why Lovecraft might have chosen to write the story in this way. Why distance the reader from Cthulhu?

Lovecraft develops a theme of knowledge and ignorance in this story. Perhaps taking a page from the Bible, he suggests that the human mind is incapable of processing certain information, leading those who look upon Cthulhu to madness. As you read, consider other texts in this volume that treat the monster as ineffable: how are these monsters similar to Cthulhu and how do they differ?

Editorial Notes

Although Lovecraft was born and spent most of his life in Rhode Island, the language in this story adopts British spellings and archaic terminology. Aside from regularizing *shew* to *show* and some punctuation, we have left the prose as Lovecraft wrote it—as it aids in conveying the Romantic and mysterious setting his mythology sought to create. The first footnote is original to the text; all others are ours.

Further Reading

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“THE CALL OF CTHULHU”¹

H. P. LOVECRAFT

“Of such great powers or beings there may be conceivably a survival... a survival of a hugely remote period when... consciousness was manifested, perhaps, in shapes and forms long since withdrawn before the tide of advancing humanity... forms of which poetry and legend alone have caught a flying memory and called them gods, monsters, mythical beings of all sorts and kinds....”

—Algernon Blackwood.

I. The Horror in Clay

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.

Theosophists² have guessed at the awesome grandeur of the cosmic cycle wherein our world and human race form transient incidents. They have hinted at strange survivals in terms which would freeze the blood if not masked by a bland optimism. But it is not from them that there came the single glimpse of forbidden aeons which chills me when I think of it and maddens me when I dream of it. That glimpse, like all dread glimpses of truth, flashed out from an accidental piecing together of separated things—in this case an old newspaper item and the notes of a dead professor. I hope that no one else will accomplish this piecing out; certainly, if I live, I shall never knowingly supply a link in so hideous a chain. I think that the professor, too, intended to keep silent regarding the part he knew, and that he would have destroyed his notes had not sudden death seized him.

¹ (Found Among the Papers of the Late Francis Wayland Thurston, of Boston)

² A school of thought which sought to achieve knowledge of the divine and the universe itself through mystical and occult means.

My knowledge of the thing began in the winter of 1926–27 with the death of my grand-uncle George Gammell Angell, Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages in Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. Professor Angell was widely known as an authority on ancient inscriptions, and had frequently been resorted to by the heads of prominent museums; so that his passing at the age of ninety-two may be recalled by many. Locally, interest was intensified by the obscurity of the cause of death. The professor had been stricken whilst returning from the Newport boat; falling suddenly, as witnesses said, after having been jostled by a nautical-looking negro who had come from one of the queer dark courts on the precipitous hillside which formed a short cut from the waterfront to the deceased’s home in Williams Street. Physicians were unable to find any visible disorder, but concluded after perplexed debate that some obscure lesion of the heart, induced by the brisk ascent of so steep a hill by so elderly a man, was responsible for the end. At the time I saw no reason to dissent from this dictum, but latterly I am inclined to wonder—and more than wonder.

As my grand-uncle’s heir and executor, for he died a childless widower, I was expected to go over his papers with some thoroughness; and for that purpose moved his entire set of files and boxes to my quarters in Boston. Much of the material which I correlated will be later published by the American Archaeological Society, but there was one box which I found exceedingly puzzling, and which I felt much averse from showing to other eyes. It had been locked, and I did not find the key till it occurred to me to examine the personal ring which the professor carried always in his pocket. Then indeed I succeeded in opening it, but when I did so seemed only to be confronted by a greater and more closely locked barrier. For what could be the meaning of the queer clay bas-relief³ and the disjointed jottings, ramblings, and cuttings which I found? Had my uncle, in his latter years, become credulous of the most superficial impostures? I resolved to search out the eccentric sculptor responsible for this apparent disturbance of an old man’s peace of mind.

³ A sculpture in low relief, the type which might normally be seen in coinage and Eastern temple sculpture.

The bas-relief was a rough rectangle less than an inch thick and about five by six inches in area; obviously of modern origin. Its designs, however, were far from modern in atmosphere and suggestion; for although the vagaries of cubism and futurism are many and wild, they do not often reproduce that cryptic regularity which lurks in prehistoric writing. And writing of some kind the bulk of these designs seemed certainly to be; though my memory, despite much familiarity with the papers and collections of my uncle, failed in any way to identify this particular species, or even to hint at its remotest affiliations.

Above these apparent hieroglyphics was a figure of evidently pictorial intent, though its impressionistic execution forbade a very clear idea of its nature. It seemed to be a sort of monster, or symbol representing a monster, of a form which only a diseased fancy could conceive. If I say that my somewhat extravagant imagination yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature, I shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing. A pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings; but it was the *general outline* of the whole which made it most shockingly frightful. Behind the figure was a vague suggestion of a Cyclopean⁴ architectural background.

The writing accompanying this oddity was, aside from a stack of press cuttings, in Professor Angell's most recent hand; and made no pretence to literary style. What seemed to be the main document was headed "CTHULHU CULT" in characters painstakingly printed to avoid the erroneous reading of a word so unheard-of. The manuscript was divided into two sections, the first of which was headed "1925—Dream and Dream Work of H. A. Wilcox, 7 Thomas St., Providence, R.I.," and the second, "Narrative of Inspector John R. Legrasse, 121 Bienville St., New Orleans, La., at 1908 A. A. S. Mtg.—Notes on Same, & Prof. Webb's Acct." The other manuscript papers were all brief notes, some of them accounts of the queer dreams of different persons, some of them citations from theosophical books and magazines (notably W. Scott-Elliot's *Atlantis and the Lost Lemuria*⁵), and the rest comments on long-surviving secret societies and hidden cults, with references to passages in such mythological and anthropological source-books as Frazer's *Golden Bough* and Miss Murray's

Witch-Cult in Western Europe.⁶ The cuttings largely alluded to outré mental illnesses and outbreaks of group folly or mania in the spring of 1925.

The first half of the principal manuscript told a very peculiar tale. It appears that on March 1st, 1925, a thin, dark young man of neurotic and excited aspect had called upon Professor Angell bearing the singular clay bas-relief, which was then exceedingly damp and fresh. His card bore the name of Henry Anthony Wilcox, and my uncle had recognised him as the youngest son of an excellent family slightly known to him, who had latterly been studying sculpture at the Rhode Island School of Design and living alone at the Fleur-de-Lys Building near that institution. Wilcox was a precocious youth of known genius but great eccentricity, and had from childhood excited attention through the strange stories and odd dreams he was in the habit of relating. He called himself "psychically hypersensitive," but the staid folk of the ancient commercial city dismissed him as merely "queer." Never mingling much with his kind, he had dropped gradually from social visibility, and was now known only to a small group of aesthetes from other towns. Even the Providence Art Club, anxious to preserve its conservatism, had found him quite hopeless.

On the occasion of the visit, ran the professor's manuscript, the sculptor abruptly asked for the benefit of his host's archaeological knowledge in identifying the hieroglyphics on the bas-relief. He spoke in a dreamy, stilted manner which suggested pose and alienated sympathy; and my uncle showed some sharpness in replying, for the conspicuous freshness of the tablet implied kinship with anything but archaeology. Young Wilcox's rejoinder, which impressed my uncle enough to make him recall and record it verbatim, was of a fantastically poetic cast which must have typified his whole conversation, and which I have since found highly characteristic of him. He said, "It is new, indeed, for I made it last night in a dream of strange cities; and dreams are older than brooding Tyre, or the contemplative Sphinx, or garden-girdled Babylon."

It was then that he began that rambling tale which suddenly played upon a sleeping memory and won the fevered interest of my uncle. There had been a slight earthquake

⁴ In the sense Lovecraft is using the word here, *titanic* or *gigantic* would be synonymous.

⁵ Eliot was a theosophist whose books developed the idea of "root races," arguing for the so-called lost civilizations of Atlantis and Lemuria as the basis for the earliest of human civilizations.

⁶ James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, first published in 1890, was one of the earliest anthropological studies of religion. Margaret Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, published in 1921 and indebted to Frazer's earlier work, was an anthropological study of the witch and its connection to pre-Christian "pagan" worship.

tremor the night before, the most considerable felt in New England for some years; and Wilcox's imagination had been keenly affected. Upon retiring, he had had an unprecedented dream of great Cyclopean cities of titan blocks and sky-flung monoliths, all dripping with green ooze and sinister with latent horror. Hieroglyphics had covered the walls and pillars, and from some undetermined point below had come a voice that was not a voice; a chaotic sensation which only fancy could transmute into sound, but which he attempted to render by the almost unpronounceable jumble of letters, "*Cthulhu fhtagn*."

This verbal jumble was the key to the recollection which excited and disturbed Professor Angell. He questioned the sculptor with scientific minuteness; and studied with almost frantic intensity the bas-relief on which the youth had found himself working, chilled and clad only in his night-clothes, when waking had stolen bewilderingly over him. My uncle blamed his old age, Wilcox afterward said, for his slowness in recognising both hieroglyphics and pictorial design. Many of his questions seemed highly out-of-place to his visitor, especially those which tried to connect the latter with strange cults or societies; and Wilcox could not understand the repeated promises of silence which he was offered in exchange for an admission of membership in some widespread mystical or pagan religious body. When Professor Angell became convinced that the sculptor was indeed ignorant of any cult or system of cryptic lore, he besieged his visitor with demands for future reports of dreams. This bore regular fruit, for after the first interview the manuscript records daily calls of the young man, during which he related startling fragments of nocturnal imagery whose burden was always some terrible Cyclopean vista of dark and dripping stone, with a subterrene voice or intelligence shouting monotonously in enigmatical sense-impacts unscrisbable save as gibberish. The two sounds most frequently repeated are those rendered by the letters "*Cthulhu*" and "*R'lyeh*."

On March 23d, the manuscript continued, Wilcox failed to appear; and inquiries at his quarters revealed that he had been stricken with an obscure sort of fever and taken to the home of his family in Waterman Street. He had cried out in the night, arousing several other artists in the building, and had manifested since then only alternations of unconsciousness and delirium. My uncle at once telephoned the family, and from that time forward kept close watch of the case; calling often at the Thayer Street office of Dr. Tobey, whom he learned to be in charge. The youth's febrile mind, apparently,

was dwelling on strange things; and the doctor shuddered now and then as he spoke of them. They included not only a repetition of what he had formerly dreamed, but touched wildly on a gigantic thing "miles high" which walked or lumbered about. He at no time fully described this object, but occasional frantic words, as repeated by Dr. Tobey, convinced the professor that it must be identical with the nameless monstrosity he had sought to depict in his dream-sculpture. Reference to this object, the doctor added, was invariably a prelude to the young man's subsidence into lethargy. His temperature, oddly enough, was not greatly above normal; but his whole condition was otherwise such as to suggest true fever rather than mental disorder.

On April 2nd at about 3 p.m. every trace of Wilcox's malady suddenly ceased. He sat upright in bed, astonished to find himself at home and completely ignorant of what had happened in dream or reality since the night of March 22nd. Pronounced well by his physician, he returned to his quarters in three days; but to Professor Angell he was of no further assistance. All traces of strange dreaming had vanished with his recovery, and my uncle kept no record of his night-thoughts after a week of pointless and irrelevant accounts of thoroughly usual visions.

Here the first part of the manuscript ended, but references to certain of the scattered notes gave me much material for thought—so much, in fact, that only the ingrained scepticism then forming my philosophy can account for my continued distrust of the artist. The notes in question were those descriptive of the dreams of various persons covering the same period as that in which young Wilcox had had his strange visitations. My uncle, it seems, had quickly instituted a prodigiously far-flung body of inquiries amongst nearly all the friends whom he could question without impertinence, asking for nightly reports of their dreams, and the dates of any notable visions for some time past. The reception of his request seems to have been varied; but he must, at the very least, have received more responses than any ordinary man could have handled without a secretary. This original correspondence was not preserved, but his notes formed a thorough and really significant digest. Average people in society and business—New England's traditional "salt of the earth"—gave an almost completely negative result, though scattered cases of uneasy but formless nocturnal impressions appear here and there, always between March 23d and April 2nd—the period of young Wilcox's delirium. Scientific men were little more affected, though four cases of vague description suggest fugitive glimpses of strange landscapes,

and in one case there is mentioned a dread of something abnormal.

It was from the artists and poets that the pertinent answers came, and I know that panic would have broken loose had they been able to compare notes. As it was, lacking their original letters, I half suspected the compiler of having asked leading questions, or of having edited the correspondence in corroboration of what he had latently resolved to see. That is why I continued to feel that Wilcox, somehow cognisant of the old data which my uncle had possessed, had been imposing on the veteran scientist. These responses from aesthetes told a disturbing tale. From February 28th to April 2nd a large proportion of them had dreamed very bizarre things, the intensity of the dreams being immeasurably the stronger during the period of the sculptor's delirium. Over a fourth of those who reported anything, reported scenes and half-sounds not unlike those which Wilcox had described; and some of the dreamers confessed acute fear of the gigantic nameless thing visible toward the last. One case, which the note describes with emphasis, was very sad. The subject, a widely known architect with leanings toward theosophy and occultism, went violently insane on the date of young Wilcox's seizure, and expired several months later after incessant screamings to be saved from some escaped denizen of hell. Had my uncle referred to these cases by name instead of merely by number, I should have attempted some corroboration and personal investigation; but as it was, I succeeded in tracing down only a few. All of these, however, bore out the notes in full. I have often wondered if all the objects of the professor's questioning felt as puzzled as did this fraction. It is well that no explanation shall ever reach them.

The press cuttings, as I have intimated, touched on cases of panic, mania, and eccentricity during the given period. Professor Angell must have employed a cutting bureau, for the number of extracts was tremendous and the sources scattered throughout the globe. Here was a nocturnal suicide in London, where a lone sleeper had leaped from a window after a shocking cry. Here likewise a rambling letter to the editor of a paper in South America, where a fanatic deduces a dire future from visions he has seen. A despatch from California describes a theosophist colony as donning white robes en masse for some "glorious fulfilment" which never arrives, whilst items from India speak guardedly of serious native unrest toward the end of March. Voodoo orgies multiply in Hayti, and African outposts report ominous mutterings. American officers in the Philippines find certain tribes both-

ersome about this time, and New York policemen are mobbed by hysterical Levantines⁷ on the night of March 22-23. The west of Ireland, too, is full of wild rumour and legendry, and a fantastic painter named Ardois-Bonnot hangs a blasphemous *Dream Landscape* in the Paris spring salon of 1926. And so numerous are the recorded troubles in insane asylums, that only a miracle can have stopped the medical fraternity from noting strange parallelisms and drawing mystified conclusions. A weird bunch of cuttings, all told; and I can at this date scarcely envisage the callous rationalism with which I set them aside. But I was then convinced that young Wilcox had known of the older matters mentioned by the professor.

II. The Tale of Inspector Legrasse

The older matters which had made the sculptor's dream and bas-relief so significant to my uncle formed the subject of the second half of his long manuscript. Once before, it appears, Professor Angell had seen the hellish outlines of the nameless monstrosity, puzzled over the unknown hieroglyphics, and heard the ominous syllables which can be rendered only as "*Cthulhu*"; and all this in so stirring and horrible a connexion that it is small wonder he pursued young Wilcox with queries and demands for data.

The earlier experience had come in 1908, seventeen years before, when the American Archaeological Society held its annual meeting in St. Louis. Professor Angell, as befitted one of his authority and attainments, had had a prominent part in all the deliberations; and was one of the first to be approached by the several outsiders who took advantage of the convocation to offer questions for correct answering and problems for expert solution.

The chief of these outsiders, and in a short time the focus of interest for the entire meeting, was a commonplace-looking middle-aged man who had travelled all the way from New Orleans for certain special information unobtainable from any local source. His name was John Raymond Legrasse, and he was by profession an Inspector of Police. With him he bore the subject of his visit, a grotesque, repulsive, and apparently very ancient stone statuette whose origin he was at a loss to determine. It must not be fancied that Inspector Legrasse had the least interest in archaeology. On the contrary, his wish for enlightenment was prompted by purely professional considerations. The statuette, idol, fetish, or whatever it

⁷ Individuals from the Levant, eastern Mediterranean countries including Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria.

was, had been captured some months before in the wooded swamps south of New Orleans during a raid on a supposed voodoo meeting; and so singular and hideous were the rites connected with it, that the police could not but realise that they had stumbled on a dark cult totally unknown to them, and infinitely more diabolic than even the blackest of the African voodoo circles. Of its origin, apart from the erratic and unbelievable tales extorted from the captured members, absolutely nothing was to be discovered; hence the anxiety of the police for any antiquarian lore which might help them to place the frightful symbol, and through it track down the cult to its fountain-head.

Inspector Legrasse was scarcely prepared for the sensation which his offering created. One sight of the thing had been enough to throw the assembled men of science into a state of tense excitement, and they lost no time in crowding around him to gaze at the diminutive figure whose utter strangeness and air of genuinely abysmal antiquity hinted so potently at unopened and archaic vistas. No recognised school of sculpture had animated this terrible object, yet centuries and even thousands of years seemed recorded in its dim and greenish surface of unplaceable stone.

The figure, which was finally passed slowly from man to man for close and careful study, was between seven and eight inches in height, and of exquisitely artistic workmanship. It represented a monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long, narrow wings behind. This thing, which seemed instinct with a fearsome and unnatural malignancy, was of a somewhat bloated corpulence, and squatted evilly on a rectangular block or pedestal covered with undecipherable characters. The tips of the wings touched the back edge of the block, the seat occupied the centre, whilst the long, curved claws of the doubled-up, crouching hind legs gripped the front edge and extended a quarter of the way down toward the bottom of the pedestal. The cephalopod head was bent forward, so that the ends of the facial feelers brushed the backs of huge fore paws which clasped the croucher's elevated knees. The aspect of the whole was abnormally life-like, and the more subtly fearful because its source was so totally unknown. Its vast, awesome, and incalculable age was unmistakable; yet not one link did it show with any known type of art belonging to civilisation's youth—or indeed to any other time.

Totally separate and apart, its very material was a mystery; for the soapy, greenish-black stone with its golden or iridescent flecks and striations resembled nothing familiar

to geology or mineralogy. The characters along the base were equally baffling; and no member present, despite a representation of half the world's expert learning in this field, could form the least notion of even their remotest linguistic kinship. They, like the subject and material, belonged to something horribly remote and distinct from mankind as we know it; something frightfully suggestive of old and unhallowed cycles of life in which our world and our conceptions have no part.

And yet, as the members severally shook their heads and confessed defeat at the Inspector's problem, there was one man in that gathering who suspected a touch of bizarre familiarity in the monstrous shape and writing, and who presently told with some diffidence of the odd trifle he knew. This person was the late William Channing Webb, Professor of Anthropology in Princeton University, and an explorer of no slight note.

Professor Webb had been engaged, forty-eight years before, in a tour of Greenland and Iceland in search of some Runic inscriptions which he failed to unearth; and whilst high up on the West Greenland coast had encountered a singular tribe or cult of degenerate Esquimaux whose religion, a curious form of devil-worship, chilled him with its deliberate bloodthirstiness and repulsiveness. It was a faith of which other Esquimaux knew little, and which they mentioned only with shudders, saying that it had come down from horribly ancient aeons before ever the world was made. Besides nameless rites and human sacrifices there were certain queer hereditary rituals addressed to a supreme elder devil or *tornasuk*; and of this Professor Webb had taken a careful phonetic copy from an aged *angedkok* or wizard-priest, expressing the sounds in Roman letters as best he knew how. But just now of prime significance was the fetish which this cult had cherished, and around which they danced when the aurora leaped high over the ice cliffs. It was, the professor stated, a very crude bas-relief of stone, comprising a hideous picture and some cryptic writing. And so far as he could tell, it was a rough parallel in all essential features of the bestial thing now lying before the meeting.

This data, received with suspense and astonishment by the assembled members, proved doubly exciting to Inspector Legrasse; and he began at once to ply his informant with questions. Having noted and copied an oral ritual among the swamp cult-worshippers his men had arrested, he besought the professor to remember as best he might the syllables taken down amongst the diabolist Esquimaux. There then followed an exhaustive comparison of details, and a moment of really awed silence when both detective and scientist agreed

on the virtual identity of the phrase common to two hellish rituals so many worlds of distance apart. What, in substance, both the Esquimau wizards and the Louisiana swamp-priests had chanted to their kindred idols was something very like this—the word-divisions being guessed at from traditional breaks in the phrase as chanted aloud:

Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn.

Legrasse had one point in advance of Professor Webb, for several among his mongrel prisoners had repeated to him what older celebrants had told them the words meant. This text, as given, ran something like this:

In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming.

And now, in response to a general and urgent demand, Inspector Legrasse related as fully as possible his experience with the swamp worshippers; telling a story to which I could see my uncle attached profound significance. It savoured of the wildest dreams of myth-maker and theosophist, and disclosed an astonishing degree of cosmic imagination among such half-castes and pariahs as might be least expected to possess it.

On November 1st, 1907, there had come to the New Orleans police a frantic summons from the swamp and lagoon country to the south. The squatters there, mostly primitive but good-natured descendants of Lafitte's men,⁸ were in the grip of stark terror from an unknown thing which had stolen upon them in the night. It was voodoo, apparently, but voodoo of a more terrible sort than they had ever known; and some of their women and children had disappeared since the malevolent tom-tom had begun its incessant beating far within the black haunted woods where no dweller ventured. There were insane shouts and harrowing screams, soul-chilling chants and dancing devil-flames; and, the frightened messenger added, the people could stand it no more.

So a body of twenty police, filling two carriages and an automobile, had set out in the late afternoon with the shivering squatter as a guide. At the end of the passable road they alighted, and for miles splashed on in silence through the terrible cypress woods where day never came. Ugly roots and malignant hanging nooses of Spanish moss beset them, and now and then a pile of dank stones or fragment of a rotting wall intensified by its hint of morbid habitation a depression which every malformed tree and every fungous

islet combined to create. At length the squatter settlement, a miserable huddle of huts, hove in sight; and hysterical dwellers ran out to cluster around the group of bobbing lanterns. The muffled beat of tom-toms was now faintly audible far, far ahead; and a curdling shriek came at infrequent intervals when the wind shifted. A reddish glare, too, seemed to filter through the pale undergrowth beyond endless avenues of forest night. Reluctant even to be left alone again, each one of the cowed squatters refused point-blank to advance another inch toward the scene of unholy worship, so Inspector Legrasse and his nineteen colleagues plunged on unguided into black arcades of horror that none of them had ever trod before.

The region now entered by the police was one of traditionally evil repute, substantially unknown and untraversed by white men. There were legends of a hidden lake glimpsed by mortal sight, in which dwelt a huge, formless white polypous⁹ thing with luminous eyes; and squatters whispered that bat-winged devils flew up out of caverns in inner earth to worship it at midnight. They said it had been there before D'Iberville, before La Salle,¹⁰ before the Indians, and before even the wholesome beasts and birds of the woods. It was nightmare itself, and to see it was to die. But it made men dream, and so they knew enough to keep away. The present voodoo orgy was, indeed, on the merest fringe of this abhorred area, but that location was bad enough; hence perhaps the very place of the worship had terrified the squatters more than the shocking sounds and incidents.

Only poetry or madness could do justice to the noises heard by Legrasse's men as they ploughed on through the black morass toward the red glare and the muffled tom-toms. There are vocal qualities peculiar to men, and vocal qualities peculiar to beasts; and it is terrible to hear the one when the source should yield the other. Animal fury and orgiastic licence here whipped themselves to daemonic heights by howls and squawking ecstasies that tore and reverberated through those nighted woods like pestilential tempests from the gulfs of hell. Now and then the less organised ululation would cease, and from what seemed a well-drilled chorus of hoarse voices would rise in sing-song chant that hideous phrase or ritual:

"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn."

⁹ Of or characterized by polyps, bulbous growths set upon slender stalks.

¹⁰ Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville (1661–1706) and René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle (1643–1687).

⁸ Jean Lafitte, a pirate and sometimes-privateer, he aided in the defense of New Orleans in the War of 1812.

Then the men, having reached a spot where the trees were thinner, came suddenly in sight of the spectacle itself. Four of them reeled, one fainted, and two were shaken into a frantic cry which the mad cacophony of the orgy fortunately deadened. Legrasse dashed swamp water on the face of the fainting man, and all stood trembling and nearly hypnotised with horror.

In a natural glade of the swamp stood a grassy island of perhaps an acre's extent, clear of trees and tolerably dry. On this now leaped and twisted a more indescribable horde of human abnormality than any but a Sime or an Angarola could paint.¹¹ Void of clothing, this hybrid spawn were braying, bellowing, and writhing about a monstrous ring-shaped bonfire; in the centre of which, revealed by occasional rifts in the curtain of flame, stood a great granite monolith some eight feet in height; on top of which, incongruous with its diminutiveness, rested the noxious carven statuette. From a wide circle of ten scaffolds set up at regular intervals with the flame-girt monolith as a centre hung, head downward, the oddly marred bodies of the helpless squatters who had disappeared. It was inside this circle that the ring of worshippers jumped and roared, the general direction of the mass motion being from left to right in endless Bacchanal between the ring of bodies and the ring of fire.

It may have been only imagination and it may have been only echoes which induced one of the men, an excitable Spaniard, to fancy he heard antiphonal responses to the ritual from some far and unilluminated spot deeper within the wood of ancient legendry and horror. This man, Joseph D. Galvez, I later met and questioned; and he proved distractingly imaginative. He indeed went so far as to hint of the faint beating of great wings, and of a glimpse of shining eyes and a mountainous white bulk beyond the remotest trees—but I suppose he had been hearing too much native superstition.

Actually, the horrified pause of the men was of comparatively brief duration. Duty came first; and although there must have been nearly a hundred mongrel celebrants in the throng, the police relied on their firearms and plunged determinedly into the nauseous rout. For five minutes the resultant din and chaos were beyond description. Wild blows were struck, shots were fired, and escapes were made; but in the end Legrasse was able to count some forty-seven sullen prisoners, whom he forced to dress in haste and fall into line between two rows of policemen. Five of the worshippers lay

dead, and two severely wounded ones were carried away on improvised stretchers by their fellow-prisoners. The image on the monolith, of course, was carefully removed and carried back by Legrasse.

Examined at headquarters after a trip of intense strain and weariness, the prisoners all proved to be men of a very low, mixed-blooded, and mentally aberrant type. Most were seamen, and a sprinkling of negroes and mulattoes, largely West Indians or Brava Portuguese from the Cape Verde Islands, gave a colouring of voodooism to the heterogeneous cult. But before many questions were asked, it became manifest that something far deeper and older than negro fetichism was involved. Degraded and ignorant as they were, the creatures held with surprising consistency to the central idea of their loathsome faith.

They worshipped, so they said, the Great Old Ones who lived ages before there were any men, and who came to the young world out of the sky. Those Old Ones were gone now, inside the earth and under the sea; but their dead bodies had told their secrets in dreams to the first men, who formed a cult which had never died. This was that cult, and the prisoners said it had always existed and always would exist, hidden in distant wastes and dark places all over the world until the time when the great priest Cthulhu, from his dark house in the mighty city of R'lyeh under the waters, should rise and bring the earth again beneath his sway. Some day he would call, when the stars were ready, and the secret cult would always be waiting to liberate him.

Meanwhile no more must be told. There was a secret which even torture could not extract. Mankind was not absolutely alone among the conscious things of earth, for shapes came out of the dark to visit the faithful few. But these were not the Great Old Ones. No man had ever seen the Old Ones. The carven idol was great Cthulhu, but none might say whether or not the others were precisely like him. No one could read the old writing now, but things were told by word of mouth. The chanted ritual was not the secret—that was never spoken aloud, only whispered. The chant meant only this: "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming."

Only two of the prisoners were found sane enough to be hanged, and the rest were committed to various institutions. All denied a part in the ritual murders, and averred that the killing had been done by Black Winged Ones which had come to them from their immemorial meeting-place in the haunted wood. But of those mysterious allies no coherent account could ever be gained. What the police did extract, came

¹¹ Sidney Sime, a late Victorian painter and Anthony Angarola, an American painter of roughly the same time period.

mainly from an immensely aged mestizo¹² named Castro, who claimed to have sailed to strange ports and talked with undying leaders of the cult in the mountains of China.

Old Castro remembered bits of hideous legend that paled the speculations of theosophists and made man and the world seem recent and transient indeed. There had been aeons when other Things ruled on the earth, and They had had great cities. Remains of Them, he said the deathless Chinamen had told him, were still to be found as Cyclopean stones on islands in the Pacific. They all died vast epochs of time before men came, but there were arts which could revive Them when the stars had come round again to the right positions in the cycle of eternity. They had, indeed, come themselves from the stars, and brought Their images with Them.

These Great Old Ones, Castro continued, were not composed altogether of flesh and blood. They had shape—for did not this star-fashioned image prove it?—but that shape was not made of matter. When the stars were right, They could plunge from world to world through the sky; but when the stars were wrong, They could not live. But although They no longer lived, They would never really die. They all lay in stone houses in Their great city of R'lyeh, preserved by the spells of mighty Cthulhu for a glorious resurrection when the stars and the earth might once more be ready for Them. But at that time some force from outside must serve to liberate Their bodies. The spells that preserved Them intact likewise prevented Them from making an initial move, and They could only lie awake in the dark and think whilst uncounted millions of years rolled by. They knew all that was occurring in the universe, but Their mode of speech was transmitted thought. Even now They talked in Their tombs. When, after infinities of chaos, the first men came, the Great Old Ones spoke to the sensitive among them by moulding their dreams; for only thus could Their language reach the fleshly minds of mammals.

Then, whispered Castro, those first men formed the cult around small idols which the Great Ones showed them; idols brought in dim aeras from dark stars. That cult would never die till the stars came right again, and the secret priests would take great Cthulhu from His tomb to revive His subjects and resume His rule of earth. The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and revelling in

joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom. Meanwhile the cult, by appropriate rites, must keep alive the memory of those ancient ways and shadow forth the prophecy of their return.

In the elder time chosen men had talked with the entombed Old Ones in dreams, but then something had happened. The great stone city R'lyeh, with its monoliths and sepulchres, had sunk beneath the waves; and the deep waters, full of the one primal mystery through which not even thought can pass, had cut off the spectral intercourse. But memory never died, and high-priests said that the city would rise again when the stars were right. Then came out of the earth the black spirits of earth, mouldy and shadowy, and full of dim rumours picked up in caverns beneath forgotten sea-bottoms. But of them old Castro dared not speak much. He cut himself off hurriedly, and no amount of persuasion or subtlety could elicit more in this direction. The *size* of the Old Ones, too, he curiously declined to mention. Of the cult, he said that he thought the centre lay amid the pathless deserts of Arabia, where Irem, the City of Pillars,¹³ dreams hidden and untouched. It was not allied to the European witch-cult, and was virtually unknown beyond its members. No book had ever really hinted of it, though the deathless Chinamen said that there were double meanings in the *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred¹⁴ which the initiated might read as they chose, especially the much-discussed couplet:

*"That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange aeons even death may die."*

Legrasse, deeply impressed and not a little bewildered, had inquired in vain concerning the historic affiliations of the cult. Castro, apparently, had told the truth when he said that it was wholly secret. The authorities at Tulane University could shed no light upon either cult or image, and now the detective had come to the highest authorities in the country and met with no more than the Greenland tale of Professor Webb.

The feverish interest aroused at the meeting by Legrasse's tale, corroborated as it was by the statuette, is echoed in the subsequent correspondence of those who attended; although

¹³ Iram is mentioned in the Quran (89.6–14) as a lost city.

¹⁴ The *Necronomicon* (Book of the Dead), is a fictional grimoire invented by Lovecraft and appears in a number of his stories. Abdul Alhazred (often referred to simply as "The Mad Arab") is its equally fictional author.

¹² An individual of mixed ancestry, specifically of European and Native American lineage.

scant mention occurs in the formal publications of the society. Caution is the first care of those accustomed to face occasional charlatanry and imposture. Legrasse for some time lent the image to Professor Webb, but at the latter's death it was returned to him and remains in his possession, where I viewed it not long ago. It is truly a terrible thing, and unmistakably akin to the dream-sculpture of young Wilcox.

That my uncle was excited by the tale of the sculptor I did not wonder, for what thoughts must arise upon hearing, after a knowledge of what Legrasse had learned of the cult, of a sensitive young man who had *dreamed* not only the figure and exact hieroglyphics of the swamp-found image and the Greenland devil tablet, but had come *in his dreams* upon at least three of the precise words of the formula uttered alike by Esquimau diabolists and mongrel Louisianans? Professor Angell's instant start on an investigation of the utmost thoroughness was eminently natural; though privately I suspected young Wilcox of having heard of the cult in some indirect way, and of having invented a series of dreams to heighten and continue the mystery at my uncle's expense. The dream-narratives and cuttings collected by the professor were, of course, strong corroboration; but the rationalism of my mind and the extravagance of the whole subject led me to adopt what I thought the most sensible conclusions. So, after thoroughly studying the manuscript again and correlating the theosophical and anthropological notes with the cult narrative of Legrasse, I made a trip to Providence to see the sculptor and give him the rebuke I thought proper for so boldly imposing upon a learned and aged man.

Wilcox still lived alone in the Fleur-de-Lys Building in Thomas Street, a hideous Victorian imitation of seventeenth-century Breton architecture which flaunts its stuccoed front amidst the lovely colonial houses on the ancient hill, and under the very shadow of the finest Georgian steeple in America. I found him at work in his rooms, and at once conceded from the specimens scattered about that his genius is indeed profound and authentic. He will, I believe, some time be heard from as one of the great decadents; for he has crystallised in clay and will one day mirror in marble those nightmares and phantasies which Arthur Machen evokes in prose, and Clark Ashton Smith makes visible in verse and in painting.¹⁵

¹⁵ Arthur Machen (1863–1947) was an Irish mystic and writer, particularly excelling at horror stories. Clark Ashton Smith (1893–1961) was a horror writer, Romantic poet, and sculptor; he wrote for *Weird Tales* along with Lovecraft.

Dark, frail, and somewhat unkempt in aspect, he turned languidly at my knock and asked me my business without rising. When I told him who I was, he displayed some interest; for my uncle had excited his curiosity in probing his strange dreams, yet had never explained the reason for the study. I did not enlarge his knowledge in this regard, but sought with some subtlety to draw him out. In a short time I became convinced of his absolute sincerity, for he spoke of the dreams in a manner none could mistake. They and their subconscious residuum had influenced his art profoundly, and he showed me a morbid statue whose contours almost made me shake with the potency of its black suggestion. He could not recall having seen the original of this thing except in his own dream bas-relief, but the outlines had formed themselves insensibly under his hands. It was, no doubt, the giant shape he had raved of in delirium. That he really knew nothing of the hidden cult, save from what my uncle's relentless catechism had let fall, he soon made clear; and again I strove to think of some way in which he could possibly have received the weird impressions.

He talked of his dreams in a strangely poetic fashion; making me see with terrible vividness the damp Cyclopean city of slimy green stone—whose *geometry*, he oddly said, was *all wrong*—and hear with frightened expectancy the ceaseless, half-mental calling from underground: "*Cthulhu fhtagn*," "*Cthulhu fhtagn*."

These words had formed part of that dread ritual which told of dead Cthulhu's dream-vigil in his stone vault at R'lyeh, and I felt deeply moved despite my rational beliefs. Wilcox, I was sure, had heard of the cult in some casual way, and had soon forgotten it amidst the mass of his equally weird reading and imagining. Later, by virtue of its sheer impressiveness, it had found subconscious expression in dreams, in the bas-relief, and in the terrible statue I now beheld; so that his imposture upon my uncle had been a very innocent one. The youth was of a type, at once slightly affected and slightly ill-mannered, which I could never like; but I was willing enough now to admit both his genius and his honesty. I took leave of him amicably, and wish him all the success his talent promises.

The matter of the cult still remained to fascinate me, and at times I had visions of personal fame from researches into its origin and connexions. I visited New Orleans, talked with Legrasse and others of that old-time raiding-party, saw the frightful image, and even questioned such of the mongrel prisoners as still survived. Old Castro, unfortunately, had been dead for some years. What I now heard so graphically at

first-hand, though it was really no more than a detailed confirmation of what my uncle had written, excited me afresh; for I felt sure that I was on the track of a very real, very secret, and very ancient religion whose discovery would make me an anthropologist of note. My attitude was still one of absolute materialism, *as I wish it still were*, and I discounted with almost inexplicable perversity the coincidence of the dream notes and odd cuttings collected by Professor Angell.

One thing I began to suspect, and which I now fear I *know*, is that my uncle's death was far from natural. He fell on a narrow hill street leading up from an ancient waterfront swarming with foreign mongrels, after a careless push from a negro sailor. I did not forget the mixed blood and marine pursuits of the cult-members in Louisiana, and would not be surprised to learn of secret methods and poison needles as ruthless and as anciently known as the cryptic rites and beliefs. Legrasse and his men, it is true, have been let alone; but in Norway a certain seaman who saw things is dead. Might not the deeper inquiries of my uncle after encountering the sculptor's data have come to sinister ears? I think Professor Angell died because he knew too much, or because he was likely to learn too much. Whether I shall go as he did remains to be seen, for I have learned much now.

III. The Madness from the Sea

If heaven ever wishes to grant me a boon, it will be a total effacing of the results of a mere chance which fixed my eye on a certain stray piece of shelf-paper. It was nothing on which I would naturally have stumbled in the course of my daily round, for it was an old number of an Australian journal, the *Sydney Bulletin* for April 18, 1925. It had escaped even the cutting bureau which had at the time of its issuance been avidly collecting material for my uncle's research.

I had largely given over my inquiries into what Professor Angell called the "Cthulhu Cult," and was visiting a learned friend in Paterson, New Jersey; the curator of a local museum and a mineralogist of note. Examining one day the reserve specimens roughly set on the storage shelves in a rear room of the museum, my eye was caught by an odd picture in one of the old papers spread beneath the stones. It was the *Sydney Bulletin* I have mentioned, for my friend has wide affiliations in all conceivable foreign parts; and the picture was a half-tone cut of a hideous stone image almost identical with that which Legrasse had found in the swamp.

Eagerly clearing the sheet of its precious contents, I scanned the item in detail; and was disappointed to find it

of only moderate length. What it suggested, however, was of portentous significance to my flagging quest; and I carefully tore it out for immediate action. It read as follows:

MYSTERY DERELICT FOUND AT SEA

Vigilant Arrives With Helpless Armed New Zealand Yacht in Tow. One Survivor and Dead Man Found Aboard. Tale of Desperate Battle and Deaths at Sea. Rescued Seaman Refuses Particulars of Strange Experience. Odd Idol Found in His Possession. Inquiry to Follow.

The Morrison Co.'s freighter *Vigilant*, bound from Valparaiso, arrived this morning at its wharf in Darling Harbour, having in tow the battled and disabled but heavily armed steam yacht *Alert* of Dunedin, N. Z., which was sighted April 12th in S. Latitude 34° 21', W. Longitude 152° 17' with one living and one dead man aboard.

The *Vigilant* left Valparaiso March 25th, and on April 2nd was driven considerably south of her course by exceptionally heavy storms and monster waves. On April 12th the derelict was sighted; and though apparently deserted, was found upon boarding to contain one survivor in a half-delirious condition and one man who had evidently been dead for more than a week.

The living man was clutching a horrible stone idol of unknown origin, about a foot in height, regarding whose nature authorities at Sydney University, the Royal Society, and the Museum in College Street all profess complete bafflement, and which the survivor says he found in the cabin of the yacht, in a small carved shrine of common pattern.

This man, after recovering his senses, told an exceedingly strange story of piracy and slaughter. He is Gustaf Johansen, a Norwegian of some intelligence, and had been second mate of the two-masted schooner *Emma* of Auckland, which sailed for Callao February 20th with a complement of eleven men.

The *Emma*, he says, was delayed and thrown widely south of her course by the great storm of March 1st, and on March 22nd, in S. Latitude 49° 51', W. Longitude 128° 34', encountered the *Alert*, manned by a queer and evil-looking crew of Kanakas¹⁶ and half-

¹⁶ A native of one of the Nicobar Islands in southern India.

castes. Being ordered peremptorily to turn back, Capt. Collins refused; whereupon the strange crew began to fire savagely and without warning upon the schooner with a peculiarly heavy battery of brass cannon forming part of the yacht's equipment.

The *Emma's* men showed fight, says the survivor, and though the schooner began to sink from shots beneath the waterline they managed to heave alongside their enemy and board her, grappling with the savage crew on the yacht's deck, and being forced to kill them all, the number being slightly superior, because of their particularly abhorrent and desperate though rather clumsy mode of fighting.

Three of the *Emma's* men, including Capt. Collins and First Mate Green, were killed; and the remaining eight under Second Mate Johansen proceeded to navigate the captured yacht, going ahead in their original direction to see if any reason for their ordering back had existed.

The next day, it appears, they raised and landed on a small island, although none is known to exist in that part of the ocean; and six of the men somehow died ashore, though Johansen is queerly reticent about this part of his story, and speaks only of their falling into a rock chasm.

Later, it seems, he and one companion boarded the yacht and tried to manage her, but were beaten about by the storm of April 2nd.

From that time till his rescue on the 12th the man remembers little, and he does not even recall when William Briden, his companion, died. Briden's death reveals no apparent cause, and was probably due to excitement or exposure.

Cable advices from Dunedin report that the *Alert* was well known there as an island trader, and bore an evil reputation along the waterfront. It was owned by a curious group of half-castes whose frequent meetings and night trips to the woods attracted no little curiosity; and it had set sail in great haste just after the storm and earth tremors of March 1st.

Our Auckland correspondent gives the *Emma* and her crew an excellent reputation, and Johansen is described as a sober and worthy man.

The admiralty will institute an inquiry on the whole matter beginning tomorrow, at which every effort

will be made to induce Johansen to speak more freely than he has done hitherto.

This was all, together with the picture of the hellish image; but what a train of ideas it started in my mind! Here were new treasuries of data on the Cthulhu Cult, and evidence that it had strange interests at sea as well as on land. What motive prompted the hybrid crew to order back the *Emma* as they sailed about with their hideous idol? What was the unknown island on which six of the *Emma's* crew had died, and about which the mate Johansen was so secretive? What had the vice-admiralty's investigation brought out, and what was known of the noxious cult in Dunedin? And most marvellous of all, what deep and more than natural linkage of dates was this which gave a malign and now undeniable significance to the various turns of events so carefully noted by my uncle?

March 1st—our February 28th according to the International Date Line—the earthquake and storm had come. From Dunedin the *Alert* and her noisome crew had darted eagerly forth as if imperiously summoned, and on the other side of the earth poets and artists had begun to dream of a strange, dank Cyclopean city whilst a young sculptor had moulded in his sleep the form of the dreaded Cthulhu. March 23d the crew of the *Emma* landed on an unknown island and left six men dead; and on that date the dreams of sensitive men assumed a heightened vividness and darkened with dread of a giant monster's malign pursuit, whilst an architect had gone mad and a sculptor had lapsed suddenly into delirium! And what of this storm of April 2nd—the date on which all dreams of the dank city ceased, and Wilcox emerged unharmed from the bondage of strange fever? What of all this—and of those hints of old Castro about the sunken, star-born Old Ones and their coming reign; their faithful cult *and their mastery of dreams*? Was I tottering on the brink of cosmic horrors beyond man's power to bear? If so, they must be horrors of the mind alone, for in some way the second of April had put a stop to whatever monstrous menace had begun its siege of mankind's soul.

That evening, after a day of hurried cabling and arranging, I bade my host adieu and took a train for San Francisco. In less than a month I was in Dunedin; where, however, I found that little was known of the strange cult-members who had lingered in the old sea taverns. Waterfront scum was far too common for special mention; though there was vague talk about one inland trip these mongrels had made, during which faint drumming and red flame were noted on the distant hills.

In Auckland I learned that Johansen had returned *with yellow hair turned white* after a perfunctory and inconclusive

questioning at Sydney, and had thereafter sold his cottage in West Street and sailed with his wife to his old home in Oslo. Of his stirring experience he would tell his friends no more than he had told the admiralty officials, and all they could do was to give me his Oslo address.

After that I went to Sydney and talked profitlessly with seamen and members of the vice-admiralty court. I saw the *Alert*, now sold and in commercial use, at Circular Quay in Sydney Cove, but gained nothing from its non-committal bulk. The crouching image with its cuttlefish head, dragon body, scaly wings, and hieroglyphed pedestal, was preserved in the Museum at Hyde Park; and I studied it long and well, finding it a thing of balefully exquisite workmanship, and with the same utter mystery, terrible antiquity, and unearthly strangeness of material which I had noted in Legrasse's smaller specimen. Geologists, the curator told me, had found it a monstrous puzzle; for they vowed that the world held no rock like it. Then I thought with a shudder of what old Castro had told Legrasse about the primal Great Ones: "They had come from the stars, and had brought Their images with Them."

Shaken with such a mental revolution as I had never before known, I now resolved to visit Mate Johansen in Oslo. Sailing for London, I reëmbarked at once for the Norwegian capital; and one autumn day landed at the trim wharves in the shadow of the Egeberg.

Johansen's address, I discovered, lay in the Old Town of King Harold Haardrada, which kept alive the name of Oslo during all the centuries that the greater city masqueraded as "Christiana." I made the brief trip by taxicab, and knocked with palpitant heart at the door of a neat and ancient building with plastered front. A sad-faced woman in black answered my summons, and I was stung with disappointment when she told me in halting English that Gustaf Johansen was no more.

He had not survived his return, said his wife, for the doings at sea in 1925 had broken him. He had told her no more than he had told the public, but had left a long manuscript—of "technical matters" as he said—written in English, evidently in order to safeguard her from the peril of casual perusal. During a walk through a narrow lane near the Gothenburg dock, a bundle of papers falling from an attic window had knocked him down. Two Lascar¹⁷ sailors at once helped him to his feet, but before the ambulance could reach him he was dead. Physicians found no adequate cause for the end, and laid it to heart trouble and a weakened constitution.

I now felt gnawing at my vitals that dark terror which will never leave me till I, too, am at rest; "accidentally" or otherwise. Persuading the widow that my connexion with her husband's "technical matters" was sufficient to entitle me to his manuscript, I bore the document away and began to read it on the London boat.

It was a simple, rambling thing—a naive sailor's effort at a post-facto diary—and strove to recall day by day that last awful voyage. I cannot attempt to transcribe it verbatim in all its cloudiness and redundance, but I will tell its gist enough to show why the sound of the water against the vessel's sides became so unendurable to me that I stopped my ears with cotton.

Johansen, thank God, did not know quite all, even though he saw the city and the Thing, but I shall never sleep calmly again when I think of the horrors that lurk ceaselessly behind life in time and in space, and of those unhallowed blasphemies from elder stars which dream beneath the sea, known and favoured by a nightmare cult ready and eager to loose them on the world whenever another earthquake shall heave their monstrous stone city again to the sun and air.

Johansen's voyage had begun just as he told it to the vice-admiralty. The *Emma*, in ballast, had cleared Auckland on February 20th, and had felt the full force of that earthquake-born tempest which must have heaved up from the sea-bottom the horrors that filled men's dreams. Once more under control, the ship was making good progress when held up by the *Alert* on March 22nd, and I could feel the mate's regret as he wrote of her bombardment and sinking. Of the swarthy cult-fiends on the *Alert* he speaks with significant horror. There was some peculiarly abominable quality about them which made their destruction seem almost a duty, and Johansen shows ingenuous wonder at the charge of ruthlessness brought against his party during the proceedings of the court of inquiry. Then, driven ahead by curiosity in their captured yacht under Johansen's command, the men sight a great stone pillar sticking out of the sea, and in S. Latitude 47° 9', W. Longitude 126° 43' come upon a coast-line of mingled mud, ooze, and weedy Cyclopean masonry which can be nothing less than the tangible substance of earth's supreme terror—the nightmare corpse-city of R'lyeh, that was built in measureless aeons behind history by the vast, loathsome shapes that seeped down from the dark stars. There lay great Cthulhu and his hordes, hidden in green slimy vaults and sending out at last, after cycles incalculable, the thoughts that spread fear to the dreams of the sensitive and called imperiously to the faithful to come on a pilgrimage of liberation and

¹⁷ An general term for sailors from eastern countries (especially India) serving on European ships.

restoration. All this Johansen did not suspect, but God knows he soon saw enough!

I suppose that only a single mountain-top, the hideous monolith-crowned citadel whereon great Cthulhu was buried, actually emerged from the waters. When I think of the *extent* of all that may be brooding down there I almost wish to kill myself forthwith. Johansen and his men were awed by the cosmic majesty of this dripping Babylon of elder daemons, and must have guessed without guidance that it was nothing of this or of any sane planet. Awe at the unbelievable size of the greenish stone blocks, at the dizzying height of the great carven monolith, and at the stupefying identity of the colossal statues and bas-reliefs with the queer image found in the shrine on the *Alert*, is poignantly visible in every line of the mate's frightened description.

Without knowing what futurism is like, Johansen achieved something very close to it when he spoke of the city; for instead of describing any definite structure or building, he dwells only on broad impressions of vast angles and stone surfaces—surfaces too great to belong to any thing right or proper for this earth, and impious with horrible images and hieroglyphs. I mention his talk about *angles* because it suggests something Wilcox had told me of his awful dreams. He had said that the *geometry* of the dream-place he saw was abnormal, non-Euclidean, and loathsomely redolent of spheres and dimensions apart from ours. Now an unlettered seaman felt the same thing whilst gazing at the terrible reality.

Johansen and his men landed at a sloping mud-bank on this monstrous Acropolis, and clambered slipperily up over titan oozy blocks which could have been no mortal staircase. The very sun of heaven seemed distorted when viewed through the polarising miasma welling out from this sea-soaked perversion, and twisted menace and suspense lurked leeringly in those crazily elusive angles of carven rock where a second glance showed concavity after the first showed convexity.

Something very like fright had come over all the explorers before anything more definite than rock and ooze and weed was seen. Each would have fled had he not feared the scorn of the others, and it was only half-heartedly that they searched—vainly, as it proved—for some portable souvenir to bear away.

It was Rodriguez the Portuguese who climbed up the foot of the monolith and shouted of what he had found. The rest followed him, and looked curiously at the immense carved door with the now familiar squid-dragon bas-relief. It was,

Johansen said, like a great barn-door; and they all felt that it was a door because of the ornate lintel, threshold, and jambs around it, though they could not decide whether it lay flat like a trap-door or slantwise like an outside cellar-door. As Wilcox would have said, the geometry of the place was all wrong. One could not be sure that the sea and the ground were horizontal, hence the relative position of everything else seemed phantasmally variable.

Briden pushed at the stone in several places without result. Then Donovan felt over it delicately around the edge, pressing each point separately as he went. He climbed interminably along the grotesque stone moulding—that is, one would call it climbing if the thing was not after all horizontal—and the men wondered how any door in the universe could be so vast. Then, very softly and slowly, the acre-great panel began to give inward at the top; and they saw that it was balanced. Donovan slid or somehow propelled himself down or along the jamb and rejoined his fellows, and everyone watched the queer recession of the monstrously carven portal. In this phantasy of prismatic distortion it moved anomalously in a diagonal way, so that all the rules of matter and perspective seemed upset.

The aperture was black with a darkness almost material. That tenebrousness was indeed a *positive quality*; for it obscured such parts of the inner walls as ought to have been revealed, and actually burst forth like smoke from its aeon-long imprisonment, visibly darkening the sun as it slunk away into the shrunken and gibbous sky on flapping membraneous wings. The odour arising from the newly opened depths was intolerable, and at length the quick-eared Hawkins thought he heard a nasty, slopping sound down there. Everyone listened, and everyone was listening still when It lumbered slobberingly into sight and gropingly squeezed its gelatinous green immensity through the black doorway into the tainted outside air of that poison city of madness.

Poor Johansen's handwriting almost gave out when he wrote of this. Of the six men who never reached the ship, he thinks two perished of pure fright in that accursed instant. The Thing cannot be described—there is no language for such abysses of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order. A mountain walked or stumbled. God! What wonder that across the earth a great architect went mad, and poor Wilcox raved with fever in that telepathic instant? The Thing of the idols, the green, sticky spawn of the stars, had awaked to claim his own. The stars were right again, and what an age-old cult had failed to do by design, a band of innocent sailors had done by

accident. After vigintillions of years great Cthulhu was loose again, and ravening for delight.

Three men were swept up by the flabby claws before anybody turned. God rest them, if there be any rest in the universe. They were Donovan, Guerrero, and Ångstrom. Parker slipped as the other three were plunging frenziedly over endless vistas of green-crustled rock to the boat, and Johansen swears he was swallowed up by an angle of masonry which shouldn't have been there; an angle which was acute, but behaved as if it were obtuse. So only Briden and Johansen reached the boat, and pulled desperately for the *Alert* as the mountainous monstrosity flopped down the slimy stones and hesitated floundering at the edge of the water.

Steam had not been suffered to go down entirely, despite the departure of all hands for the shore; and it was the work of only a few moments of feverish rushing up and down between wheel and engines to get the *Alert* under way. Slowly, amidst the distorted horrors of that indescribable scene, she began to churn the lethal waters; whilst on the masonry of that charnel shore that was not of earth the titan Thing from the stars slavered and gibbered like Polypheme¹⁸ cursing the fleeing ship of Odysseus. Then, bolder than the storied Cyclops, great Cthulhu slid greasily into the water and began to pursue with vast wave-raising strokes of cosmic potency. Briden looked back and went mad, laughing shrilly as he kept on laughing at intervals till death found him one night in the cabin whilst Johansen was wandering deliriously.

But Johansen had not given out yet. Knowing that the Thing could surely overtake the *Alert* until steam was fully up, he resolved on a desperate chance; and, setting the engine for full speed, ran lightning-like on deck and reversed the wheel. There was a mighty eddying and foaming in the noisome brine, and as the steam mounted higher and higher the brave Norwegian drove his vessel head on against the pursuing jelly which rose above the unclean froth like the stern of a daemon galleon. The awful squid-head with writhing feelers came nearly up to the bowsprit of the sturdy yacht, but Johansen drove on relentlessly.

There was a bursting as of an exploding bladder, a slushy nastiness as of a cloven sunfish, a stench as of a thousand opened graves, and a sound that the chronicler would not put on paper. For an instant the ship was befouled by an acrid and blinding green cloud, and then there was only a venomous seething astern; where—God in heaven!—the scattered plas-

ticity of that nameless sky-spawn was nebulously *recombining* in its hateful original form, whilst its distance widened every second as the *Alert* gained impetus from its mounting steam.

That was all. After that Johansen only brooded over the idol in the cabin and attended to a few matters of food for himself and the laughing maniac by his side. He did not try to navigate after the first bold flight, for the reaction had taken something out of his soul. Then came the storm of April 2nd, and a gathering of the clouds about his consciousness. There is a sense of spectral whirling through liquid gulfs of infinity, of dizzying rides through reeling universes on a comet's tail, and of hysterical plunges from the pit to the moon and from the moon back again to the pit, all livened by a cachinnating chorus of the distorted, hilarious elder gods and the green, bat-winged mocking imps of Tartarus.

Out of that dream came rescue—the *Vigilant*, the vice-admiralty court, the streets of Dunedin, and the long voyage back home to the old house by the Egeberg. He could not tell—they would think him mad. He would write of what he knew before death came, but his wife must not guess. Death would be a boon if only it could blot out the memories.

That was the document I read, and now I have placed it in the tin box beside the bas-relief and the papers of Professor Angell. With it shall go this record of mine—this test of my own sanity, wherein is pieced together that which I hope may never be pieced together again. I have looked upon all that the universe has to hold of horror, and even the skies of spring and the flowers of summer must ever afterward be poison to me. But I do not think my life will be long. As my uncle went, as poor Johansen went, so I shall go. I know too much, and the cult still lives.

Cthulhu still lives, too, I suppose, again in that chasm of stone which has shielded him since the sun was young. His accursed city is sunken once more, for the *Vigilant* sailed over the spot after the April storm; but his ministers on earth still bellow and prance and slay around idol-capped monoliths in lonely places. He must have been trapped by the sinking whilst within his black abyss, or else the world would by now be screaming with fright and frenzy. Who knows the end? What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise. Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep, and decay spreads over the tottering cities of men. A time will come—but I must not and cannot think! Let me pray that, if I do not survive this manuscript, my executors may put caution before audacity and see that it meets no other eye.

18 Polyphemus, the Cyclops blinded and tricked by Odysseus in *The Odyssey*.

SKETCH OF CTHULHU

Critical Introduction

While H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu is among the most iconic figures in the history of the horror genre, Lovecraft only produced a single surviving image of this high priest of the Great Old Ones, the Elder Gods. The inscription on the sketch suggests that it was used as the basis for a sculpture by Lovecraft's childhood friend and eventual literary executor R. H. Barlow, though no such work has survived. Like most of Lovecraft's imagery, the description of Cthulhu is more allusive than precise. His writing style does not so much conjure specific beings and settings as it suggests impossible, unimaginable entities. "Unknown," for example, appears nine times in the text of the short story "The Call of Cthulhu." Lovecraft describes an image of the Old One as, in essence indescribable:

Above these apparent hieroglyphics was a figure of evidently pictorial intent, though its impressionistic execution forbade a very clear idea of its nature. It seemed to be a sort of monster, or symbol representing a monster, of a form which only a diseased fancy could conceive. If I say that my somewhat extravagant imagination yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature, I shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing. A pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings; but it was the general outline of the whole which made it most shockingly frightful.

In comparison, the sketch itself is somewhat surprising. While many modern images of Cthulhu attempt to present a dark, frightening horror, Lovecraft's is more melancholic. It seems to show a sculpture of the figure, seated atop a plinth marked

with a cryptic, illegible script. The figure does seem scaly and winged in the manner of a dragon and anthropomorphic in overall shape, while the head is tentacled like an octopus. Further, we can see three eyes on the visible side of the head, suggesting six in total. The pose recalls Auguste Rodin's famous sculpture *The Thinker* (1880), which Lovecraft could have seen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art while living in New York in the 1920s, and this association amplifies the contemplative tone of the sketch.

Viewing Questions

Is this image how you would imagine the figure, based on the textual description? How might you draw the same figure based on Lovecraft's story?

ASM

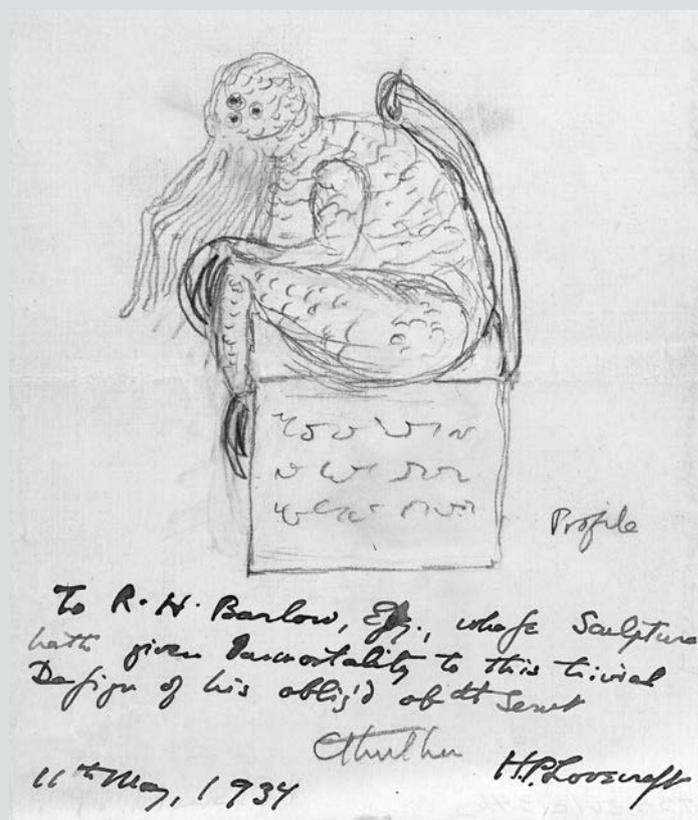


Figure 11. Sketch of Cthulhu by H. P. Lovecraft. Twentieth Century (1934), 6 ¼ × 4 ⅞ in. John Hay Library and Special Collections, Brown University. A55361 [344-46], Box 24

C. L. MOORE, “SHAMBLEAU”

Critical Introduction

Catherine Lucille Moore (1911–1987), who wrote under the pen name C. L. Moore, was one of the earliest female science-fiction writers, working mostly in pulp magazines such as *Astounding Science Fiction* and *Weird Tales*. “Shambleau” (1933) was written early in her career and established the Northwest Smith character, to whom she would return again and again. But Smith is not the star of this particular tale: as it proceeds, his easy confidence fades, and he ends the narrative deeply shaken by his encounter with the Shambleau.

In science-fiction—where human beings are often the minority—it is difficult to consider anything a monster. This is especially true with the Shambleau, whose feline physical features neither repulse nor initially attract Smith. By the time she has Smith mentally in her grasp, however, the reader might be unsurprised that Yarol finds him physically entwined in her hidden, worm-like tentacles. This is not necessarily because tentacles are somehow inherently related to monstrosity (though [H. P. Lovecraft’s Cthulhu](#) sports them as well), but because Moore uses the hallmarks of a *femme fatale* to telegraph that Shambleau is as dangerous as she is desirable. Like [Bram Stoker’s Dracula](#), she exerts a sexualized, hypnotic hold over her victim, but unlike the Count, she does not seem to be intent on domination: the narrative makes clear that this is how she survives. Removed from a Christian context, the space vampire is neither undead nor evil like its predecessors, but it is still a dangerous creature, as shown by the final conversation between Yarol and Smith.

Reading Questions

Although Moore is careful to remove the outright evil aspects of previously Earth-bound vampires, she maintains a mysterious background for the Shambleau. As you read, think about why Moore works to explain and mystify the Shambleau at the same time.

After you have finished reading the story, try to identify the differences between the Shambleau vampire in this story and the “classic” vampire in *Dracula* (if you have not read all of *Dracula*, perhaps consider the film adaptations instead). Why do you think these differences are important? That is, are they differences that merely serve the narrative, or can they be attributed to the science-fiction genre, the particular cultural context of the 1930s, or a female perspective on the vampire?

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“SHAMBLEAU”

C. L. MOORE

MAN HAS CONQUERED space before. You may be sure of that. Somewhere beyond the Egyptians, in that dimness out of which come echoes of half-mythical names—Atlantis, Mu—somewhere back of history's first beginnings there must have been an age when mankind, like us today, built cities of steel to house its star-roving ships and knew the names of the planets in their own native tongues—heard Venus' people call their wet world “Sha-ardol” in that soft, sweet, slurring speech and mimicked Mars' guttural “Lakkdiz” from the harsh tongues of Mars' dry-land dwellers. You may be sure of it. Man has conquered Space before, and out of that conquest faint, faint echoes run still through a world that has forgotten the very fact of a civilization which must have been as mighty as our own. There have been too many myths and legends for us to doubt it. The myth of the Medusa, for instance, can never have had its roots in the soil of Earth. That tale of the snake-haired Gorgon whose gaze turned the gazer to stone never originated about any creature that Earth nourished. And those ancient Greeks who told the story must have remembered, dimly and half believing, a tale of antiquity about some strange being from one of the outlying planets their remotest ancestors once trod.

“Shambleau! Ha... Shambleau!” The wild hysteria of the mob rocketed from wall to wall of Lakkdarol's narrow streets and the storming of heavy boots over the slag-red pavement made an ominous undernote to that swelling bay, “Shambleau! Shambleau!”

Northwest Smith heard it coming and stepped into the nearest doorway, laying a wary hand on his heat-gun's grip, and his colorless eyes narrowed. Strange sounds were common enough in the streets of Earth's latest colony on Mars—a raw, red little town where anything might happen, and very often did. But Northwest Smith, whose name is known and respected in every dive and wild outpost on a dozen wild planets, was a cautious man, despite his reputation. He set his back against the wall and gripped his pistol, and heard the rising shout come nearer and nearer.

Then into his range of vision flashed a red running figure, dodging like a hunted hare from shelter to shelter in the narrow street. It was a girl—a berry-brown girl in a single tattered garment whose scarlet burnt the eyes with its brilliance. She ran wearily, and he could hear her gasping breath

from where he stood. As she came into view he saw her hesitate and lean one hand against the wall for support, and glance wildly around for shelter. She must not have seen him in the depths of the doorway, for as the bay of the mob grew louder and the pounding of feet sounded almost at the corner she gave a despairing little moan and dodged into the recess at his very side.

When she saw him standing there, tall and leather-brown, hand on his heat-gun, she sobbed once, inarticulately, and collapsed at his feet, a huddle of burning scarlet and bare, brown limbs.

Smith had not seen her face, but she was a girl, and sweetly made and in danger; and though he had not the reputation of a chivalrous man, something in her hopeless huddle at his feet touched that chord of sympathy for the underdog that stirs in every Earthman, and he pushed her gently into the corner behind him and jerked out his gun, just as the first of the running mob rounded the corner.

It was a motley crowd, Earthmen and Martians and a sprinkling of Venusian swampmen and strange, nameless denizens of unnamed planets—a typical Lakkdarol mob. When the first of them turned the corner and saw the empty street before them there was a faltering in the rush and the foremost spread out and began to search the doorways on both sides of the street.

“Looking for something?” Smith's sardonic call sounded clear above the clamor of the mob.

They turned. The shouting died for a moment as they took in the scene before them—tall Earthman in the space-explorer's leathern garb, all one color from the burning of savage suns save for the sinister pallor of his no-colored eyes in a scarred and resolute face, gun in his steady hand and the scarlet girl crouched behind him, panting.

The foremost of the crowd—a burly Earthman in tattered leather from which the Patrol insignia had been ripped away—stared for a moment with a strange expression of incredulity on his face overspreading the savage exultation of the chase. Then he let loose a deep-throated bellow, “Shambleau!” and lunged forward. Behind him the mob took up the cry again, “Shambleau! Shambleau! Shambleau!” and surged after.

Smith, lounging negligently against the wall, arms folded and gun-hand draped over his left forearm, looked incapable

of swift motion, but at the leader's first forward step the pistol swept in a practised half-circle and the dazzle of blue-white heat leaping from its muzzle seared an arc in the slag pavement at his feet. It was an old gesture, and not a man in the crowd but understood it. The foremost recoiled swiftly against the surge of those in the rear, and for a moment there was confusion as the two tides met and struggled. Smith's mouth curled into a grim curve as he watched. The man in the mutilated Patrol uniform lifted a threatening fist and stepped to the very edge of the deadline, while the crowd rocked to and fro behind him.

"Are you crossing that line?" queried Smith in an ominously gentle voice.

"We want that girl!"

"Come and get her!" Recklessly Smith grinned into his face. He saw danger there, but his defiance was not the foolhardy gesture it seemed. An expert psychologist of mobs from long experience, he sensed no murder here. Not a gun had appeared in any hand in the crowd. They desired the girl with an inexplicable bloodthirstiness he was at a loss to understand, but toward himself he sensed no such fury. A mauling he might expect, but his life was in no danger. Guns would have appeared before now if they were coming out at all. So he grinned in the man's angry face and leaned lazily against the wall.

Behind their self-appointed leader the crowd milled impatiently, and threatening voices began to rise again. Smith heard the girl moan at his feet.

"What do you want with her?" he demanded.

"She's Shambleau! Shambleau, you fool! Kick her out of there—we'll take care of her!"

"I'm taking care of her," drawled Smith.

"She's Shambleau, I tell you! Damn your hide, man, we never let those things live! Kick her out here!"

The repeated name had no meaning to him, but Smith's innate stubbornness rose defiantly as the crowd surged forward to the very edge of the arc, their clamor growing louder. "Shambleau! Kick her out here! Give us Shambleau! Shambleau!"

Smith dropped his indolent pose like a cloak and planted both feet wide, swinging up his gun threateningly. "Keep back!" he yelled. "She's mine! Keep back!"

He had no intention of using that heat-beam. He knew by now that they would not kill him unless he started the gun-play himself, and he did not mean to give up his life for any girl alive. But a severe mauling he expected, and he braced himself instinctively as the mob heaved within itself.

To his astonishment a thing happened then that he had never known to happen before. At his shouted defiance the foremost of the mob—those who had heard him clearly—drew back a little, not in alarm but evidently surprised. The ex-Patrolman said, "Yours! She's yours?" in a voice from which puzzlement crowded out the anger.

Smith spread his booted legs wide before the crouching figure and flourished his gun.

"Yes," he said. "And I'm keeping her! Stand back there!"

The man stared at him wordlessly, and horror and disgust and incredulity mingled on his weather-beaten face. The incredulity triumphed for a moment and he said again,

"Yours!"

Smith nodded defiance.

The man stepped back suddenly, unutterable contempt in his very pose. He waved an arm to the crowd and said loudly, "It's—his!" and the press melted away, gone silent, too, and the look of contempt spread from face to face.

The ex-Patrolman spat on the slag-paved street and turned his back indifferently. "Keep her, then," he advised briefly over one shoulder, "But don't let her out again in this town!"

Smith stared in perplexity almost open-mouthed as the suddenly scornful mob began to break up. His mind was in a whirl. That such bloodthirsty animosity should vanish in a breath he could not believe. And the curious mingling of contempt and disgust on the faces he saw baffled him even more. Lakkdarol was anything but a puritan town—it did not enter his head for a moment that his claiming the brown girl as his own had caused that strangely shocked revulsion to spread through the crowd. No, it was something deeper-rooted than that. Instinctive, instant disgust had been in the faces he saw—they would have looked less so if he had admitted cannibalism or *Pharol*-worship.

And they were leaving his vicinity as swiftly as if whatever unknowing sin he had committed were contagious. The street was emptying as rapidly as it had filled. He saw a sleek Venusian glance back over his shoulder as he turned the corner and sneer, "Shambleau!" and the word awoke a new line of speculation in Smith's mind. Shambleau! Vaguely of French origin, it must be. And strange enough to hear it from the lips of Venusians and Martian drylanders, but it was their use of it that puzzled him more. "We never let those things live," the ex-Patrolman had said. It reminded him dimly of something... an ancient line from some writing in his own tongue... "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." He smiled to himself at the similarity, and simultaneously was aware of the girl at his elbow.

She has risen soundlessly. He turned to face her, sheathing his gun and stared at first with curiosity and then in the entirely frank openness with which men regard that which is not wholly human. For she was not. He knew it at a glance, though the brown, sweet body was shaped like a woman's and she wore the garment of scarlet—he saw it was leather—with an ease that few unhuman beings achieve toward clothing. He knew it from the moment he looked into her eyes, and a shiver of unrest went over him as he met them. They were frankly green as young grass, with slit-like, feline pupils that pulsed unceasingly, and there was a look of dark, animal wisdom in their depths—that look of the beast which sees more than man.

There was no hair upon her face—neither brows nor lashes, and he would have sworn that the tight scarlet turban bound around her head covered baldness. She had three fingers and a thumb, and her feet had four digits apiece too, and all sixteen of them were tipped with round claws that sheathed back into the flesh like a cat's. She ran her tongue over her lips—a thin, pink, flat tongue as feline as her eyes—and spoke with difficulty. He felt that that throat and tongue had never been shaped for human speech.

"Not—afraid now," she said softly, and her little teeth were white and pointed as a kitten's.

"What did they want you for?" he asked her curiously. "What had you done? Shambleau... is that your name?"

"I—not talk your—speech," she demurred hesitantly.

"Well, try to—I want to know. Why were they chasing you? Will you be safe on the street now, or hadn't you better get indoors somewhere? They looked dangerous."

"I—go with you." She brought it out with difficulty.

"Say you!" Smith grinned. "What are you, anyhow? You look like a kitten to me."

"Shambleau." She said it somberly.

"Where d'you live? Are you a Martian?"

"I come from—from far—from long ago—far country—"

"Wait!" laughed Smith. "You're getting your wires crossed. You're not a Martian?"

She drew herself up very straight beside him, lifting the turbaned head, and there was something queenly in the poise of her.

"Martian?" she said scornfully. "My people—are—are—you have no word. Your speech—hard for me!"

"What's yours? I might know it—try me."

She lifted her head and met his eyes squarely, and there was in hers a subtle amusement—he could have sworn it.

"Some day I—speak to you in—my own language," she promised, and the pink tongue flicked out over her lips, swiftly, hungrily.

Approaching footsteps on the red pavement interrupted Smith's reply. A dryland Martian came past, reeling a little and exuding an aroma of *segir*-whisky, the Venusian brand. When he caught the red flash of the girl's tatters he turned his head sharply, and as his *segir*-steeped brain took in the fact of her presence he lurched toward the recess unsteadily, bawling, "Shambleau, by *Pharol!* Shambleau!" and reached out a clutching hand.

Smith struck it aside contemptuously.

"On your way, drylander," he advised.

The man drew back and stared, blear-eyed.

"Yours, eh?" he croaked. "Zut! You're welcome to it!" And like the Patrolman before him he spat on the pavement and turned away, muttering harshly in the blasphemous tongue of the drylands.

Smith watched him shuffle off, and there was a crease between his colorless eyes, a nameless unease rising within him.

"Come on," he said abruptly to the girl. "If this sort of thing is going to happen we'd better get indoors. Where I shall I take you?"

"With—you," she murmured.

He stared down into the flat green eyes. Those ceaselessly pulsing pupils disturbed him, but it seemed to him, vaguely, that behind the animal shallows of her gaze was a shutter—a closed barrier that might at any moment open to reveal the very deeps of that dark knowledge he sensed there.

Roughly he said again, "Come on, then," and stepped down into the street.

She pattered along a pace or two behind him, making no effort to keep up with his long strides, and though Smith—as men know from Venus to Jupiter's moons—walks as softly as a cat, even in spacemen's boots, the girl at his heels slid like a shadow over the rough pavement, making so little sound that even the lightness of his footsteps was loud in the empty street.

Smith chose the less frequented ways of Lakkdarol, and somewhat shamefacedly thanked his nameless gods that his lodgings were not far away, for the few pedestrians he met turned and stared after the two with that by now familiar mingling of horror and contempt which he was as far as ever from understanding.

The room he had engaged was a single cubicle in a lodginghouse on the edge of the city. Lakkdarol, raw camp-town

that it was in those days, could have furnished little better anywhere within its limits, and Smith's errand there was not one he wished to advertise. He had slept in worse places than this before, and knew that he would do so again.

There was no one in sight when he entered, and the girl slipped up the stairs at his heels and vanished through the door, shadowy, unseen by anyone in the house. Smith closed the door and leaned his broad shoulders against the panels, regarding her speculatively.

She took in what little the room had to offer in a glance—frowsy bed, rickety table, mirror hanging unevenly and cracked against the wall, unpainted chairs—a typical camp-town room in an Earth settlement abroad. She accepted its poverty in that single glance, dismissed it, then crossed to the window and leaned out for a moment, gazing across the low roof-tops toward the barren countryside beyond, red slag under the late afternoon sun.

"You can stay here," said Smith abruptly, "until I leave town. I'm waiting here for a friend to come in from Venus. Have you eaten?"

"Yes," said the girl quickly. "I shall—need no—food for—a while."

"Well—" Smith glanced around the room. "I'll be in sometime tonight. You can go or stay just as you please. Better lock the door behind me."

With no more formality than that he left her. The door closed and he heard the key turn, and smiled to himself. He did not expect, then, ever to see her again.

He went down the steps and out into the late-slanting sunlight with a mind so full of other matters that the brown girl receded very quickly into the background. Smith's errand in Lakkdarol, like most of his errands, is better not spoken of. Man lives as he must, and Smith's living was a perilous affair outside the law and ruled by the ray-gun only. It is enough to say that the shipping-port and its cargoes outbound interested him deeply just now, and that the friend he awaited was Yarol the Venusian, in that swift little Edsel ship the *Maid* that can flash from world to world with a derisive speed that laughs at Patrol boats and leaves pursuers floundering in the ether far behind. Smith and Yarol and the *Maid* were a trinity that had caused the Patrol leaders much worry and many gray hairs in the past, and the future looked very bright to Smith himself that evening as he left his lodging-house.

Lakkdarol roars by night, as Earthmen's camp-towns have a way of doing on every planet where Earth's outposts are, and it was beginning lustily as Smith went down among the awakening lights toward the center of town. His busi-

ness there does not concern us. He mingled with the crowds where the lights were brightest, and there was the click of ivory counters and the jingle of silver, and red *segir* gurgled invitingly from black Venusian bottles, and much later Smith strolled homeward under the moving moons of Mars, and if the street wavered a little under his feet now and then—why, that is only understandable. Not even Smith could drink red *segir* at every bar from the *Martian Lamb* to the *New Chicago* and remain entirely steady on his feet. But he found his way back with very little difficulty—considering—and spent a good five minutes hunting for his key before he remembered he had left it in the inner lock for the girl.

He knocked then, and there was no sound of footsteps from within, but in a few moments the latch clicked and the door swung open. She retreated soundlessly before him as he entered, and took up her favorite place against the window, leaning back on the sill and outlined against the starry sky beyond. The room was in darkness.

Smith flipped the switch by the door and then leaned back against the panels, steadying himself. The cool night air had sobered him a little, and his head was clear enough—liquor went to Smith's feet, not his head, or he would never have come this far along the lawless way he had chosen. He lounged against the door now and regarded the girl in the sudden glare of the bulbs, blinking a little as much at the scarlet of her clothing as at the light.

"So you stayed," he said.

"I—waited," she answered softly, leaning farther back against the sill and clasping the rough wood with slim, three-fingered hands, pale brown against the darkness.

"Why?"

She did not answer that, but her mouth curved into a slow smile. On a woman it would have been reply enough—provocative, daring. On Shambleau there was something pitiful and horrible in it—so human on the face of one half-animal. And yet... that sweet brown body curving so softly from the tatters of scarlet leather—the velvety texture of that brownness—the white-flashing smile.... Smith was aware of a stirring excitement within him. After all—time would be hanging heavy now until Yarol came.... Speculatively he allowed the steel-pale eyes to wander over her, with a slow regard that missed nothing. And when he spoke he was aware that his voice had deepened a little....

"Come here," he said.

She came forward slowly, on bare clawed feet that made no slightest sound on the floor, and stood before him with downcast eyes and mouth trembling in that pitifully human

smile. He took her by the shoulders—velvety soft shoulders, of a creamy smoothness that was not the texture of human flesh. A little tremor went over her, perceptibly, at the contact of his hands. Northwest Smith caught his breath suddenly and dragged her to him... sweet yielding brownness in the circle of his arms... heard her own breath catch and quicken as her velvety arms closed about his neck. And then he was looking down into her face, very near, and the green animal eyes met his with the pulsing pupils and the flicker of—something—deep behind their shallows—and through the rising clamor of his blood, even as he stooped his lips to hers, Smith felt something deep within him shudder away—inexplicable, instinctive, revolted. What it might be he had no words to tell, but the very touch of her was suddenly loathsome—so soft and velvet and unhuman—and it might have been an animal's face that lifted itself to his mouth—the dark knowledge looked hungrily from the darkness of those slit pupils—and for a mad instant he knew that same wild, feverish revulsion he had seen in the faces of the mob.

"God!" he gasped, a far more ancient invocation against evil than he realized, then or ever, and he ripped her arms from his neck, swung her away with such a force that she reeled half across the room. Smith fell back against the door, breathing heavily, and stared at her while the wild revolt died slowly within him.

She had fallen to the floor beneath the window, and as she lay there against the wall with bent head he saw, curiously, that her turban had slipped—the turban that he had been so sure covered baldness—and a lock of scarlet hair fell below the binding leather, hair as scarlet as her garment, as unhumanly red as her eyes were unhumanly green. He stared, and shook his head dizzily and stared again, for it seemed to him that the thick lock of crimson had moved, *squirmed* of itself against her cheek.

At the contact of it her hands flew up and she tucked it away with a very human gesture and then dropped her head again into her hands. And from the deep shadow of her fingers he thought she was staring up at him covertly.

Smith drew a deep breath and passed a hand across his forehead. The inexplicable moment had gone as quickly as it came—too swiftly for him to understand or analyze it. "Got to lay off the *segir*," he told himself unsteadily. Had he imagined that scarlet hair? After all, she was no more than a pretty brown girl-creature from one of the many half-human races peopling the planets. No more than that, after all. A pretty little thing, but animal.... He laughed a little shakily.

"No more of that," he said. "God knows I'm no angel, but there's got to be a limit somewhere. Here." He crossed to the bed and sorted out a pair of blankets from the untidy heap, tossing them to the far corner of the room. "You can sleep there."

Wordlessly she rose from the floor and began to rearrange the blankets, the uncomprehending resignation of the animal eloquent in every line of her.

Smith had a strange dream that night. He thought he had awakened to a room full of darkness and moonlight and moving shadows, for the nearer moon of Mars was racing through the sky and everything on the planet below her was endowed with a restless life in the dark. And something... some nameless, unthinkable *thing*... was coiled about his throat... something like a soft snake, wet and warm. It lay loose and light about his neck... and it was moving gently, very gently, with a soft, caressive pressure that sent little thrills of delight through every nerve and fiber of him, a perilous delight—beyond physical pleasure, deeper than joy of the mind. That warm softness was caressing the very roots of his soul with a terrible intimacy. The ecstasy of it left him weak, and yet he knew—in a flash of knowledge born of this impossible dream—that the soul should not be handled.... And with that knowledge a horror broke upon him, turning the pleasure into a rapture of revulsion, hateful, horrible—but still most foully sweet. He tried to lift his hands and tear the dream-monstrosity from his throat—tried but halfheartedly; for though his soul was revolted to its very depths, yet the delight of his body was so great that his hands all but refused the attempt. But when at last he tried to lift his arms a cold shock went over him and he found that he could not stir... his body lay stony as marble beneath the blankets, a living marble that shuddered with a dreadful delight through every rigid vein.

The revulsion grew strong upon him as he struggled against the paralyzing dream—a struggle of soul against sluggish body—titanically, until the moving dark was streaked with blankness that clouded and closed about him at last and he sank back into the oblivion from which he had awakened.

Next morning, when the bright sunlight shining through Mars' clear thin air awakened him, Smith lay for a while trying to remember. The dream had been more vivid than reality, but he could not quite recall... only that it had been more sweet and horrible than anything else in life. He lay puzzling for a while, until a soft sound from the corner aroused him from his thoughts and he sat up to see the girl lying in a cat-like coil on her blankets, watching him with round, grave eyes. He regarded her somewhat ruefully.

"Morning," he said. "I've just had the devil of a dream.... Well, hungry?"

She shook her head silently, and he could have sworn there was a covert gleam of strange amusement in her eyes.

He stretched and yawned, dismissing the nightmare temporarily from his mind.

"What am I going to do with you?" he inquired, turning to more immediate matters. "I'm leaving here in a day or two and I can't take you along, you know. Where'd you come from in the first place?"

Again she shook her head.

"Not telling? Well, it's your own business. You can stay here until I give up the room. From then on you'll have to do your own worrying."

He swung his feet to the floor and reached for his clothes.

Ten minutes later, slipping the heat-gun into its holster at his thigh, Smith turned to the girl. "There's food-concentrate in that box on the table. It ought to hold you until I get back. And you'd better lock the door again after I've gone."

Her wide, unwavering stare was his only answer, and he was not sure she had understood, but at any rate the lock clicked after him as before, and he went down the steps with a faint grin on his lips.

The memory of last night's extraordinary dream was slipping from him, as such memories do, and by the time he had reached the street the girl and the dream and all of yesterday's happenings were blotted out by the sharp necessities of the present.

Again the intricate business that had brought him here claimed his attention. He went about it to the exclusion of all else, and there was a good reason behind everything he did from the moment he stepped out into the street until the time when he turned back again at evening; though had one chosen to follow him during the day his apparently aimless rambling through Lakkdarol would have seemed very pointless.

He must have spent two hours at the least idling by the space-port, watching with sleepy, colorless eyes the ships that came and went, the passengers, the vessels lying at wait, the cargoes—particularly the cargoes. He made the rounds of the town's saloons once more, consuming many glasses of varied liquors in the course of the day and engaging in idle conversation with men of all races and worlds, usually in their own languages, for Smith was a linguist of repute among his contemporaries. He heard the gossip of the spaceways, news from a dozen planets of a thousand different events. He heard the latest joke about the Venusian Emperor and the latest report on the Chino-Aryan war and the latest song

hot from the lips of Rose Robertson, whom every man on the civilized planets adored as "the Georgia Rose." He passed the day quite profitably, for his own purposes, which do not concern us now, and it was not until late evening, when he turned homeward again, that the thought of the brown girl in his room took definite shape in his mind, though it had been lurking there, formless and submerged, all day.

He had no idea what comprised her usual diet, but he bought a can of New York roast beef and one of Venusian frog-broth and a dozen fresh canal-apples and two pounds of that Earth lettuce that grows so vigorously in the fertile canal-soil of Mars. He felt that she must surely find something to her liking in this broad variety of edibles, and—for his day had been very satisfactory—he hummed *The Green Hills of Earth* to himself in a surprisingly good baritone as he climbed the stairs.

The door was locked, as before, and he was reduced to kicking the lower panels gently with his boot, for his arms were full. She opened the door with that softness that was characteristic of her and stood regarding him in the semi-darkness as he stumbled to the table with his load. The room was unlit again.

"Why don't you turn on the lights?" he demanded irritably after he had barked his shin on the chair by the table in an effort to deposit his burden there.

"Light and—dark—they are alike—to me," she murmured.

"Cat eyes, eh? Well, you look the part. Here, I've brought you some dinner. Take your choice. Fond of roast beef? Or how about a little frog-broth?"

She shook her head and backed away a step.

"No," she said. "I can not—eat your food."

Smith's brows wrinkled. "Didn't you have any of the food-tablets?"

Again the red turban shook negatively.

"Then you haven't had anything for—why, more than twenty-four hours! You must be starved."

"Not hungry," she denied.

"What can I find for you to eat, then? There's time yet if I hurry. You've got to eat, child."

"I shall—eat," she said softly. "Before long—I shall—feed. Have no worry."

She turned away then and stood at the window, looking out over the moonlit landscape as if to end the conversation. Smith cast her a puzzled glance as he opened the can of roast beef. There had been an odd undertone in that assurance that, undefinably, he did not like. And the girl had teeth and tongue and presumably a fairly human digestive system, to

judge from her form. It was nonsense for her to pretend that she could find nothing that she could eat. She must have had some of the food concentrate after all, he decided, prying up the thermos lid of the inner container to release the long-sealed savor of the hot meal inside.

"Well, if you won't eat you won't," he observed philosophically as he poured hot broth and diced beef into the dish-like lid of the thermos can and extracted the spoon from its hiding-place between the inner and outer receptacles. She turned a little to watch him as he pulled up a rickety chair and sat down to the food, and after a while the realization that her green gaze was fixed so unwinkingly upon him made the man nervous, and he said between bites of creamy canal-apple, "Why don't you try a little of this? It's good."

"The food—I eat is—better," her soft voice told him in its hesitant murmur, and again he felt rather than heard a faint undernote of unpleasantness in the words. A sudden suspicion struck him as he pondered on that last remark—some vague memory of horror-tales told about campfires in the past—and he swung round in the chair to look at her, a tiny, creeping fear unaccountably arising. There had been that in her words—in her unspoken words, that menaced....

She stood up beneath his gaze demurely, wide green eyes with their pulsing pupils meeting his without a falter. But her mouth was scarlet and her teeth were sharp....

"What food do you eat?" he demanded. And then, after a pause, very softly, "Blood?"

She stared at him for a moment, uncomprehending; then something like amusement curled her lips and she said scornfully, "You think me—vampire, eh? No—I am Shambleau!"

Unmistakably there were scorn and amusement in her voice at the suggestion, but as unmistakably she knew what he meant—accepted it as a logical suspicion—vampires! Fairy-tales—but fairy-tales this unhuman, outland creature was most familiar with. Smith was not a credulous man, nor a superstitious one, but he had seen too many strange things himself to doubt that the wildest legend might have a basis of fact. And there was something namelessly strange about her....

He puzzled over it for a while between deep bites of the canal-apple. And though he wanted to question her about a great many things, he did not, for he knew how futile it would be.

He said nothing more until the meat was finished and another canal-apple had followed the first, and he had cleared away the meal by the simple expedient of tossing the empty can out of the window. Then he lay back in the chair and sur-

veyed her from half-closed eyes, colorless in a face tanned like saddle-leather. And again he was conscious of the brown, soft curves of her, velvety—subtle arcs and planes of smooth flesh under the tatters of scarlet leather. Vampire she might be, unhuman she certainly was, but desirable beyond words as she sat submissive beneath his low regard, her red-turbaned head bent, her clawed fingers lying in her lap. They sat very still for a while, and the silence throbbed between them.

She was so like a woman—an Earth woman—sweet and submissive and demure, and softer than soft fur, if he could forget the three-fingered claws and the pulsing eyes—and that deeper strangeness beyond words.... (Had he dreamed that red lock of hair that moved? Had it been *segir* that woke the wild revulsion he knew when he held her in his arms? Why had the mob so thirsted for her?) He sat and stared, and despite the mystery of her and the half-suspicions that thronged his mind—for she was so beautifully soft and curved under those revealing tatters—he slowly realized that his pulses were mounting, became aware of a kindling within... brown girl-creature with downcast eyes... and then the lids lifted and the green flatness of a cat's gaze met his and last night's revulsion woke swiftly again, like a warning bell that clanged as their eyes met—animal, after all, too sleek and soft for humanity, and that inner strangeness....

Smith shrugged and sat up. His failings were legion, but the weakness of the flesh was not among the major ones. He motioned the girl to her pallet of blankets in the corner and turned to his own bed.

From deeps of sound sleep he awoke much later. He awoke suddenly and completely, and with that inner excitement that presages something momentous. He awoke to brilliant moonlight, turning the room so bright that he could see the scarlet of the girl's rags as she sat up on her pallet. She was awake, she was sitting with her shoulder half turned to him and her head bent, and some warning instinct crawled coldly up his spine as he watched what she was doing. And yet it was a very ordinary thing for a girl to do—any girl, anywhere. She was unbinding her turban....

He watched, not breathing, a presentiment, of something horrible stirring in his brain, inexplicably.... The red folds loosened, and—he knew then that he had not dreamed—again a scarlet lock swung down against her cheek... a hair, was it? a lock of hair?... thick as a worm it fell, plumply, against that smooth cheek... more scarlet than blood and thick as a crawling worm... and like a worm it crawled.

Smith rose on an elbow, not realizing the motion, and fixed an unwinking stare, with a sort of sick fascinated incre-

dulity, on that—that lock of hair. He had not dreamed. Until now he had taken it for granted that it was the *segir* which had made it seem to move on that evening before. But now... it was lengthening, stretching, moving of itself. It must be hair, but it *crawled*; with a sickening life of its own it squirmed down against her cheek, caressingly, revoltingly, impossibly.... Wet, it was, and round and thick and shining....

She unfastened the last fold and whipped the turban off. From what he saw then Smith would have turned his eyes away—and he had looked on dreadful things before, without flinching—but he could not stir. He could only lie there on his elbows staring at the mass of scarlet, squirming—worms, hairs, what?—that writhed over her head in a dreadful mockery of ringlets. And it was lengthening, falling, somehow growing before his eyes, down over her shoulders in a spilling cascade, a mass that even at the beginning could never have been hidden under the skull-tight turban she had worn. He was beyond wondering, but he realized that. And still it squirmed and lengthened and fell, and she shook it out in a horrible travesty of a woman shaking out her unbound hair—until the unspeakable tangle of it—twisting, writhing, obscenely scarlet—hung to her waist and beyond, and still lengthened, an endless mass of crawling horror that until now, somehow, impossibly, had been hidden under the tight-bound turban. It was like a nest of blind, restless red worms... it was—it was like naked entrails endowed with an unnatural aliveness, terrible beyond words.

Smith lay in the shadows, frozen without and within in a sick numbness that came of utter shock and revulsion.

She shook out the obscene, unspeakable tangle over her shoulders, and somehow he knew that she was going to turn in a moment and that he must meet her eyes. The thought of that meeting stopped his heart with dread, more awfully than anything else in this nightmare horror; for nightmare it must be, surely. But he knew without trying that he could not wrench his eyes away—the sickened fascination of that sight held him motionless, and somehow there was a certain beauty....

Her head was turning. The crawling awfulness rippled and squirmed at the motion, writing thick and wet and shining over the soft brown shoulder about which they fell now in obscene cascades that all but hid her body. Her head was turning. Smith lay numb. And very slowly he saw the round of her cheek foreshorten and her profile come into view, all the scarlet horror twisting ominously, and the profile shortened in turn and her full face came slowly into round toward the bed—moonlight shining brilliantly as day on the pretty

girl-face, demure and sweet, framed in tangled obscenity that crawled....

The green eyes met his. He felt a perceptible shock, and a shudder rippled down his paralyzed spine, leaving an icy numbness in its wake. He felt the goose-flesh rising. But that numbness and cold horror he scarcely realized, for the green eyes were locked with his in a long, long look that somehow presaged nameless things—not altogether unpleasant things—the voiceless voice of her mind assailing him with little murmurous promises....

For a moment he went down into a blind abyss of submission; and then somehow the very sight of that obscenity, in eyes that did not then realize they saw it, was dreadful enough to draw him out of the seductive darkness... the sight of her crawling and alive with unnamable horror.

She rose, and down about her in a cascade fell the squirming scarlet of—of what grew upon her head. It fell in a long, alive cloak to her bare feet on the floor, hiding her in a wave of dreadful, wet, writhing life. She put up her hands and like a swimmer she parted the waterfall of it, tossing the masses back over her shoulders to reveal her own brown body, sweetly curved. She smiled exquisitely, and in starting waves back from her forehead and down about her in a hideous background writhed the snaky wetness of her living tresses. And Smith knew that he looked upon Medusa.

The knowledge of that—the realization of vast backgrounds reaching into misted history—shook him out of his frozen horror for a moment, and in that moment he met her eyes again, smiling, green as glass in the moonlight, half hooded under drooping lids. Through the twisting scarlet she held out her arms. And there was something soul-shakingly desirable about her, so that all the blood surged to his head suddenly and he stumbled to his feet like a sleeper in a dream as she swayed toward him, infinitely graceful, infinitely sweet in her cloak of living horror.

And somehow there was beauty in it, the wet scarlet writhings with moonlight sliding and shining along the thick, wormround tresses and losing itself in the masses only to glint again and move silvery along writhing tendrils—an awful, shuddering beauty more dreadful than any ugliness could be.

But all this, again, he but half realized, for the insidious murmur was coiling again through his brain, promising, caressing, alluring, sweeter than honey; and the green eyes that held his were clear and burning like the depths of a jewel, and behind the pulsing slits of darkness he was staring into a greater dark that held all things.... He had known—dimly

he had known when he first gazed into those flat animal shallows that behind them lay this—all beauty and terror, all horror and delight in the infinite darkness upon which her eyes opened like windows, paned with emerald glass.

Her lips moved, and in a murmur that blended indistinguishably with the silence and the sway of her body and the dreadful sway of her—her hair—she whispered—very softly, very passionately, "I shall—speak to you now—in my own tongue—oh, beloved!"

And in her living cloak she swayed to him, the murmur swelling seductive and caressing in his innermost brain—promising, compelling, sweeter than sweet. His flesh crawled to the horror of her, but it was a perverted revulsion that clasped what it loathed. His arms slid round her under the sliding cloak, wet, wet and warm and hideously alive—and the sweet velvet body was clinging to his, her arms locked about his neck—and with a whisper and a rush the unspeakable horror closed about them both.

In nightmare until he died he remembered that moment when the living tresses of Shambleau first folded him in their embrace. A nauseous, smothering odor as the wetness shut around him—thick, pulsing worms clasping every inch of his body, sliding, writhing, their wetness and warmth striking through his garments as if he stood naked to their embrace.

All this in a graven instant—and after that a tangled flash of conflicting sensation before oblivion closed over him. For he remembered the dream—and knew it for nightmare reality now, and the sliding, gently moving caresses of those wet, warm worms upon his flesh was an ecstasy above words—that deeper ecstasy that strikes beyond the body and beyond the mind and tickles the very roots of the soul with unnatural delight. So he stood, rigid as marble, as helplessly stony as any of Medusa's victims in ancient legends were, while the terrible pleasure of Shambleau thrilled and shuddered through every fiber of him; through every atom of his body and the intangible atoms of what men call the soul through all that was Smith the dreadful pleasure ran. And it was truly dreadful. Dimly he knew it, even as his body answered to the root-deep ecstasy, a foul and dreadful wooing from which his very soul had shuddered away—and yet in the innermost depths of that soul some grinning traitor shivered with delight. But deeply, behind all this, he knew horror and revulsion and despair beyond telling, while the intimate caresses crawled obscenely in the secret places of his soul—knew that the soul should not be handled—and shook with the perilous pleasure through it all.

And this conflict and knowledge, this mingling of rapture and revulsion all took place in the flashing of a moment while the scarlet worms coiled and crawled upon him, sending deep, obscene tremors of that infinite pleasure into every atom that made up Smith. And he could not stir in the slimy, ecstatic embrace—and a weakness was flooding that grew deeper after each succeeding wave of intense delight, and the traitor in his soul strengthened and drowned out the revulsion—and something within him ceased to struggle as he sank wholly into a blazing darkness that was oblivion to all else but that devouring rapture...

The young Venusian climbing the stairs to his friend's pulled out his key absent-mindedly, a pucker forming between his fine brows. He was slim, as all Venusians are, as fair and sleek as any of them, and as with most of his countrymen the look of cherubic innocence on his face was wholly deceptive. He had the face of a fallen angel, without Lucifer's majesty to redeem it; for a black devil grinned in his eyes and there were faint lines of ruthlessness and dissipation about his mouth to tell of the long years behind him that had run the gamut of experiences and made his name, next to Smith's, the most hated and the most respected in the records of the Patrol.

He mounted the stairs now with a puzzled frown between his eyes. He had come to Lakkdarol on the noon liner—the *Maid* in the hold very skillfully disguised with paint and otherwise—to find in lamentable disorder the affairs he had expected to be settled. And cautious inquiry elicited the information that Smith had not been seen for three days. That was not like his friend—he had never failed before, and the two stood to lose not only a large sum of money but also their personal safety by the inexplicable lapse on the part of Smith. Yarol could think of one solution only: fate had at last caught up with his friend. Nothing but physical disability could explain it.

Still puzzling, he fitted his key in the lock and swung the door open.

In that first moment, as the door opened, he sensed something very wrong.... The room was darkened, and for a while he could see nothing, but at the first breath he scented a strange unnamable odor, half sickening, half sweet. And deep stirrings of ancestral memory awoke within him—ancient swamp-born memories from Venusian ancestors far away and long ago....

Yarol laid his hand on his gun, lightly, and opened the door wider. In the dimness all he could see at first was a curious mound in the far corner.... Then his eyes grew accus-

tomed to the dark, and he saw it more clearly, a mound that somehow heaved and stirred within itself.... A mound of—he caught his breath sharply—a mound like a mass of entrails, living, moving, writhing with an unspeakable aliveness. Then a hot Venusian oath broke from his lips and he cleared the door-sill in a swift stride, slammed the door and set his back against it, gun ready in his hand, although his flesh crawled—for he *knew*....

"Smith!" he said softly, in a voice thick with horror. "Northwest!"

The moving mass stirred—shuddered—sank back into crawling quiescence again.

"Smith! Smith!" The Venusian's voice was gentle and insistent, and it quivered a little with terror.

An impatient ripple went over the whole mass of aliveness in the corner. It stirred again, reluctantly, and then tendrils writhing tendrils it began to part itself and fall aside, and very slowly the brown of a spaceman's leather appeared beneath it, all slimed and shining.

"Smith! Northwest!" Yarol's persistent whisper came again, urgently, and with a dream-like slowness the leather garments moved... a man sat up in the midst of the writhing worms, a man who once, long ago, might have been Northwest Smith. From head to foot he was slimy from the embrace of the crawling horror about him. His face was that of some creature beyond humanity—dead-alive, fixed in a gray stare, and the look of terrible ecstasy that overspread it seemed to come from somewhere far within, a faint reflection from immeasurable distances beyond the flesh. And as there is mystery and magic in the moonlight which is after all but a reflection of the everyday sun so in that gray face turned to the door was a terror unnamable and sweet, a reflection of ecstasy beyond the understanding of any who have known only earthly ecstasy themselves. And as he sat there turning a blank, eyeless face to Yarol the red worms writhed ceaselessly about him, very gently, with a soft, caressive motion that never slackened.

"Smith... come here! Smith... get up... Smith, Smith!" Yarol's whisper hissed in the silence, commanding, urgent—but he made no move to leave the door.

And with a dreadful slowness, like a dead man rising, Smith stood up in the nest of slimy scarlet. He swayed drunkenly on his feet, and two or three crimson tendrils came writhing up his legs to the knees and wound themselves there, supportingly, moving with a ceaseless caress that seemed to give him some hidden strength, for he said then, without inflection,

"Go away. Go away. Leave me alone." And the dead ecstatic face never changed.

"Smith!" Yarol's voice was desperate: "Smith, listen! Smith, can't you hear me?"

"Go away," the monotonous voice said. "Go away. Go away. Go—"

"Not unless you come too. Can't you hear? Smith! Smith! I'll—"

He hushed in mid-phrase, and once more the ancestral prickle of race-memory shivered down his back, for the scarlet mass was moving again, violently rising....

Yarol pressed back against the door and gripped his gun, and the name of a god he had forgotten years ago rose to his lips unbidden. For he knew what was coming next, and the knowledge was more dreadful than any ignorance could have been.

The red, writhing mass rose higher, and the tendrils parted and a human face looked out—no, half human with green cat-eyes that shone in that dimness like lighted jewels, compellingly....

Yarol breathed "Shar!" again and flung up an arm across his face, and the tingle of meeting that green gaze for even an instant went thrillingly through him seriously.

"Smith!" he called in despair "Smith, can't you hear me?"

"Go away," said that voice that was not Smith's. "Go away."

And somehow, although he dared not look, Yarol knew that the—the other—had parted those worm-thick tresses and stood there in all the human sweetness of the brown curved woman's body, cloaked in living horror. And he felt the eyes upon him, and something was crying insistently in his brain to lower that shielding arm.... He was lost—he knew it, and the knowledge gave him that courage which comes from despair. The voice in his brain was growing, swelling, deafening him with a roaring command that all but swept him before it—command to lower that arm—to meet the eyes that opened upon darkness—to submit—and a promise, murmurous and sweet and evil beyond words, of pleasure to come....

But somehow he kept his head—somehow, dizzily, he was gripping his gun in his upflung hand—somehow, incredibly, crossing the narrow room with averted face, groping for Smith's shoulder. There was a moment of blind fumbling in emptiness, and then he found it, and gripped the leather that was slimy and dreadful and wet—and simultaneously he felt something loop gently about his ankle and a shock of repulsive pleasure went through him, and then another coil, and another, wound about his feet....

Yarol set his teeth and gripped the shoulder hard, and his hand shuddered of itself, for the feel of that leather was slimy as the worms about his ankles, and a faint tingle of obscene delight went through him from the contact.

That caressive pressure on his legs was all he could feel, and the voice in his brain drowned out all other sounds, and his body obeyed him reluctantly—but somehow he gave on heave of tremendous effort and swung Smith, stumbling, out of that nest of horror. The twining tendrils ripple loose with a little sucking sound, and the whole mass quivered and reached after, and then Yarol forgot his friend utterly and turned his whole being to the hopeless task of freeing himself. For only part of him was fighting, now—only a part of him struggled against the twining obscenities, and in his innermost brain the sweet, seductive murmur sounded, and his body clamored to surrender....

"*Shar! Shar y'danis... Shar mor'la-rol—*" prayed Yarol, gasping and half unconscious that he spoke, boy's prayers that he had forgotten years ago, and with his back half-turned to the central mass he kicked desperately with his heavy boots at the red, writhing worms about his. They gave back before him, quivering and curling themselves out of reach, and though he knew that more were reaching for his throat from behind, at least he could go on struggling until he was forced to meet those eyes....

He stamped and kicked and stamped again, and for one instant he was free of the slimy grip as the bruised worms curled back from his heavy feet, and he lurched away dizzily, sick with revulsion and despair as he fought off the coils, and then he lifted his eyes and saw the cracked mirror on the wall. Dimly in its reflection he could see the writing scarlet horror behind him, cat face peering out with its demure girl-smile, dreadfully human, and all the red tendrils reaching after him. And remembrance of something he had read long ago swept incongruously over him, and the gasp of relief and hope that he gave shook for a moment the grip of the command in his brain.

Without pausing for a breath he swung the gun over his should, the reflected barrel in line with the reflected horror in the mirror, and flicked the catch.

In the mirror he saw its blue flame leap in a dazzling spate across the dimness, full into the midst of that squirming, reaching mass behind him. There was a hiss and a blaze and a high, thin scream of inhuman malice and despair—the flame cut a wide arc and went out as the gun fell from his hand, and Yarol pitched forward to the floor.

Northwest Smith opened his eyes to Martian sunlight streaming thinly through the dingy window. Something wet

and cold was slapping his face, and the familiar fiery sting of *segir*-whisky burnt his throat.

"Smith!" Yarol's voice was saying from far away. "N. W.! Wake up, damn you! Wake up!"

"I'm—awake," Smith managed to articulate thickly. "Wha's matter?"

Then a cup-rim was thrust against his teeth and Yarol said irritably, "Drink it, you fool!"

Smith swallowed obediently and more of the fire-hot *segir* flowed down his grateful throat. It spread a warmth through his body that awakened him from the numbness that had gripped him until now, and helped a little toward driving out the all-devouring weakness he was becoming aware of slowly. He lay still for a few minutes while the warmth of the whisky went through him, and memory sluggishly began to permeate his brain with the spread of the *segir*. Nightmare memories... sweet and terrible... memories of—

"God!" gasped Smith suddenly, and tried to sit up. Weakness smote him like a blow, and for an instant the room wheeled as he fell back against something firm and warm—Yarol's shoulder. The Venusian's arm supported him while the room steadied, and after a while he twisted a little and stared into the other's black gaze.

Yarol was holding him with one arm and finishing the mug of *segir* himself, and the black eyes met his over the brim and crinkled into sudden laughter, half hysterical after that terror that was passed.

"By *Pharol!*" gasped Yarol, choking into his mug. "By *Pharol*, N. W.! I'm never gonna let you forget this! Next time you have to drag me out of a mess I'll say—"

"Let it go," said Smith. "What's been going on? How—"

"Shambleau." Yarol's laughter died. "Shambleau! What were you doing with a thing like that?"

"What was it?" Smith asked soberly.

"Mean to say you didn't know? But where'd you find it? How—"

"Suppose you tell me what what you know," said Smith firmly. "And another swig of that *segir*, too, please. I need it."

"Can you hold the mug now? Feel better?"

"Yeah—some. I can hold it—thanks. Now go on."

"Well—I don't know just where to start. They call them Shambleau—"

"Good God, is there more than one?"

"It's a—a sort of race, I think, one of the very oldest. Where they come from nobody knows. The name sounds a little French, doesn't it? But it goes back beyond the start of history. There have always been Shambleau."

"I never heard of 'em."

"Not many people have. And those who know don't care to talk about it much."

"Well, half this town knows. I hadn't any idea what they were talking about, then. And I still don't understand, but—"

"Yes, it happens like this, sometimes. They'll appear, and the news will spread and the town will get together and hunt them down, and after that—well, the story doesn't get around very far. It's too—too unbelievable."

"But—my God, Yarol!—what was it? Where'd it come from? How—"

"Nobody knows just where they come from. Another planet—maybe some undiscovered one. Some say Venus—I know there are some rather awful legends of them handed down in our family—that's how I've heard about it. And the minute I opened that door, awhile back—I—I think I knew that smell...."

"But—what *are* they?"

"God knows. Not human, though they have the human form. Or that may be only an illusion... or maybe I'm crazy. I don't know. They're a species of the vampire—or maybe the vampire is a species of—of them. Their normal form must be that—that mass, and in that form they draw nourishment from the—I suppose life-forces of men. And they take some form—usually a woman form, I think, and key you up to the highest pitch of emotion before they—begin. That's to work the life-force up to intensity so it'll be easier.... And they give, always, that horrible, foul pleasure as they—feed. There are some men who, if they survive the first experience, take to it like a drug—can't give it up—keep the thing with them all their lives—which isn't long—feeding it for that ghastly satisfaction. Worse than smoking *ming* or—or 'praying to *Pharol*.'"

"Yes," said Smith. "I'm beginning to understand why that crowd was so surprised and—and disgusted when I said—well, never mind. Go on."

"Did you get to talk to—to it?" asked Yarol.

"I tried to. It couldn't speak very well. I asked it where it came from and it said—'from far away and long ago'—something like that."

"I wonder. Possibly some unknown planet—but I think not. You know there are so many wild stories with some basis of fact to start from, that I've sometimes wondered—mightn't there be a lot more of even worse and wilder superstitions we've never heard of? Things like this, blasphemous and foul, that those who know have to keep still about? Awful, fantastic things running around loose that we never hear rumors of at all!

"These things—they've been in existence for countless ages. No one knows when or where they first appeared. Those who've seen them, as we saw this one, don't talk about it. It's just one of those vague, misty rumors you find half hinted at in old books sometimes.... I believe they are an older race than man, spawned from ancient seed in times before ours, perhaps on planets that have gone to dust, and so horrible to man that when they are discovered the discoverers keep still about it—forget them again as quickly as they can.

"And they go back to time immemorial. I suppose you recognized the legend of Medusa? There isn't any question that the ancient Greeks knew of them. Does it mean that there have been civilizations before yours that set out from Earth and explored other planets? Or did one of the Shambleau somehow make its way into Greece three thousand years ago? If you think about it long enough you'll go off your head! I wonder how many other legends are based on things like this—things we don't suspect, things we'll never know.

"The Gorgon, Medusa, a beautiful woman with—with snakes for hair, and a gaze that turned men to stone, and Perseus finally killed her—I remembered this just by accident, N. W., and it saved your life and mine—Perseus killed her by using a mirror as he fought to reflect what he dared not look at directly. I wonder what the old Greek who first started that legend would have thought if he'd known that three thousand years later his story would save the lives of two men on another planet. I wonder what that Greek's own story was, and how he met the thing, and what happened...."

"Well, there's a lot we'll never know. Wouldn't the records of that race of—of *things*, whatever they are, be worth reading! Records of other planets and other ages and all the beginnings of mankind! But I don't suppose they've kept any records. I don't suppose they've even any place keep them—from what little I know, or anyone knows about it, they're like the Wandering Jew, just bobbing up here and there at long intervals, and where they stay in the meantime I'd give my eyes to know! But I don't believe that terribly hypnotic power they have indicates any superhuman intelligence. It's their means of getting food—just like a frog's long tongue or a carnivorous flower's odor. Those are physical because the frog and the flower eat physical food. The Shambleau uses a—a mental reach to get mental food. I don't quite know how to put it. And just as a beast that eats the bodies of other animals acquires with each meal greater power over the bodies of the rest, so the Shambleau, stoking itself up with the life-forces of men, increases its power over the minds and the souls of other men. But I'm talking about things I can't define—things I'm not sure exist.

"I only know that when I felt—when those tentacles closed around my legs—I didn't want to pull loose, I felt sensations that—that—oh, I'm fouled and filthy to the very deepest part of me by that—pleasure—and yet—"

"I know," said Smith slowly. The effect of the *segir* was beginning to wear off, and weakness was washing back over him in waves, and when he spoke he was half meditating in a low voice, scarcely realizing that Yarol listened. "I know it—much better than you do—and there's something so indescribably awful that the thing emanates, something so utterly at odds with everything human—there aren't any words to say it. For a while I was a part of it, literally, sharing its thoughts and memories and emotions and hungers, and—well, it's over now and I don't remember very clearly, but the only part left free was that part of me that was all but insane from the—the obscenity of the thing. And yet it was a pleasure so sweet—I think there must be some nucleus of utter evil in me—in everyone—that needs only the proper stimulus to get complete control; because even while I was sick all through from the touch of those—things—there was something in me that was—was simply gibbering with delight.... Because of that I saw things—and knew things—horrible, wild things I can't quite remember—visited unbelievable places, looked backward through the memory of that—creature—I was one with, and saw—God, I wish I could remember!"

"You ought to thank your God you can't," said Yarol soberly.

His voice roused Smith from the half-trance he had fallen into and he rose on his elbow, swaying a little from weakness. The room was wavering before him, and he closed his eyes, not to see it, but he asked, "You say they—don't turn up again? No way of finding—another?"

Yarol did not answer for a moment. He laid his hands on the other man's shoulders and pressed him back, and then sat staring down into the dark, ravaged face with a new, strange, undefinable look upon it that he had never seen there before—whose meaning he knew, too well.

"Smith," he said finally, and his black eyes for once were steady and serious, and the little grinning devil had vanished from behind them, "Smith, I've never asked your word on anything before, but I've—I've earned the right to do it now, and I'm asking you to promise me one thing."

Smith's colorless eyes met the black gaze unsteadily. Irresolution was in them, and a little fear of what that promise might be. And for just a moment Yarol was looking, not into his friend's familiar eyes, but into a wide gray blankness that held all horror and delight—a pale sea with unspeakable pleasures sunk beneath it. Then the voice said, "Go ahead. I'll promise."

"That if you ever should meet a Shambleau again—ever, anywhere—you'll draw your gun and burn it to hell the instant you realize what it is. Will you promise me that?"

There was a long silence. Yarol's somber black eyes bored relentlessly into the colorless ones of Smith, not wavering. And the veins stood out on Smith's tanned forehead. He never broke his word—he had given it perhaps half a dozen times in his life, but once he had given it, he was incapable of breaking it. And once more the gray seas flooded in a dim tide of memories, sweet and horrible beyond dreams. Once more Yarol was staring into blankness that hid nameless things. The room was very still.

The gray tide ebbed. Smith's eyes, pale and resolute as steel, met Yarol's levelly.

"I'll—try," he said. And his voice wavered.

J.R.R. TOLKIEN, *THE HOBBIT*, OR THERE AND BACK AGAIN — Selections

Critical Introduction

As noted in our introduction to his essay "[Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics](#)," J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973) is the only author to appear in both of our volumes. He is now more widely known, though, for his novels of Middle Earth than for his scholarship. *The Hobbit* is the first of these novels and was intended for children. His *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, *The Return of the King*) continues the narrative in greater depth and complexity, and was targeted at an adult audience.

The Hobbit tells the tale of Bilbo Baggins, a hobbit. Tolkien introduces hobbits at the start of the novel:

They are (or were) a little people, about half our height, and smaller than the bearded Dwarves. Hobbits have no beards... They are inclined to be fat in the stomach;... wear no shoes, because their feet grow natural leathery soles and thick warm brown hair like the stuff on their heads (which is curly); have long clever brown fingers, good-natured faces, and laugh deep fruity laughs (especially after dinner, which they have twice a day when they can get it).

Bilbo is a somewhat typical hobbit at the outset of the novel, when the great wizard Gandalf appears, bringing a party of warlike dwarves to his cozy hobbit hole, and sending him off on a great adventure to defeat the dragon Smaug and restore the dwarven king Thorin Oakenshield to his rightful place in their lost kingdom under the Lonely Mountain. Along the way, they meet elves, face trolls, fight giant wolves, and escape from giant spiders and goblins.

While he drew on his deep familiarity with *Beowulf* and other medieval tales of adventure and monstrosity, Tolkien is responsible, in many ways, for inventing Dungeons & Dragons, role-playing video games, and the modern fantasy genre, sometimes now called High Fantasy, in which elves, dwarves, wizards, and heroes battle with orcs, goblins, and dragons. There are countless pulp novels produced each year that still follow the basic formulas that Tolkien established, in which the humanoid "races" are characterized by certain physical and intellectual traits: elves are not only tall and elegant, with pointed ears, but also calm and wise; dwarves are not only

short and stocky, with long beards, but also greedy and hot tempered; orcs are dark, violent, and evil. At the root of this basic pattern for establishing characters is a mode of thought based on the core principle of racist theories of human difference: that physical traits are connected with, and can be used to predict, intellectual, psychological, and moral traits. This basic construct has been replicated again and again in fantasy narratives, though some more recent works challenge the paradigm.

Here, we present two selections: the near-deadly encounter with a group of coarse and quarrelsome trolls and Bilbo's conversation with the fearsome dragon, Smaug.

Reading Questions

In Tolkien's Middle Earth, many of the monsters are rather chatty. What do we learn about the trolls through their conversations? We will eventually hear a conversation between Bilbo and Smaug, but the first meeting presents the dragon as bestial. What are the elements of his physical description? How does Tolkien's work create the image of a terrifying monster?

Editorial Notes

Where portions of the narrative have been omitted, the deletion is indicated with a triple set of hyphens. Where appropriate, a synopsis of the omitted action has been provided and placed in italics.

Further Reading

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THE HOBBIT, OR THERE AND BACK AGAIN

Selections (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1937)

J.R.R. TOLKIEN

BILBO BAGGINS, A quiet hobbit from The Shire, has—on the recommendation of Gandalf—been “hired” as a burglar by a band of dwarves who are looking to reclaim their treasure from the Lonely Mountain and the dragon Smaug who has taken residence there. The following action takes place on the road to Rivendell, an elven settlement.

Off Bilbo had to go, before he could explain that he could not hoot even once like any kind of owl any more than fly like a bat. But at any rate hobbits can move quietly in woods, absolutely quietly. They take a pride in it, and Bilbo had sniffed more than once at what he called “all this dwarvish racket,” as they went along, though I don’t suppose you or I would notice anything at all on a windy night, not if the whole cavalcade had passed two feet off. As for Bilbo walking primly towards the red light, I don’t suppose even a weasel would have stirred a whisker at it. So, naturally, he got right up to the fire—for fire it was—without disturbing anyone. And this is what he saw. Three very large persons sitting round a very large fire of beech-logs. They were toasting mutton on long spits of wood, and licking the gravy off their fingers. There was a fine toothsome smell. Also there was a barrel of good drink at hand, and they were drinking out of jugs. But they were trolls. Obviously trolls. Even Bilbo, in spite of his sheltered life, could see that: from the great heavy faces of them, and their size, and the shape of their legs, not to mention their language, which was not drawing-room fashion at all, at all.

“Mutton yesterday, mutton today, and blimey, if it don’t look like mutton again tomorrer,” said one of the trolls.

“Never a blinking bit of manflesh have we had for long enough,” said a second. “What the ‘ell William was a-thinkin’ of to bring us into these parts at all, beats me—and the drink runnin’ short, what’s more,” he said jogging the elbow of William, who was taking a pull at his jug.

William choked. “Shut yer mouth!” he said as soon as he could. “Yer can’t expect folk to stop here for ever just to be et by you and Bert. You’ve et a village and a half between yer, since we come down from the mountains. How much more d’yer want? And time’s been up our way, when yer’d have said ‘thank yer Bill’ for a nice bit o’ fat valley mutton like what this is.” He took a big bite off a sheep’s leg he was toasting, and wiped his lips on his sleeve.

Yes, I am afraid trolls do behave like that, even those with only one head each. After hearing all this Bilbo ought to have done something at once. Either he should have gone back quietly and warned his friends that there were three fair-sized trolls at hand in a nasty mood, quite likely to try toasted dwarf, or even pony, for a change; or else he should have done a bit of good quick burgling. A really first-class and legendary burglar would at this point have picked the trolls’ pockets—it is nearly always worthwhile if you can manage it—, pinched the very mutton off the spit, purloined the beer, and walked off without their noticing him. Others more practical but with less professional pride would perhaps have stuck a dagger into each of them before they observed it. Then the night could have been spent cheerily.

Bilbo knew it. He had read of a good many things he had never seen or done. He was very much alarmed, as well as disgusted; he wished himself a hundred miles away, and yet—and yet somehow he could not go straight back to Thorin and Company empty-handed. So he stood and hesitated in the shadows. Of the various burglarious proceedings he had heard of picking the trolls’ pockets seemed the least difficult, so at last he crept behind a tree just behind William.

Bert and Tom went off to the barrel. William was having another drink.

Then Bilbo plucked up courage and put his little hand in William’s enormous pocket. There was a purse in it, as big as a bag to Bilbo. “Ha!” thought he warming to his new work as he lifted it carefully out, “this is a beginning!”

It was! Trolls’ purses are the mischief, and this was no exception. “‘Ere, ‘oo are you?” it squeaked, as it left the pocket; and William turned round at once and grabbed Bilbo by the neck, before he could duck behind the tree.

“Blimey, Bert, look what I’ve copped!” said William.

“What is it?” said the others coming up.

“Lumme, if I knows! What are yer?”

“Bilbo Baggins, a bur—a hobbit,” said poor Bilbo, shaking all over, and wondering how to make owl-noises before they throttled him.

“A burrahobbit?” said they a bit startled. Trolls are slow in the uptake, and mighty suspicious about anything new to them.

“What’s burrahobbit got to do with my pocket, anyways?” said William.

"And can yer cook 'em?" said Tom.

"Yer can try," said Bert, picking up a skewer.

"He wouldn't make above a mouthful," said William, who had already had a fine supper, "not when he was skinned and boned."

"P'raps there are more like him round about, and we might make a pie," said Bert. "Here you, are there any more of your sort a-sneakin' in these here woods, yer nassty little rabbit," said he looking at the hobbit's furry feet; and he picked him up by the toes and shook him.

"Yes, lots," said Bilbo, before he remembered not to give his friends away. "No, none at all, not one," he said immediately afterwards.

"What d'yer mean?" said Bert, holding him right away up, by the hair this time.

"What I say," said Bilbo gasping. "And please don't cook me, kind sirs! I am a good cook myself, and cook better than I cook, if you see what I mean. I'll cook beautifully for you, a perfectly beautiful breakfast for you, if only you don't have me for supper."

"Poor little blighter," said William. He had already had as much supper as he could hold; also he had had lots of beer.

"Poor little blighter! Let him go!"

"Not till he says what he means by *lots* and *none at all*," said Bert. "I don't want to have me throat cut in me sleep. Hold his toes in the fire, till he talks!"

"I won't have it," said William. "I caught him anyway."

"You're a fat fool, William," said Bert, "as I've said afore this evening."

"And you're a lout!"

"And I won't take that from you, Bill Huggins," says Bert, and puts his fist in William's eye.

Then there was a gorgeous row. Bilbo had just enough wits left, when Bert dropped him on the ground, to scramble out of the way of their feet, before they were fighting like dogs, and calling one another all sorts of perfectly true and applicable names in very loud voices. Soon they were locked in one another's arms, and rolling nearly into the fire kicking and thumping, while Tom whacked at them both with a branch to bring them to their senses—and that of course only made them madder than ever.

That would have been the time for Bilbo to have left. But his poor little feet had been very squashed in Bert's big paw, and he had no breath in his body, and his head was going round; so there he lay for a while panting, just outside the circle of firelight.

Right in the middle of the fight up came Balin. The dwarves had heard noises from a distance, and after waiting

for some time for Bilbo to come back, or to hoot like an owl, they started off one by one to creep towards the light as quietly as they could. No sooner did Tom see Balin come into the light than he gave an awful howl. Trolls simply detest the very sight of dwarves (uncooked). Bert and Bill stopped fighting immediately, and "a sack, Tom, quick!" they said, before Balin, who was wondering where in all this commotion Bilbo was, knew what was happening, a sack was over his head, and he was down.

"There's more to come yet," said Tom, "or I'm mighty mistook. Lots and none at all, it is," said he. "No burrahobbits, but lots of these here dwarves. That's about the shape of it!"

"I reckon you're right," said Bert, "and we'd best get out of the light."

And so they did. With sacks in their hands, that they used for carrying off mutton and other plunder, they waited in the shadows. As each dwarf came up and looked at the fire, and the spilled jugs, and the gnawed mutton, in surprise, pop! went a nasty smelly sack over his head, and he was down. Soon Dwalin lay by Balin, and Fili and Kili together, and Dori and Nori and Ori all in a heap, and Oin and Gloin and Bifur and Bofur and Bombur piled uncomfortably near the fire.

"That'll teach 'em," said Tom; for Bifur and Bombur had given a lot of trouble, and fought like mad, as dwarves will when cornered.

Thorin came last—and he was not caught unawares. He came expecting mischief, and didn't need to see his friends' legs sticking out of sacks to tell him that things were not all well. He stood outside in the shadows some way off, and said: "What's all this trouble? Who has been knocking my people about?"

"It's trolls!" said Bilbo from behind a tree. They had forgotten all about him. "They're hiding in the bushes with sacks," said he.

"O! are they?" said Thorin, and he jumped forward to the fire, before they could leap on him. He caught up a big branch all on fire at one end; and Bert got that end in his eye before he could step aside. That put him out of the battle for a bit. Bilbo did his best. He caught hold of Tom's leg—as well as he could, it was thick as a young tree-trunk—but he was sent spinning up into the top of some bushes, when Tom kicked the sparks up in Thorin's face.

Tom got the branch in his teeth for that, and lost one of the front ones. It made him howl, I can tell you. But just at that moment William came up behind and popped a sack right over Thorin's head and down to his toes. And so the fight ended. A nice pickle they were all in now: all neatly tied up in

sacks, with three angry trolls (and two with burns and bashes to remember) sitting by them, arguing whether they should roast them slowly, or mince them fine and boil them, or just sit on them one by one and squash them into jelly: and Bilbo up in a bush, with his clothes and his skin torn, not daring to move for fear they should hear him.

It was just then that Gandalf came back. But no one saw him. The trolls had just decided to roast the dwarves now and eat them later—that was Bert's idea, and after a lot of argument they had all agreed to it.

"No good roasting 'em now, it'd take all night," said a voice. Bert thought it was William's.

"Don't start the argument all over-again. Bill," he said, "or it will take all night."

"Who's a-arguing?" said William, who thought it was Bert that had spoken.

"You are," said Bert.

"You're a liar," said William; and so the argument began over again. In the end they decided to mince them fine and boil them. So they got a black pot, and they took out their knives.

"No good boiling 'em! We ain't got no water, and it's a long way to the well and all," said a voice. Bert and William thought it was Tom's.

"Shut up!" said they, "or we'll never have done. And yer can fetch the water yerself, if yer say any more."

"Shut up yerself!" said Tom, who thought it was William's voice. "Who's arguing but you. I'd like to know."

"You're a booby," said William.

"Booby yerself!" said Tom.

And so the argument began all over again, and went on hotter than ever, until at last they decided to sit on the sacks one by one and squash them, and boil them next time.

"Who shall we sit on first?" said the voice.

"Better sit on the last fellow first," said Bert, whose eye had been damaged by Thorin. He thought Tom was talking.

"Don't talk to yerself," said Tom. "But if you wants to sit on the last one, sit on him. Which is he?"

"The one with the yellow stockings," said Bert.

"Nonsense, the one with the grey stockings," said a voice like William's.

"I made sure it was yellow," said Bert.

"Yellow it was," said William.

"Then what did yer say it was grey for?" said Bert.

"I never did. Tom said it."

"That I never did!" said Tom. "It was you."

"Two to one, so shut yer mouth!" said Bert.

"Who are you a-talkin' to?" said William.

"Now stop it!" said Tom and Bert together. "The night's gettin' on, and dawn comes early. Let's get on with it!"

"Dawn take you all, and be stone to you!" said a voice that sounded like William's. But it wasn't. For just at that moment the light came over the hill, and there was a mighty twitter in the branches. William never spoke for he stood turned to stone as he stooped; and Bert and Tom were stuck like rocks as they looked at him. And there they stand to this day, all alone, unless the bird perch on them; for trolls, as you probably know, must be underground before dawn, or they go back to the stuff of the mountains they are made of, and never move again. That is what had happened to Bert and Tom and William.

"Excellent!" said Gandalf, as he stepped from behind a tree, and helped Bilbo to climb down out of a thorn-bush. Then Bilbo understood. It was the wizard's voice that had kept the trolls bickering and quarrelling, until the light came and made an end of them.

In the intervening action, Bilbo has encountered Gollum and found the One Ring (which makes its wearer invisible) when lost in the Misty Mountains. After nasty run-ins with giant spiders and unfriendly elves in Mirkwood, they arrive at the Lonely Mountain, where Bilbo is tasked with reconnaissance.

It was at this point that Bilbo stopped. Going on from there was the bravest thing he ever did. The tremendous things that happened afterward were as nothing compared to it. He fought the real battle in the tunnel alone, before he ever saw the vast danger that lay in wait. At any rate after a short halt go on he did; and you can picture him coming to the end of the tunnel, an opening of much the same size and shape as the door above. Through it peeps the hobbit's little head. Before him lies the great bottommost cellar or dungeon-hall of the ancient dwarves right at the Mountain's root. It is almost dark so that its vastness can only be dimly guessed, but rising from the near side of the rocky floor there is a great glow. The glow of Smaug!

There he lay, a vast red-golden dragon, fast asleep; thrumming came from his jaws and nostrils, and wisps of smoke, but his fires were low in slumber. Beneath him, under all his limbs and his huge coiled tail, and about him on all sides stretching away across the unseen floors, lay countless piles of precious things, gold wrought and unwrought, gems and jewels, and silver red-stained in the ruddy light.

Smaug lay, with wings folded like an immeasurable bat, turned partly on one side, so that the hobbit could see his underparts and his long pale belly crusted with gems and fragments of gold from his long lying on his costly bed. Behind him where the walls were nearest could dimly be seen coats of mail, helms and axes, swords and spears hanging; and there in rows stood great jars and vessels filled with a wealth that could not be guessed. To say that Bilbo's breath was taken away is no description at all. There are no words left to express his staggerment, since Men changed the language that they learned of elves in the days when all the world was wonderful. Bilbo had heard tell and sing of dragon-hoards before, but the splendour, the lust, the glory of such treasure had never yet come home to him. His heart was filled and pierced with enchantment and with the desire of dwarves; and he gazed motionless, almost forgetting the frightful guardian, at the gold beyond price and count.

He gazed for what seemed an age, before drawn almost against his will, he stole from the shadow of the doorway, across the floor to the nearest edge of the mounds of treasure. Above him the sleeping dragon lay, a dire menace even in his sleep. He grasped a great two-handled cup, as heavy as he could carry, and cast one fearful eye upwards. Smaug stirred a wing, opened a claw, the rumble of his snoring changed its note.

Then Bilbo fled. But the dragon did not wake—not yet but shifted into other dreams of greed and violence, lying there in his stolen hall while the little hobbit toiled back up the long tunnel. His heart was beating and a more fevered shaking was in his legs than when he was going down, but still he clutched the cup, and his chief thought was: "I've done it! This will show them. 'More like a grocer than a burglar' indeed! Well, we'll hear no more of that."

Nor did he. Balin was overjoyed to see the hobbit again, and as delighted as he was surprised. He picked Bilbo up and carried him out into the open air. It was midnight and clouds had covered the stars, but Bilbo lay with his eyes shut, gasping and taking pleasure in the feel of the fresh air again, and hardly noticing the excitement of the dwarves, or how they praised him and patted him on the back and put themselves and all their families for generations to come at his service.

The dwarves were still passing the cup from hand to hand and talking delightedly of the recovery of their treasure, when suddenly a vast rumbling woke in the mountain underneath as if it was an old volcano that had made up its mind to start eruptions once again. The door behind them was pulled nearly to, and blocked from closing with a stone, but up the

long tunnel came the dreadful echoes, from far down in the depths, of a bellowing and a trampling that made the ground beneath them tremble.

Then the dwarves forgot their joy and their confident boasts of a moment before and cowered down in fright. Smaug was still to be reckoned with. It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him. Dragons may not have much real use for all their wealth, but they know it to an ounce as a rule, especially after long possession; and Smaug was no exception. He had passed from an uneasy dream (in which a warrior, altogether insignificant in size but provided with a bitter sword and great courage, figured most unpleasantly) to a doze, and from a doze to wide waking. There was a breath of strange air in his cave. Could there be a draught from that little hole? He had never felt quite happy about it, though was so small, and now he glared at it in suspicion and wondered why he had never blocked it up. Of late he had half fancied he had caught the dim echoes of a knocking sound from far above that came down through it to his lair. He stirred and stretched forth his neck to sniff. Then he missed the cup!

Thieves! Fire! Murder! Such a thing had not happened since first he came to the Mountain! His rage passes description—the sort of rage that is only seen when rich folk that have more than they can enjoy suddenly lose something that they have long had but have never before used or wanted. His fire belched forth, the hall smoked, he shook the mountain-roots. He thrust his head in vain at the little hole, and then coiling his length together, roaring like thunder underground, he sped from his deep lair through its great door, out into the huge passages of the mountain-palace and up towards the Front Gate.

To hunt the whole mountain till he had caught the thief and had torn and trampled him was his one thought. He issued from the Gate, the waters rose in fierce whistling steam, and up he soared blazing into the air and settled on the mountain-top in a spout of green and scarlet flame. The dwarves heard the awful rumour of his flight, and they crouched against the walls of the grass terrace cringing under boulders, hoping somehow to escape the frightful eyes of the hunting dragon.

There they would have all been killed, if it had not been for Bilbo once again. "Quick! Quick!" he gasped. "The door! The tunnel! It's no good here."

Roused by these words they were just about to creep inside the tunnel when Bifur gave a cry: "My cousins! Bombur and Bofur—we have forgotten them, they are down in the valley!"

"They will be slain, and all our ponies too, and all our stores lost," moaned the others. "We can do nothing."

"Nonsense!" said Thorin, recovering his dignity. "We cannot leave them. Get inside Mr. Baggins and Balin, and you two Fili and Kili—the dragon shan't have all of us. Now you others, where are the ropes? Be quick!"

Those were perhaps the worst moments they had been through yet. The horrible sounds of Smaug's anger were echoing in the stony hollows far above; at any moment he might come blazing down or fly whirling round and find them there, near the perilous cliff's edge hauling madly on the ropes. Up came Bofur, and still all was safe. Up came Bombur, puffing and blowing while the ropes creaked, and still all was safe. Up came some tools and bundles of stores, and then danger was upon them. A whirring noise was heard. A red light touched the points of standing rocks. The dragon came. They had barely time to fly back to the tunnel, pulling and dragging in their bundles, when Smaug came hurtling from the North, licking the mountain-sides with flame, beating his great wings with a noise like a roaring wind. His hot breath shrivelled the grass before the door, and drove in through the crack they had left and scorched them as they lay hid. Flickering fires leaped up and black rock-shadows danced. Then darkness fell as he passed again.

The ponies screamed with terror, burst their ropes and galloped wildly off. The dragon swooped and turned to pursue them, and was gone.

"That'll be the end of our poor beasts!" said Thorin.

"Nothing can escape Smaug once he sees it. Here we are and here we shall have to stay, unless any one fancies tramping the long open miles back to the river with Smaug on the watch!"

It was not a pleasant thought! They crept further down the tunnel, and there they lay and shivered though it was warm and stuffy, until dawn came pale through the crack of the door. Every now and again through the night they could hear the roar of the flying dragon grow and then pass and fade, as he hunted round and round the mountain-sides.

He guessed from the ponies, and from the traces of the camps he had discovered, that men had come up from the river and the lake and had scaled the mountain-side from the valley where the ponies had been standing; but the door withstood his searching eye, and the little high-walled bay had kept out his fiercest flames. Long he had hunted in vain till the dawn chilled his wrath and he went back to his golden couch to sleep—and to gather new strength.

He would not forget or forgive the theft, not if a thousand years turned him to smouldering stone, but he could afford to wait. Slow and silent he crept back to his lair and half closed his eyes.

THEODORE STURGEON, “IT!”

Critical Introduction

Theodore Sturgeon (1918–1985) was an American science-fiction writer. Though not as well known as Ray Bradbury, Philip K. Dick, or Robert Heinlein, he is still revered in the science-fiction community some thirty years after his death. “It!” first published in the pulp magazine *Unknown* in 1940, is distinctive among the monster tales included in this volume in that the monster is vegetable-based. Aside from John Wyndham’s triffids, Audrey from *Little Shop of Horrors*, the monster in *The Thing from Another Planet* (directed by Christian Nyby, 1951), and the comic book character Swamp Thing, there are almost no popular monsters that are plants—and since Sturgeon published his story some eleven years before *Day of the Triffids*, it more than deserves a closer look.

The narrative proceeds along the lines of a detective story, for although the unnamed creature is the main character, its origins and motivations are mysterious—to both the reader and the creature itself. Only at the end of the story do we learn where it came from, but Sturgeon’s tale still haunts because it refuses to answer *how* this monster came to be and *why* it does what it does. Though one may be tempted to see a moral about greed or the conflict between human consumption and the natural world, the narrative does as much to occlude those readings as it does to support them. Sturgeon, it seems, understands that monsters disallow easy answers.

Reading Questions

Unlike many monsters, the creature from this story does not seem to have any real intention. It cannot rightly be called “evil” since it is unclear it knows it has done wrong. But one certainly would not call it “good” or “innocent,” either—even though it clearly is attempting to learn what it is and how the world around it works. Think about the amoral nature of the creature. Is it more or less frightening than outright evil creatures? Why?

What are the differences and similarities between Sturgeon’s creation and other monsters in this volume? (Some points of reference might be creation stories, development, and relationship with humans.)

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“IT!”

THEODORE STURGEON

IT WALKED IN the woods.

It was never born. It existed. Under the pine needles the fires burn, deep and smokeless in the mold. In heat and in darkness and decay there is growth. There is life and there is growth. It grew, but it was not alive. It walked unbreathing through the woods, and thought and saw and was hideous and strong, and it was not born and it did not live. It grew and moved about without living.

It crawled out of the darkness and hot damp mold into the cool of a morning. It was huge. It was lumped and crusted with its own hateful substances, and pieces of it dropped off as it went its way, dropped off and lay writhing, and stilled, and sank putrescent into the forest loam.

It had no mercy, no laughter, no beauty. It had strength and great intelligence. And—perhaps it could not be destroyed. It crawled out of its mound in the wood and lay pulsing in the sunlight for a long moment. Patches of it shone wetly in the golden glow, parts of it were nubbled and flaked. And whose dead bones had given it the form of a man?

It scabbled painfully with its half-formed hands, beating the ground and the bole of a tree. It rolled and lifted itself up on its crumbling elbows, and it tore up a great handful of herbs and shredded them against its chest, and it paused and gazed at the gray-green juices with intelligent calm. It wavered to its feet, and seized a young sapling and destroyed it, folding the slender trunk back on itself again and again, watching attentively the useless, fibered splinters. And it squealed, snatching up a fear-frozen field-creature, crushing it slowly, letting blood and pulpy flesh and fur ooze from between its fingers, run down and rot on the forearms.

It began searching.

Kimbo drifted through the tall grasses like a puff of dust, his bushy tail curled tightly over his back and his long jaws agape. He ran with an easy lope, loving his freedom and the power of his flanks and furry shoulders. His tongue lolled listlessly over his lips. His lips were black and serrated, and each tiny pointed liplet swayed with his doggy gallop. Kimbo was all dog, all healthy animal.

He leaped high over a boulder and landed with a startled yelp as a long-eared cony shot from its hiding place under the rock. Kimbo hurtled after it, grunting with each great thrust of his legs. The rabbit bounced just ahead of him, keeping its dis-

tance, its ears flattened on its curving back and its little legs nibbling away at a distance hungrily. It stopped, and Kimbo pounced, and the rabbit shot away at a tangent and popped into a hollow log. Kimbo yelped again and rushed snuffling at the log, and knowing his failure, curvetted but once around the stump and ran on into the forest. The thing that watched from the wood raised its crusted arms and waited for Kimbo.

Kimbo sensed it there, standing dead-still by the path. To him it was a bulk which smelled of carrion not fit to roll in, and he snuffled distastefully and ran to pass it.

The thing let him come abreast and dropped a heavy twisted fist on him. Kimbo saw it coming and curled up tight as he ran, and the hand clipped stunningly on his rump, sending him rolling and yipping down the slope. Kimbo straddled to his feet, shook his head, shook his body with a deep growl, came back to the silent thing with green murder in his eyes. He walked stiffly, straight-legged, his tail as low as his lowered head and a ruff of fury round his neck. The thing raised its arms again, waited.

Kimbo slowed, then flipped himself through the air at the monster's throat. His jaws closed on it; his teeth clicked together through a mass of filth, and he fell choking and snarling at its feet. The thing leaned down and struck twice, and after the dog's back was broken, it sat beside him and began to tear him apart.

“Be back in an hour or so,” said Alton Drew, picking up his rifle from the corner behind the wood box. His brother laughed.

“Old Kimbo 'bout runs your life, Alton,” he said.

“Ah, I know the ol' devil,” said Alton. “When I whistle for him for half an hour and he don't show up, he's in a jam or he's treed something wuth shootin' at. The ol' son of a gun calls me by not answerin'”

Cory Drew shoved a full glass of milk over to his nine-year-old daughter and smiled. “You think as much o' that houn'-dog o' yours as I do of Babe here.”

Babe slid off her chair and ran to her uncle. “Gonna catch me the bad fella, Uncle Alton?” she shrilled. The “bad fella” was Cory's invention—the one who lurked in corners ready to pounce on little girls who chased the chickens and played around mowing machines and hurled green apples with a powerful young arm at the sides of the hogs, to hear the synchronized thud and grunt; little girls who swore with an Austrian accent

like an ex-hired man they had had; who dug caves in haystacks till they tipped over, and kept pet crawfish in tomorrow's milk cans, and rode work horses to a lather in the night pasture.

"Get back here and keep away from Uncle Alton's gun!" said Cory. "If you see the bad fella, Alton, chase him back here. He has a date with Babe here for that stunt of hers last night." The preceding evening, Babe had kind-heartedly poured pepper on the cows' salt block.

"Don't worry, kiddo," grinned her uncle, "I'll bring you the bad fella's hide if he don't get me first."

Alton Drew walked up the path toward the wood, thinking about Babe. She was a phenomenon—a pampered farm child. Ah well—she had to be. They'd both loved Clissa Drew, and she'd married Cory, and they had to love Clissa's child. Funny thing, love. Alton was a man's man, and thought things out that way; and his reaction to love was a strong and frightened one. He knew what love was because he felt it still for his brother's wife and would feel it as long as he lived for Babe. It led him through his life, and yet he embarrassed himself by thinking of it. Loving a dog was an easy thing, because you and the old devil could love one another completely without talking about it. The smell of gun smoke and the smell of wet fur in the rain were perfume enough for Alton Drew, a grunt of satisfaction and the scream of something hunted and hit were poetry enough. They weren't like love for a human, that choked his throat so he could not say words he could not have thought of anyway. So Alton loved his dog Kimbo and his Winchester for all to see, and let his love for his brother's women, Clissa and Babe, eat at him quietly and unmentioned.

His quick eyes saw the fresh indentations in the soft earth behind the boulder, which showed where Kimbo had turned and leaped with a single surge, chasing the rabbit. Ignoring the tracks, he looked for the nearest place where a rabbit might hide, and strolled over to the stump. Kimbo had been there, he saw, and had been there too late. "You're an ol' fool," muttered Alton. "Y' can't catch a cony by chasin' it. You want to cross him up some way." He gave a peculiar trilling whistle, sure that Kimbo was digging frantically under some nearby stump for a rabbit that was three counties away by now. No answer. A little puzzled, Alton went back to the path. "He never done this before," he said softly. There was something about this he didn't like.

He cocked his .32-40 and cradled it. At the county fair someone had once said of Alton Drew that he could shoot at a handful of salt and pepper thrown in the air and hit only the pepper. Once he split a bullet on the blade of a knife and put two candles out. He had no need to fear anything that could be shot at. That's what he believed.

The thing in the woods looked curiously down at what it had done to Kimbo, and moaned the way Kimbo had before he died. It stood a minute storing away facts in its foul, unemotional mind. Blood was warm. The sunlight was warm. Things that moved and bore fur had a muscle to force the thick liquid through tiny tubes in their bodies. The liquid coagulated after a time. The liquid on rooted green things was thinner and the loss of a limb did not mean loss of life. It was very interesting, but the thing, the mold with a mind, was not pleased. Neither was it displeased. Its accidental urge was a thirst for knowledge, and it was only—interested.

It was growing late, and the sun reddened and rested awhile on the hilly horizon, teaching the clouds to be inverted flees. The thing threw up its head suddenly, noticing the dusk. Night was ever a strange thing, even for those of us who have known it in life. It would have been frightening for the monster had it been capable of fright, but it could only be curious; it could only reason from what it had observed.

What was happening? It was getting harder to see. Why? It threw its shapeless head from side to side. It was true—things were dim, and growing dimmer. Things were changing shape, taking on a new and darker color. What did the creatures it had crushed and torn apart see? How did they see? The larger one, the one that had attacked, had used two organs in its head. That must have been it, because after the thing had torn off two of the dog's legs it had struck at the hairy muzzle; and the dog, seeing the blow coming, had dropped folds of its skin over the organs—closed its eyes. Ergo, the dog saw with its eyes. But then after the dog was dead, and its body still, repeated blows had no effect on the eyes. They remained open and staring. The logical conclusion was, then, that a being that had ceased to live and breathe and move about lost the use of its eyes. It must be that to lose sight was, conversely, to die. Dead things did not walk about. They lay down and did not move. Therefore the thing in the wood concluded that it must be dead, and so it lay down by the path, not far away from Kimbo's scattered body, lay down and believed itself dead.

Alton Drew came up through the dusk to the wood. He was frankly worried. He whistled again, and then called, and there was still no response, and he said again, "The ol' flea-bus never done this before," and shook his heavy head. It was past milking time, and Cory would need him. "Kimbo!" he roared. The cry echoed through the shadows, and Alton flipped on the safety catch of his rifle and put the butt on the ground beside the path. Leaning on it, he took off his cap and scratched the

back of his head, wondering. The rifle butt sank into what he thought was soft earth; he staggered and stepped into the chest of the thing that lay beside the path. His foot went up to the ankle in its yielding rottenness, and he swore and jumped back.

"*Whew!* Sompn sure dead as hell there! Ugh!" He swabbed at his boot with a handful of leaves while the monster lay in the growing blackness with the edges of the deep footprint in its chest sliding into it, filling it up. It lay there regarding him dimly out of its muddy eyes, thinking it was dead because of the darkness, watching the articulation of Alton Drew's joints, wondering at this new uncautious creature.

Alton cleaned the butt of his gun with more leaves and went on up the path, whistling anxiously for Kimbo.

Clissa Drew stood in the door of the milk shed, very lovely in red-checked gingham and a blue apron. Her hair was clean yellow, parted in the middle and stretched tautly back to a heavy braided knot. "Cory! Alton!" she called a little sharply.

"Well?" Cory responded gruffly from the barn, where he was stripping off the Ayrshire. The dwindling streams of milk plopped pleasantly into the froth of a full pail.

"I've called and called," said Clissa. "Supper's cold, and Babe won't eat until you come. Why—where's Alton?"

Cory grunted, heaved the stool out of the way, threw over the stanchion lock and slapped the Ayrshire on the rump. The cow backed and filled like a towboat, clattered down the line and out into the barnyard. "Ain't back yet."

"Not back?" Clissa came in and stood beside him as he sat by the next cow, put his forehead against the warm flank. "But, Cory, he said he'd—"

"Yeh, yeh, I know. He said he'd be back fer the milkin'. I heard him. Well, he ain't."

"And you have to—Oh, Cory, I'll help you finish up. Alton would be back if he could. Maybe he's—"

"Maybe he's treed a blue jay," snapped her husband. "Him an' that damn dog." He gestured hugely with one hand while the other went on milking. "I got twenty-six head o' cows to milk. I got pigs to feed an' chickens to put to bed. I got to toss hay for the mare and turn the team out. I got harness to mend and a wire down in the night pasture. I got wood to split an' carry." He milked for a moment in silence, chewing on his lip. Clissa stood twisting her hands together, trying to think of something to stem the tide. It wasn't the first time Alton's hunting had interfered with the chores. "So I got to go ahead with it. I can't interfere with Alton's spoorin'. Every damn time that hound o' his smells out a squirrel I go without my supper. I'm gettin' sick an'—"

"Oh, I'll help you!" said Clissa. She was thinking of the spring, when Kimbo had held four hundred pounds of raging black bear at bay until Alton could put a bullet in its brain, the time Babe had found a bear cub and started to carry it home, and had fallen into a freshet, cutting her head. You can't hate a dog that has saved your child for you, she thought.

"You'll do nothin' of the kind!" Cory growled. "Get back to the house. You'll find work enough there. I'll be along when I can. Dammit, Clissa, don't cry! I didn't mean t—Oh, shucks!" He got up and put his arms around her. "I'm wrought up," he said. "Go on now. I'd no call to speak that way to you. I'm sorry. Go back to Babe. I'll put a stop to this for good tonight. I've had enough. There's work here for four farmers an' all we've got is me an' that... that huntsman. Go on now, Clissa."

"All right," she said into his shoulder. "But, Cory, hear him out first when he comes back. He might be unable to come back this time. Maybe he... he—"

"Ain't nothin' kin hurt my brother that a bullet will hit. He can take care of himself. He's got no excuse good enough this time. Go on, now. Make the kid eat."

Clissa went back to the house, her young face furrowed. If Cory quarreled with Alton now and drove him away, what with the drought and the creamery about to close and all, they just couldn't manage. Hiring a man was out of the question. Cory'd have to work himself to death, and he just wouldn't be able to make it. No one man could. She sighed and went into the house. It was seven o'clock, and the milking not done yet. Oh, why did Alton have to—

Babe was in bed at nine when Clissa heard Cory in the shed, slinging the wire cutters into a corner. "Alton back yet?" they both said at once as Cory stepped into the kitchen; and as she shook her head he clumped over to the stove, and lifting a lid, spat into the coals. "Come to bed," he said.

She lay down her stitching and looked at his broad back. He was twenty-eight, and he walked and acted like a man ten years older, and looked like a man five years younger. "I'll be up in a while," Clissa said.

Cory glanced at the corner behind the wood box where Alton's rifle usually stood, then made an unspellable, disgusted sound and sat down to take off his heavy muddy shoes.

"It's after nine," Clissa volunteered timidly. Cory said nothing, reaching for house slippers.

"Cory, you're not going to—"

"Not going to what?"

"Oh, nothing. I just thought that maybe Alton—"

"Alton!" Cory flared. "The dog goes hunting field mice. Alton goes hunting the dog. Now you want me to go hunting Alton. That's what you want?"

"I just—He was never this late before."

"I won't do it! Go out lookin' for him at nine o'clock in the night? I'll be damned! He has no call to use us so, Clissa."

Clissa said nothing. She went to the stove, peered into the wash boiler, set it aside at the back of the range. When she turned around, Cory had his shoes and coat on again.

"I knew you'd go," she said. Her voice smiled though she did not.

"I'll be back durned soon," said Cory. "I don't reckon he's strayed far. It is late. I ain't feared for him, but—" He broke his 12-gauge shotgun, looked through the barrels, slipped two shells in the breech and a box of them into his pocket. "Don't wait up," he said over his shoulder as he went out.

"I won't," Clissa replied to the closed door, and went back to her stitching by the lamp.

The path up the slope to the wood was very dark when Cory went up it, peering and calling. The air was chill and quiet, and a fetid odor of mold hung in it. Cory blew the taste of it out through impatient nostrils, drew it in again with the next breath, and swore. "Nonsense," he muttered. "Houn'-dog. Huntin', at ten in th' night, too. Alton!" he bellowed. "Alton Drew!" Echoes answered him, and he entered the wood. The huddled thing he passed in the dark heard him and felt the vibrations of his footsteps and did not move because it thought it was dead.

Cory strode on, looking around and ahead and not down since his feet knew the path.

"Alton!"

"That you, Cory?"

Cory Drew froze. That corner of the wood was thickly set and as dark as a burial vault. The voice he heard was choked, quiet, penetrating.

"Alton?"

"I found Kimbo, Cory."

"Where the hell have you been?" shouted Cory furiously. He disliked this pitch-blackness; he was afraid at the tense hopelessness of Alton's voice, and he mistrusted his ability to stay angry at his brother.

"I called him, Cory. I whistled at him, an' the ol' devil didn't answer."

"I can say the same for you, you... you louse. Why weren't you to milkin'? Where are you? You caught in a trap?"

"The houn' never missed answerin' me before, you know," said the tight, monotonous voice from the darkness.

"Alton! What the devil's the matter with you? What do I care if your mutt didn't answer? Where—"

"I guess because he ain't never died before," said Alton, refusing to be interrupted.

"You *what*? Cory clicked his lips together twice and then said, "Alton, you turned crazy? What's that you say?"

"Kimbo's dead."

"Kim... oh! Oh!" Cory was seeing that picture again in his mind—Babe sprawled unconscious in the freshet, and Kimbo raging and snapping against a monster bear, holding her back until Alton could get there. "What happened, Alton?" he asked more quietly.

"I aim to find out. Someone tore him up."

"*Tore him up?*"

"There ain't a bit of him left tacked together, Cory. Every damn joint in his body tore apart. Guts out of him."

"Good God! Bear, you reckon?"

"No bear, nor nothin' on four legs. He's all here. None of him's been et. Whoever done it just killed him an'—tore him up."

"Good God!" Cory said again. "Who could've—" There was a long silence, then. "Come 'long home," he said almost gently. "There's no call for you to set up by him all night."

"I'll set. I aim to be here at sunup, an' I'm goin' to start trackin', an' I'm goin' to keep trackin' till I find the one done this job on Kimbo."

"You're drunk or crazy, Alton."

"I ain't drunk. You can think what you like about the rest of it. I'm stickin' here."

"We got a farm back yonder. Remember? I ain't going to milk twenty-six head o' cows again in the mornin' like I did jest now, Alton."

"Somebody's got to. I can't be there. I guess you'll just have to, Cory."

"You dirty scum!" Cory screamed. "You'll come back with me now or I'll know why!"

Alton's voice was still tight, half-sleepy. "Don't you come no nearer, Bud."

Cory kept moving toward Alton's voice.

"I said"—the voice was very quiet now—"stop where you are."

Cory kept coming. A sharp click told of the release of the .32-40's safety. Cory stopped.

"You got your gun on me, Alton?" Cory whispered.

"That's right, Bud. You ain't a-trompin' up these tracks for me. I need 'em at sun-up."

A full minute passed, and the only sound in the blackness was that of Cory's pained breathing. Finally:

"I got my gun, too, Alton. Come home."

"You can't see to shoot me."

"We're even on that."

"We ain't. I know just where you stand, Cory. I been here four hours."

"My gun scatters."

"My gun kills."

Without another word Cory Drew turned on his heel and stamped back to the farm.

Black and liquidescent it lay in the blackness, not alive, not understanding death, believing itself dead. Things that were alive saw and moved about. Things that were not alive could do neither. It rested its muddy gaze on the line of trees at the crest of the rise, and deep within its thoughts trickled wetly. It lay huddled, dividing its new-found facts, dissecting them as it had dissected live things when there was light, comparing, concluding, pigeon-holing.

The trees at the top of the slope could just be seen, as their trunks were a fraction of a shade lighter than the dark sky behind them. At length they, too, disappeared, and for a moment sky and trees were a monotone. The thing knew it was dead now, and like many a being before it, it wondered how long it must stay like this. And then the sky beyond the trees grew a little lighter. That was a manifestly impossible occurrence, thought the thing, but it could see it and it must be so. Did dead things live again? That was curious. What about dismembered dead things? It would wait and see.

The sun came hand over hand up a beam of light. A bird somewhere made a high yawning peep, and as an owl killed a shrew, a skunk pounced on another, so that the night-shift deaths and those of day could go on without cessation. Two flowers nodded archly to each other, comparing their pretty clothes. A dragonfly nymph decided it was tired of looking serious and cracked its back open, to crawl out and dry gauzily. The first golden ray sheared down between the trees, through the grasses, passed over the mass in the shadowed bushes. "I am alive again," thought the thing that could not possibly live. "I am alive, for I see clearly." It stood up on its thick legs, up into the golden glow. In a little while the wet flakes that had grown during the night dried in the sun, and when it took its first steps, they cracked off and a little shower of them fell away. It walked up the slope to find Kimbo, to see if he, too, were alive again.

Babe let the sun come into her room by opening her eyes. Uncle Alton was gone—that was the first thing that ran through her head. Dad had come home last night and had shouted at mother for an hour. Alton was plumb crazy. He'd turned a gun on his own brother. If Alton ever came ten feet into Cory's land, Cory would fill him so full of holes he'd look

like a tumbleweed. Alton was lazy, shiftless, selfish, and one or two other things of questionable taste but undoubted vividness. Babe knew her father. Uncle Alton would never be safe in this county.

She bounced out of bed in the enviable way of the very young, and ran to the window. Cory was trudging down to the night pasture with two bridles over his arm, to get the team. There were kitchen noises from downstairs.

Babe ducked her head in the washbowl and shook off the water like a terrier before she toweled. Trailing clean shirt and dungarees, she went to the head of the stairs, slid into the shirt, and began her morning ritual with the trousers. One step down was a step through the right leg. One more, and she was into the left. Then, bouncing step by step on both feet, buttoning one button per step, she reached the bottom fully dressed and ran into the kitchen.

"Didn't Uncle Alton come back a-tall, Mum?"

"Morning, Babe. No, dear." Clissa was too quiet, smiling too much, Babe thought shrewdly. Wasn't happy.

"Where'd he go, Mum?"

"We don't know, Babe. Sit down and eat your breakfast."

"What's a misbegotten, Mum?" the Babe asked suddenly. Her mother nearly dropped the dish she was drying. "Babe! You must never say that again!"

"Oh. Well, why is Uncle Alton, then?"

"Why is he what?"

Babe's mouth muscled around an outsize spoonful of oatmeal. "A misbe—"

"Babe!"

"All right, Mum," said Babe with her mouth full. "Well, why?"

"I told Cory not to shout last night," Clissa said half to herself.

"Well, whatever it means, he isn't," said Babe with finality. "Did he go hunting again?"

"He went to look for Kimbo, darling."

"Kimbo? Oh Mummy, is Kimbo gone, too? Didn't he come back either?"

"No, dear. Oh, please, Babe, stop asking questions!"

"All right. Where do you think they went?"

"Into the north woods. Be quiet."

Babe gulped away at her breakfast. An idea struck her; and as she thought of it she ate slower and slower, and cast more and more glances at her mother from under the lashes of her tilted eyes. It would be awful if daddy did anything to Uncle Alton. Someone ought to warn him.

Babe was halfway to the woods when Alton's .32-40 sent echoes giggling up and down the valley.

Cory was in the south thirty, riding a cultivator and cussing at the team of grays when he heard the gun. "Hoo," he called to the horses, and sat a moment to listen to the sound. "One-two-three. Four," he counted. "Saw someone, blasted away at him. Had a chance to take aim and give him another, careful. My God!" He threw up the cultivator points and steered the team into the shade of three oaks. He hobbled the gelding with swift tosses of a spare strap, and headed for the woods. "Alton a killer," he murmured, and doubled back to the house for his gun. Clissa was standing just outside the door.

"Get shells!" he snapped and flung into the house. Clissa followed him. He was strapping his hunting knife on before she could get a box off the shelf. "Cory—"

"Hear that gun, did you? Alton's off his nut. He don't waste lead. He shot at someone just then, and he wasn't fixin' to shoot pa'tridges when I saw him last. He was out to get a man. Gimme my gun."

"Cory, Babe—"

"You keep her here. Oh, God, this is a helluva mess! I can't stand much more." Cory ran out the door.

Clissa caught his arm. "Cory, I'm trying to tell you. Babe isn't here. I've called, and she isn't here."

Cory's heavy, young-old face tautened. "Babe—Where did you last see her?"

"Breakfast." Clissa was crying now.

"She say where she was going?"

"No. She asked a lot of questions about Alton and where he'd gone."

"Did you say?"

Clissa's eyes widened, and she nodded, biting the back of her hand.

"You shouldn't ha' done that, Clissa," he gritted, and ran toward the woods. Clissa looked after him, and in that moment she could have killed herself.

Cory ran with his head up, straining with his legs and lungs and eyes at the long path. He puffed up the slope to the woods, agonized for breath after the forty-five minutes' heavy going. He couldn't even notice the damp smell of mold in the air.

He caught a movement in a thicket to his right, and dropped. Struggling to keep his breath, he crept forward until he could see clearly. There was something in there, all right. Something black, keeping still. Cory relaxed his legs and torso completely to make it easier for his heart to pump some strength back into them, and slowly raised the 12-gauge until it bore on the thing hidden in the thicket.

"Come out!" Cory said when he could speak.

Nothing happened.

"Come out or by God I'll shoot!" rasped Cory.

There was a long moment of silence, and his finger tightened on the trigger.

"You asked for it," he said, and as he fired the thing leaped sideways into the open, screaming.

It was a thin little man dressed in sepulchral black, and bearing the rosiest little baby-face Cory had ever seen. The face was twisted with fright and pain. The little man scrambled to his feet and hopped up and down saying over and over, "Oh, my hand! Don't shoot again! Oh, my hand! Don't shoot again!" He stopped after a bit, when Cory had climbed to his feet, and he regarded the farmer out of sad china-blue eyes. "You shot me," he said reproachfully, holding up a little bloody hand. "Oh, my goodness!"

Cory said, "Now, who the hell are you?"

The man immediately became hysterical, mouthing such a flood of broken sentences that Cory stepped back a pace and half-raised his gun in self-defense. It seemed to consist mostly of "I lost my papers," and "I didn't do it," and "It was horrible. Horrible. Horrible," and "The dead man," and "Oh, don't shoot again!"

Cory tried twice to ask him a question, and then he stepped over and knocked the man down. He lay on the ground writhing and moaning and blubbing and putting his, bloody hand to his mouth where Cory had hit him.

The man rolled over and sat up. "I didn't do it!" he sobbed. "I didn't! I was walking along and I heard the gun and I heard some swearing and an awful scream and I went over there and peeped and I saw the dead man and I ran away and you came and I hid and you shot me and—"

"*Shut up!*" The man did, as if a switch had been thrown. "Now," said Cory, pointing along the path, "you say there's a dead man up there?"

The man nodded and began crying in earnest. Cory helped him up. "Follow this path back to my farmhouse," he said. "Tell my wife to fix up your hand. *Don't* tell her anything else. And wait there until I come. Hear?"

"Yes. Thank you. Oh, thank you. *Snff!*"

"Go on now." Cory gave him a gentle shove in the right direction and went alone, in cold fear, up the path to the spot where he had found Alton the night before.

He found him here now, too, and Kimbo. Kimbo and Alton had spent several years together in the deepest friendship; they had hunted and fought and slept together, and the lives they owed each other were finished now. They were dead together.

It was terrible that they died the same way. Cory Drew was a strong man, but he gasped and fainted dead away when he saw what the thing of the mold had done to his brother and his brother's dog.

The little man in black hurried down the path, whimpering and holding his injured hand as if he rather wished he could limp with it. After a while the whimper faded away, and the hurried stride changed to a walk as the gibbering terror of the last hour receded. He drew two deep breaths, said: "My goodness!" and felt almost normal. He bound a linen handkerchief around his wrist, but the hand kept bleeding. He tried the elbow, and that made it hurt. So he stuffed the handkerchief back in his pocket and simply waved the hand stupidly in the air until the blood clotted.

It wasn't much of a wound. Two of the balls of shot had struck him, one passing through the fleshy part of his thumb and the other scoring the side. As he thought of it, he became a little proud that he had borne a gunshot wound. He strolled along in the midmorning sunlight, feeling a dreamy communion with the boys at the front. "The whine of shot and shell—" Where had he read that? Ah, what a story this would make! "And there beside the"—what was the line?—"the embattled farmer stood." Didn't the awfulest things happen in the nicest places? This was a nice forest. No screeches and snakes and deep dark menaces. Not a story-book wood at all. Shot by a gun. How exciting! He was now—he strutted—a gentleman adventurer. He did not see the great moist horror that clumped along behind him, though his nostrils crinkled a little with its foulness.

The monster had three little holes close together on its chest, and one little hole in the middle of its slimy forehead. It had three close-set pits in its back and one on the back of its head. These marks were where Alton Drew's bullets had struck and passed through. Half of the monster's shapeless face was sloughed away, and there was a deep indentation on its shoulder. This was what Alton Drew's gun butt had done after he clubbed it and struck at the thing that would not lie down after he put his four bullets through it. When these things happened the monster was not hurt or angry. It only wondered why Alton Drew acted that way. Now it followed the little man without hurrying at all, matching his stride step by step and dropping little particles of muck behind it.

The little man went on out of the wood and stood with his back against a big tree at the forest's edge, and he thought. Enough had happened to him here. What good would it do to stay and face a horrible murder inquest, just to continue this silly, vague quest? There was supposed to be the ruin of

an old, old hunting lodge deep in this wood somewhere, and perhaps it would hold the evidence he wanted. But it was a vague report—vague enough to be forgotten without regret. It would be the height of foolishness to stay for all the hick-town red tape that would follow that ghastly affair back in the wood. Ergo, it would be ridiculous to follow that farmer's advice, to go to his house and wait for him. He would go back to town.

The monster was leaning against the other side of the big tree.

The little man snuffled disgustedly at a sudden overpowering odor of rot. He reached for his handkerchief, fumbled and dropped it. As he bent to pick it up, the monster's arm *whuffed* heavily in the air where his head had been—a blow that would certainly have removed that baby-faced protuberance. The man stood up and would have put the handkerchief to his nose had it not been so bloody. The creature behind the tree lifted its arms again just as the little man tossed the handkerchief away and stepped out into the field, heading across country to the distant highway that would take him back to town. The monster pounced on the handkerchief, picked it up, studied it, tore it across several times and inspected the tattered edges. Then it gazed vacantly at the disappearing figure of the little man, and finding him no longer interesting, turned back into the woods.

Babe broke into a trot at the sound of the shots. It was important to warn Uncle Alton about what her father had said, but it was more interesting to find out what he had bagged. Oh, he'd bagged it, all right. Uncle Alton never fired without killing. This was about the first time she had ever heard him blast away like that. Must be a bear, she thought excitedly, tripping over a root, sprawling, rolling to her feet again, without noticing the tumble. She'd love to have another bearskin in her room. Where would she put it? Maybe they could line it and she could have it for a blanket. Uncle Alton could sit on it and read to her in the evening— Oh, no. No. Not with this trouble between him and dad. Oh, if she could only do something! She tried to run faster, worried and anticipating, but she was out of breath and went more slowly instead.

At the top of the rise by the edge of the woods she stopped and looked back. Far down in the valley lay the south thirty. She scanned it carefully, looking for her father. The new furrows and the old were sharply defined, and her keen eyes saw immediately that Cory had left the line with the cultivator and had angled the team over to the shade trees without finishing his row. That wasn't like him. She could see the team now, and Cory's pale-blue denim was not in sight.

A little nearer was the house; and as her gaze fell on it she moved out of the cleared pathway. Her father was coming; she had seen his shotgun and he was running. He could really cover ground when he wanted to. He must be chasing her, she thought immediately. He'd guessed that she would run toward the sound of the shots, and he was going to follow her tracks to Uncle Alton and shoot him. She knew that he was as good a woodsman as Alton; he would most certainly see her tracks. Well, she'd fix him.

She ran along the edge of the wood, being careful to dig her heels deeply into the loam. A hundred yards of this, and she angled into the forest and ran until she reached a particularly thick grove of trees. Shinning up like a squirrel, she squirmed from one close-set tree to another until she could go no farther back toward the path, then dropped lightly to the ground and crept on her way, now stepping very gently. It would take him an hour to beat around for her trail, she thought proudly, and by that time she could easily get to Uncle Alton. She giggled to herself as she thought of the way she had fooled her father. And the little sound of laughter drowned out, for her, the sound of Alton's hoarse dying scream.

She reached and crossed the path and slid through the brush beside it. The shots came from up around here somewhere. She stopped and listened several times, and then suddenly heard something coming toward her, fast. She ducked under cover, terrified, and a little baby-faced man in black, his blue eyes wide with horror, crashed blindly past her, the leather case he carried catching on the branches. It spun a moment and then fell right in front of her. The man never missed it.

Babe lay there for a long moment and then picked up the case and faded into the woods. Things were happening too fast for her. She wanted Uncle Alton, but she dared not call. She stopped again and strained her ears. Back toward the edge of the wood she heard her father's voice, and another's—probably the man who had dropped the brief case. She dared not go over there. Filled with enjoyable terror, she thought hard, then snapped her fingers in triumph. She and Alton had played Injun many times up here; they had a whole repertoire of secret signals. She had practiced birdcalls until she knew them better than the bids themselves. What would it be? Ah—blue jay. She threw back her head and by some youthful alchemy produced a nerve-shattering screech that would have done justice to any jay that ever flew. She repeated it, and then twice more.

The response was immediate—the call of a blue jay, four times, spaced two and two. Babe nodded to herself happily.

That was the signal that they were to meet immediately at The Place. The Place was a hide-out that he had discovered and shared with her, and not another soul knew of it; an angle of rock beside a stream not far away. It wasn't exactly a cave, but almost. Enough so to be entrancing. Babe trotted happily away toward the brook. She had just known that Uncle Alton would remember the call of the blue jay, and what it meant.

In the tree that arched over Alton's scattered body perched a large jay bird, preening itself and shining in the sun. Quite unconscious of the presence of death, hardly noticing the Babe's realistic cry, it screamed again four times, two and two.

It took Cory more than a moment to recover himself from what he had seen. He turned away from it and leaned weakly against a pine, panting. Alton. That was Alton lying there, in—parts.

"God! God, God, God—"

Gradually his strength returned, and he forced himself to turn again. Stepping carefully, he bent and picked up the .32-40. Its barrel was bright and clean, but the butt and stock were smeared with some kind of stinking rottenness. Where had he seen the stuff before? Somewhere—no matter. He cleaned it off absently, throwing the befouled bandanna away afterward. Through his mind ran Alton's words—was that only last night?—*"I'm goin' to start trackin'. An' I'm goin' to keep trackin' till I find the one done this job on Kimbo."*

Cory searched shrinkingly until he found Alton's box of shells. The box was wet and sticky. That made it—better, somehow. A bullet wet with Alton's blood was the right thing to use. He went away a short distance, circled around till he found heavy footprints, then came back.

"I'm a-trackin' for you, Bud," he whispered thickly, and began. Through the brush he followed its wavering spoor, amazed at the amount of filthy mold about, gradually associating it with the thing that had killed his brother. There was nothing in the world for him any more but hate and doggedness. Cursing himself for not getting Alton home last night, he followed the tracks to the edge of the woods. They led him to a big tree there, and there he saw something else—the footprints the little city man. Nearby lay some tattered scraps of linen, and—what was that?

Another set of prints—small ones. Small, stub-toed ones. Babe's.

"Babe!" Cory screamed. "Babe!"

No answer. The wind sighed. Somewhere a blue jay called.

Babe stopped and turned when she heard her father's voice, faint with distance, piercing.

"Listen at him holler," she crooned delightedly. "Gee, he sounds mad." She sent a jay bird's call disrespectfully back to him and hurried to The Place.

It consisted of a mammoth boulder beside the brook. Some upheaval the glacial age had cleft it, cutting out a huge V-shaped chunk. The widest part of the cleft was at the water's edge, and the narrowest was hidden by bushes. It made a little ceilingless room, rough and uneven and full of pot-holes and cavelets inside, and yet with quite a level floor. The open end was at the water's edge.

Babe parted the bushes and peered down the cleft.

"Uncle Alton!" she called softly. There was no answer. Oh, well, he'd be along. She scrambled in and slid down to the floor.

She loved it here. It was shaded and cool, and the chattering little stream filled it with shifting golden lights and laughing gurgles. She called again, on principle, and then perched on an outcropping to wait. It was only then she realized that she still carried the little man's brief case.

She turned it over a couple of times and then opened it. It was divided in the middle by a leather wall. On one side were a few papers in a large yellow envelope, and on the other some sandwiches, a candy bar, and an apple. With a youngster's complacent acceptance of manna from heaven, Babe fell to. She saved one sandwich for Alton, mainly because she didn't like its highly spiced bologna. The rest made quite a feast.

She was a little worried when Alton hadn't arrived, even after she had consumed the apple core. She got up and tried to skim some flat pebbles across the roiling brook, and she stood on her hands, and she tried to think of a story to tell herself, and she tried just waiting. Finally, in desperation, she turned again to the brief case, took out the papers, curled up by the rocky wall and began to read them. It was something to do, anyway.

There was an old newspaper clipping that told about strange wills that people had left. An old lady had once left a lot of money to whoever would make the trip from the Earth to the Moon and back. Another had financed a home for cats whose masters and mistresses had died. A man left thousands of dollars to the first man who could solve a certain mathematical problem and prove his solution. But one item was blue-penciled. It was:

One of the strangest of wills still in force is that of Thaddeus M. Kirk, who died in 1920. It appears that he built an elaborate mausoleum with burial vaults for all the remains of his family. He collected and

removed caskets from all over the country to fill the designated niches. Kirk was the last of his line; there were no relatives when he died. His will stated that the mausoleum was to be kept in repair permanently, and that a certain sum was to be set aside as a reward for whoever could produce the body of his grandfather, Roger Kirk, whose niche is still empty. Anyone finding this body is eligible to receive a substantial fortune.

Babe yawned vaguely over this, but kept on reading because there was nothing else to do. Next was a thick sheet of business correspondence, bearing the letterhead of a firm of lawyers. The body of it ran:

In regard to your query regarding the will of Thaddeus Kirk, we are authorized to state that his grandfather was a man about five feet, five inches, whose left arm had been broken and who had a triangular silver plate set into his skull. There is no information as the whereabouts of his death. He disappeared and was declared legally dead after the lapse of fourteen years.

The amount of the reward as stated in the will, plus accrued interest, now amounts to a fraction over sixty-two thousand dollars, be paid to anyone who produces the remains, providing that said remains answer descriptions kept in our private files.

There was more, but Babe was bored. She went on to the little black notebook. There was nothing in it but penciled and highly abbreviated records of visits to libraries; quotations from books with titles like "History of Angelina and Tyler Counties" and "Kirk Family History." Babe threw that aside, too. Where could Uncle Alton be?

She began to sing tunelessly, "Tumalumalum tum, ta ta ta," pre tending to dance a minuet with flowing skirts like a girl she had seen in the movies. A rustle of the bushes at the entrance to The Place stopped her. She peeped upward, saw them being thrust aside. Quickly she ran to a tiny cul-de-sac in the rock wall, just big enough for her to hide in. She giggled at the thought of how surprised Uncle Alton would be when she jumped out at him.

She heard the newcomer come shuffling down the steep slope of the crevice and land heavily on the floor. There was something about that sound—what was it? It occurred to her that though it was a hard job for a big man like Uncle Alton to get through the little opening in the bushes, she could hear no heavy breathing. She heard no breathing at all!

Babe peeped out into the main cave and squealed in utmost horror. Standing there was, not Uncle Alton, but a massive caricature of a man: a huge thing like an irregular mud doll, clumsily made. It quivered and parts of it glistened and parts of it were dried and crumbly. Half of the lower left part of its face was gone, giving it a lopsided look. It had no perceptible mouth or nose, and its eyes were crooked, one higher than the other, both a dingy brown with no whites at all. It stood quite still looking at her, its only movement a steady unalive quivering of its body.

It wondered about the queer little noise Babe had made.

Babe crept far back against a little pocket of stone, her brain running round and round in tiny circles of agony. She opened her mouth to cry out, and could not. Her eyes bulged and her face flamed with the strangling effort, and the two golden ropes of her braided hair twitched as she hunted hopelessly for a way out. If only she were out in the open—or in the wedge-shaped half-cave where the thing was—or home in bed!

The thing clumped toward her, expressionless, moving with a slow inevitability that was the sheer crux of horror. Babe lay wide-eyed and frozen, mounting pressure of terror stilling her lungs, making her heart shake the whole world. The monster came to the mouth of the little pocket, tried to walk to her and was stopped by the sides. It was such a narrow little fissure; and it was all Babe could do to get in. The thing from the wood stood straining against the rock at its shoulders, pressing harder and harder to get to Babe. She sat up slowly, so near to the thing that its odor was almost thick enough to see, and a wild hope burst through her voiceless fear. It couldn't get in! It couldn't get in because it was too big!

The substance of its feet spread slowly under the tremendous strain, and at its shoulder appeared a slight crack. It widened as the monster unfeelingly crushed itself against the rock, and suddenly a large piece of the shoulder came away and the being twisted slushily three feet farther in. It lay quiet with its muddy eyes fixed on her, and then brought one thick arm up over its head and reached.

Babe scrambled in the inch farther she had believed impossible, and the filthy clubbed hand stroked down her back, leaving a trail of muck on the blue denim of the shirt she wore. The monster surged suddenly and, lying full length now, gained the last precious inch. A black hand seized one of her braids, and for Babe the lights went out.

When she came to, she was dangling by her hair from that same crusted paw. The thing held her high, so that her face and its featureless head were not more than a foot apart. It

gazed at her with a mild curiosity in its eyes, and it swung her slowly back and forth. The agony of her pulled hair did what fear could not do—gave her a voice. She screamed. She opened her mouth and puffed up her powerful young lungs, and she sounded off. She held her throat in the position of the first scream, and her chest labored and pumped more air through the frozen throat. Shrill and monotonous and infinitely piercing, her screams.

The thing did not mind. It held her as she was, and watched. When it had learned all it could from this phenomenon, it dropped her jarringly, and looked around the half-cave, ignoring the stunned and huddled Babe. It reached over and picked up the leather brief case and tore it twice across as if it were tissue. It saw the sandwich Babe had left, picked it up, crushed it, dropped it.

Babe opened her eyes, saw that she was free, and just as the thing turned back to her she dove between its legs and out into the shallow pool in front of the rock, paddled across and hit the other bank screaming. A vicious little light of fury burned in her; she picked up a grapefruit-sized stone and hurled it with all her frenzied might. It flew low and fast, and struck squashily on the monster's ankle. The thing was just taking a step toward the water; the stone caught it off balance, and its unpracticed equilibrium could not save it. It tottered for a long, silent moment at the edge and then splashed into the stream. Without a second look Babe ran shrieking away.

Cory Drew was following the little gobs of mold that somehow indicated the path of the murderer, and he was nearby when he first heard her scream. He broke into a run, dropping his shotgun and holding the .32-40 ready to fire. He ran with such deadly panic in his heart that he ran right past the huge cleft rock and was a hundred yards past it before she burst out through the pool and ran up the bank. He had to run hard and fast to catch her, because anything behind her was that faceless horror in the cave, and she was living for the one idea of getting away from there. He caught her in his arms and swung her to him, and she screamed on and on and on.

Babe didn't see Cory at all, even when he held her and quieted her.

The monster lay in the water. It neither liked nor disliked the new element. It rested on the bottom, its massive head a foot beneath the surface, and it curiously considered the facts that it had garnered. There was the little humming noise of Babe's voice that sent the monster questing into the cave. There was the black material of the brief case that resisted so much more than green things when he tore it. There was the little two-legged one who sang and brought him near, and

who screamed when he came. There was this new cold moving thing he had fallen into. It was washing his body away. That had never happened before. That was interesting. The monster decided to stay and observe this new thing. It felt no urge to save itself; it could only be curious.

The brook came laughing down out of its spring, ran down from its source beckoning to the sunbeams and embracing freshets and helpful brooklets. It shouted and played with streaming little roots, and nudged the minnows and pollywogs about in its tiny backwaters. It was a happy brook. When it came to the pool by the cloven rock it found the monster there, and plucked at it. It soaked the foul substances and smoothed and melted the molds, and the waters below the thing eddied darkly with its diluted matter. It was a thorough brook. It washed all it touched, persistently. Where it found filth, it removed filth; and if there were layer on layer of foulness, then layer by foul layer it was removed. It was a good brook. It did not mind the poison of the monster, but took it up and thinned it and spread it in little rings around rocks downstream, and let it drift to the rootlets of water plants, that they might grow greener and lovelier. And the monster melted.

"I am smaller," the thing thought. "That is interesting. I could not move now. And now this part of me which thinks is going, too. It will stop in just a moment, and drift away with the rest of the body. It will stop thinking and I will stop being, and that, too, is a very interesting thing."

So the monster melted and dirtied the water, and the water was clean again, washing and washing the skeleton that the monster had left. It was not very big, and there was a badly healed knot on the left arm. The sunlight flickered on the triangular silver plate set into the pale skull, and the skeleton was very clean now. The brook laughed about it for an age.

They found the skeleton, six grim-lipped men who came to find a killer. No one had believed Babe, when she told her story days later. It had to be days later because Babe had screamed for seven hours without stopping, and had lain like a dead child for a day. No one believed her at all, because her story was all about the bad fella, and they knew that the bad fella was simply a thing that her father had made up to frighten her with. But it was through her that the skeleton was found, and so the men at the bank sent a check to the Drews for more money than they had ever dreamed about. It was old Roger Kirk, sure enough, that skeleton, though it was found five miles from where he had died and sank into the forest floor where the hot molds builded around his skeleton and emerged—a monster.

So the Drews had a new barn and fine new livestock and they hired four men. But they didn't have Alton. And they didn't have Kimbo. And Babe screams at night and has grown very thin.

RAY BRADBURY, “FEVER DREAM”

Critical Introduction

Ray Bradbury (1920–2012) is, along with Isaac Asimov and Philip K. Dick, one of the most influential American science fiction writers, but it is his dystopian *Fahrenheit 451* for which he is best known among the reading public. Both of those strands—the speculative science and the dread of some newer, horrible world—combine in the short story “Fever Dream” (1948). Bradbury uses the isolation and terror that can accompany illness, and intensifies it by making the central character a child whose perceptions are dismissed by adults and experts. Out of the mix springs the horror of losing oneself, the horror of the Cartesian mind-body split becoming terribly skewed.

Like *Dracula* before it, “Fever Dream” plays on the fear of contagion: it is the means by which Charles is lost in his own body and, we are to understand, the means by which humanity will ultimately fall. Unlike in *Dracula*—or any text included in this volume—here the monster is a child. Charles looks no different than he did before he was sick, but he has been remade by invading infection into something sinister: he looks and medically checks out as human, but he is an evil facsimile of a human, testing his powers and looking to wreak havoc on the human world.

Reading Questions

Bradbury, excellent writer that he is, does not outright state that Charles is now a monstrous collection of germs. The ants and the third-person narration strongly suggest that he *is* a monster, but one could also read the story as a mental break

due to the fever. Which reading seems most likely to you? If he is composed of “evil” germ-directed cells, does that make him a monster? If he has suffered a mental break and will indeed go on to do terrible crimes as an adult, does that make him a monster? Why?

Charles is thirteen years old at the time of this story. How does his young age affect the way you read him and this story? Does it influence the way you answered the previous reading question? Does it increase your sense of dread? Does it make you more or less sympathetic with him? Does it make the events of the story worse in some way? (If so, in what way?)

Bradbury wrote this story in 1948, a year after the end of World War II and at the beginning of the Cold War between the then-USSR and the United States and its allies. How could this story be read as an anxiety about communism and its perceived threat to the United States?

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“FEVER DREAM”

RAY BRADBURY

THEY PUT HIM between fresh, clean, laundered sheets and there was always a newly squeezed glass of thick orange juice on the table under the dim pink lamp. All Charles had to do was call and Mom or Dad would stick their heads into his room to see how sick he was. The acoustics of the room were fine; you could hear the toilet gargling its porcelain throat of mornings, you could hear rain tap the roof or sly mice run in the secret walls or the canary singing in its cage downstairs. If you were very alert, sickness wasn't too bad.

He was thirteen, Charles was. It was mid-September, with the land beginning to burn with autumn. He lay in the bed for three days before the terror overcame him.

His hand began to change. His right hand. He looked at it and it was hot and sweating there on the counterpane alone. It fluttered, it moved a bit. Then it lay there, changing color.

That afternoon the doctor came again and tapped his thin chest like a little drum. “How are you?” asked the doctor, smiling. “I know, don't tell me: ‘My cold is fine, Doctor, but I feel awful!’ Ha!” He laughed at his own oft-repeated joke.

Charles lay there and for him that terrible and ancient jest was becoming a reality. The joke fixed itself in his mind. His mind touched and drew away from it in a pale terror. The doctor did not know how cruel he was with his jokes! “Doctor,” whispered Charles, lying flat and colorless. “My hand, it doesn't belong to me any more. This morning it changed into something else. I want you to change it back, Doctor, Doctor!”

The doctor showed his teeth and patted his hand. “It looks fine to me, son. You just had a little fever dream.”

“But it changed, Doctor, oh, Doctor,” cried Charles, pitifully holding up his pale wild hand. “It *did!*”

The doctor winked. “I'll give you a pink pill for that.” He popped a tablet onto Charles' tongue. “Swallow!”

“Will it make my hand change back and become *me*, again?”

“Yes, yes.”

The house was silent when the doctor drove off down the road in his car under the quiet, blue September sky. A clock ticked far below in the kitchen world. Charles lay looking at his hand.

It did not change back. It was still something else.

The wind blew outside. Leaves fell against the cool window.

At four o'clock his other hand changed. It seemed almost to become a fever. It pulsed and shifted, cell by cell. It beat like a warm heart. The fingernails turned blue and then red. It took about an hour for it to change and when it was finished, it looked just like any ordinary hand. But it was not ordinary. It no longer was him any more. He lay in a fascinated horror and then fell into an exhausted sleep.

Mother brought the soup up at six. He wouldn't touch it. “I haven't any hands,” he said, eyes shut.

“Your hands are perfectly good,” said mother.

“No,” he wailed. “My hands are gone. I feel like I have stumps. Oh, Mama, Mama, hold me, hold me, I'm scared!”

She had to feed him herself.

“Mama,” he said, “get the doctor, please, again. I'm so sick.”

“The doctor'll be here tonight at eight,” she said, and went out.

At seven, with night dark and close around the house, Charles was sitting up in bed when he felt the thing happening to first one leg and then the other. “Mama! Come quick!” he screamed.

But when mama came the thing was no longer happening.

When she went downstairs, he simply lay without fighting as his legs beat and beat, grew warm, red-hot, and the room filled with the warmth of his feverish change. The glow crept up from his toes to his ankles and then to his knees.

“May I come in?” The doctor smiled in the doorway.

“Doctor!” cried Charles. “Hurry, take off my blankets!”

The doctor lifted the blankets tolerantly. “There you are. Whole and healthy. Sweating, though. A little fever. I told you not to move around, bad boy.” He pinched the moist pink cheek. “Did the pills help? Did your hand change back?”

“No, no, now it's my other hand and my legs!”

“Well, well, I'll have to give you three more pills, one for each limb, eh, my little peach?” laughed the doctor.

“Will they help me? Please, please. What've I got?”

“A mild case of scarlet fever, complicated by a slight cold.”

“Is it a germ that lives and has more little germs in me?”

“Yes.”

“Are you *sure* it's scarlet fever? You haven't taken any tests!”

“I guess I know a certain fever when I see one,” said the doctor, checking the boy’s pulse with cool authority.

Charles lay there, not speaking until the doctor was crisply packing his black kit. Then in the silent room, the boy’s voice made a small, weak pattern, his eyes alight with remembrance. “I read a book once. About petrified trees, wood turning to stone. About how trees fell and rotted and minerals got in and built up and they look just like trees, but they’re not, they’re stone.” He stopped. In the quiet warm room his breathing sounded.

“Well?” asked the doctor.

“I’ve been thinking,” said Charles after a time. “Do germs ever get big? I mean, in biology class they told us about one-celled animals, amoebas and things, and how millions of years ago they got together until there was a bunch and they made the first body. And more and more cells got together and got bigger and then finally maybe there was a fish and finally here we are, and all we are is a bunch of cells that decided to get together, to help each other out. Isn’t that right?” Charles wet his feverish lips.

“What’s all this about?” the doctor bent over him.

“I’ve got to tell you this. Doctor, oh, I’ve got to!” he cried. “What would happen, oh just pretend, please pretend, that just like in the old days, a lot of microbes got together and wanted to make a bunch, and reproduced and made *more*—”

His white hands were on his chest now, crawling toward his throat.

“And they decided to *take over* a person!” cried Charles.

“Take over a person?”

“Yes, *become* a person. *Me*, my hands, my feet! What if a disease somehow knew how to kill a person and yet live after him?”

He screamed.

The hands were on his neck.

The doctor moved forward, shouting.

At nine o’clock the doctor was escorted out to his car by the mother and father, who handed him his bag. They conversed in the cool night wind for a few minutes. “Just be sure his hands are kept strapped to his legs,” said the doctor. “I don’t want him hurting himself.”

“Will he be all right, Doctor?” The mother held to his arm a moment.

He patted her shoulder. “Haven’t I been your family physician for thirty years? It’s the fever. He imagines things.”

“But those bruises on his throat, he almost choked himself.”

“Just you keep him strapped; he’ll be all right in the morning.”

The car moved off down the dark September road.

At three in the morning, Charles was still awake in his small black room. The bed was damp under his head and his back. He was very warm. Now he no longer had any arms or legs, and his body was beginning to change. He did not move on the bed, but looked at the vast blank ceiling space with insane concentration. For a while he had screamed and thrashed, but now he was weak and hoarse from it, and his mother had gotten up a number of times to soothe his brow with a wet towel. Now he was silent, his hands strapped to his legs.

He felt the walls of his body change, the organs shift, the lungs catch fire like burning bellows of pink alcohol. The room was lighted up as with the flickerings of a hearth.

Now he had no body. It was all gone. It was under him, but it was filled with a vast pulse of some burning, lethargic drug. It was as if a guillotine had neatly lopped off his head, and his head lay shining on a midnight pillow while the body, below, still alive, belonged to somebody else. The disease had eaten his body and from the eating had reproduced itself in feverish duplicate. There were the little hand hairs and the fingernails and the scars and the toenails and the tiny mole on his right hip, all done again in perfect fashion.

I am dead, he thought. I’ve been killed, and yet I live. My body is dead, it is all disease and nobody will know. I will walk around and it will not be me, it will be something else. It will be something all bad, all evil, so big and so evil it’s hard to understand or think about. Something that will buy shoes and drink water and get married some day maybe and do more evil in the world than has ever been done.

Now the warmth was stealing up his neck, into his cheeks, like a hot wine. His lips burned, his eyelids, like leaves, caught fire. His nostrils breathed out blue flame, faintly, faintly.

This will be all, he thought. It’ll take my head and my brain and fix each eye and every tooth and all the marks in my brain, and every hair and every wrinkle in my ears, and there’ll be nothing left of me.

He felt his brain fill with a boiling mercury. He felt his left eye clench in upon itself and, like a snail, withdraw, shift. He was blind in his left eye. It no longer belonged to him. It was enemy territory. His tongue was gone, cut out. His left cheek was numbed, lost. His left ear stopped hearing. It belonged to someone else now. This thing that was being born, this mineral thing replacing the wooden log, this disease replacing healthy animal cell.

He tried to scream and he was able to scream loud and high and sharply in the room, just as his brain flooded down, his right eye and right ear were cut out, he was blind and deaf, all fire, all terror, all panic, all death.

His scream stopped before his mother ran through the door to his side.

It was a good, clear morning, with a brisk wind that helped carry the doctor up the path before the house. In the window above, the boy stood, fully dressed. He did not wave when the doctor waved and called, "What's this? Up? My God!"

The doctor almost ran upstairs. He came gasping into the bedroom.

"What are you doing out of bed?" he demanded of the boy. He tapped his thin chest, took his pulse and temperature. "Absolutely amazing! Normal. Normal, by God!"

"I shall never be sick again in my life," declared the boy, quietly, standing there, looking out the wide window. "Never."

"I hope not. Why, you're looking fine, Charles."

"Doctor?"

"Yes, Charles?"

"Can I go to school *now*?" asked Charles.

"Tomorrow will be time enough. You sound positively eager."

"I am. I like school. All the kids. I want to play with them and wrestle with them, and spit on them and play with the girls' pigtails and shake the teacher's hand, and rub my hands on all the cloaks in the cloakroom, and I want to grow up and travel and shake hands with people all over the world, and be married and have lots of children, and go to libraries and handle books and—all of that I want to!" said the boy, looking off into the September morning. "What's the name you called me?"

"What?" The doctor puzzled. "I called you nothing but Charles."

"It's better than no name at all, I guess." The boy shrugged.

"I'm glad you want to go back to school," said the doctor.

"I really anticipate it," smiled the boy. "Thank you for your help, Doctor. Shake hands."

"Glad to."

They shook hands gravely, and the clear wind blew through the open window. They shook hands for almost a minute, the boy smiling up at the old man and thanking him.

Then, laughing, the boy raced the doctor downstairs and out to his car. His mother and father followed for the happy farewell.

"Fit as a fiddle!" said the doctor. "Incredible!"

"And strong," said the father. "He got out of his straps himself during the night. Didn't you, Charles?"

"Did I?" said the boy.

"You did! How?"

"Oh," the boy said, "that was a long time ago."

"A long time ago!"

They all laughed, and while they were laughing, the quiet boy moved his bare foot on the sidewalk and merely touched, brushed against a number of red ants that were scurrying about on the sidewalk. Secretly, his eyes shining, while his parents chatted with the old man, he saw the ants hesitate, quiver, and lie still on the cement. He sensed they were cold now.

"Good-by!"

The doctor drove away, waving.

The boy walked ahead of his parents. As he walked he looked away toward the town and began to hum "School Days" under his breath.

"It's good to have him well again," said the father.

"Listen to him. He's so looking forward to school!"

The boy turned quietly. He gave each of his parents a crushing hug. He kissed them both several times.

Then without a word he bounded up the steps into the house.

In the parlor, before the others entered, he quickly opened the bird cage, thrust his hand in, and petted the yellow canary, *once*.

Then he shut the cage door, stood back, and waited.

EDWARD D. HOCH, “THE FACELESS THING”

Critical Introduction

Edward D. Hoch (1930–2008) was a short story writer known more for his detective fiction than horror, and one can find some elements of his preferred genre in this selection from 1963. It is a story about a monster, certainly—but it is also a story of dealing with childhood trauma. The story seems to suggest that the protagonist’s return and confrontation with the monster of his childhood has finally allowed him to move forward and develop some sort of relationship with the people around him: he is sure and no longer needs to doubt himself. However, the monster appears only to him; couple that with the town’s apparent suspicion that he killed his sister, and there is reason to think that this monster is completely metaphorical. It may very well be a representation of the part of him that killed his sister. The story’s ambiguity—at once frustrating and fascinating—gives the monster a depth that is surprising in such a brief tale.

Reading Questions

Think about identity in this story: the main character is called by a nickname (Buddy), but the reader never learns his given name, nor the names of his sister, the old woman, his wife, or the monster. What effect does this effacement have on your relationship to the characters?

Like a number of other monsters, the faceless thing exists outside normal geographical bounds and is only impressionistically described. Compare these elements with other monsters. Why do you think this is a common technique for writers as they create their monsters?

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“THE FACELESS THING”

EDWARD D. HOCH

SUNSET: GOLDEN FLAMING clouds draped over distant canyons barely seen in the dusk of the dying day; farmland gone to rot; fields in the foreground given over wildly to the running of the rabbit and the woodchuck; the farmhouse gray and paint-peeled, sleeping possibly but more likely dead—needing burial.

It hadn't changed much in all those years. It hadn't changed; only died.

He parked the car and got out, taking it all in with eyes still intent and quick for all their years. Somehow he hadn't really thought it would still be standing. Farmhouses that were near collapse fifty years ago shouldn't still be standing; not when all the people, his mother and father and aunt and the rest, were all long in their graves.

He was an old man, had been an old man almost as long as he could remember. Youth to him was only memories of this farm, so many years before, romping in the hay with his little sister at his side; swinging from the barn ropes, exploring endless dark depths out beyond the last field. After that, he was old—through misty college days and marriage to a woman he hadn't loved, through a business and political career that carried him around the world. And never once in all those years had he journeyed back to this place, this farmhouse now given over to the weeds and insects. They were all dead; there was no reason to come back... no reason at all.

Except the memory of the ooze.

A childhood memory, a memory buried with the years, forgotten sometimes but always there, crowded into its own little space in his mind, was ready to confront him and startled him with its vividness.

The ooze was a place beyond the last field, where water always collected in the springtime and after a storm; water running over dirt and clay and rock, merging with the soil until there was nothing underfoot but a black ooze to rise above your boots. He'd followed the stream rushing with storm water, followed it to the place where it cut into the side of the hill.

It was the memory of the tunnel leading nowhere, gurgling with rain-fed water, barely large enough for him to fit through. A tunnel floored with unseen ooze, peopled by unknown danger; that was a place for every boy.

Had he been only ten that day? Certainly he'd been no more than eleven, leading the way while his nine-year-old sister followed. “This way. Be careful of the mud.” She'd been afraid of the dark, afraid of what they might find there. But he'd called encouragement to her; after all, what could there be in all this ooze to hurt them?

How many years? Fifty?

“What is it, Buddy?” She'd always called him Buddy. What is it, Buddy? Only darkness, and a place maybe darker than dark, with a half-formed shadow rising from the ooze. He'd brought along his father's old lantern, and he fumbled to light it.

“Buddy!” she'd screamed—just once—and in the flare of the match he'd seen the thing, great and hairy and covered with ooze; something that lived in the darkness here, something that hated the light. In that terrifying instant it had reached out for his little sister and pulled her into the ooze.

That was the memory, a memory that came to him sometimes only at night. It had pursued him down the years like a fabled hound, coming to him, reminding him, when all was well with the world. It was like a personal demon sent from Hades to torture him. He'd never told anyone about that thing in the ooze, not even his mother. They'd cried and carried on when his sister was found the next day, and they'd said she'd drowned. He was not one to say differently.

And the years had passed. For a time, during his high school days, he read the local papers—searching for some word of the thing, some veiled news that it had come out of that forgotten cavern. But it never did; it liked the dark and damp too much. And, of course, no one else ever ventured into the stream bed. That was a pursuit only for the very young and very foolish.

By the time he was twenty, the memory was fading, merging with other thoughts, other goals, until at times he thought it only a child's dream. But then at night it would come again in all its vividness, and the thing in the ooze would beckon him.

A long life, long and crowded... One night he'd tried to tell his wife about it, but she wouldn't listen. That was the night he'd realized how little he'd ever loved her. Perhaps he'd only married her because, in a certain light, she reminded him of that sister of his youth. But the love that sometimes comes

later came not at all to the two of them. She was gone now, like his youth, like his family and friends. There was only this memory remaining. The memory of a thing in the ooze.

Now the weeds were tall, beating against his legs, stirring nameless insects to flight with every step. He pressed a handkerchief against his brow, sponging the sweat that was forming there. Would the dark place still be there, or had fifty years of rain and dirt sealed it forever?

"Hello there," a voice called out. It was an old voice, barely carrying with the breeze. He turned and saw someone on the porch of the deserted farmhouse. An old woman, ancient and wrinkled.

"Do I know you?" he asked, moving closer.

"You may," she answered. "You're Buddy, aren't you? My, how old I've gotten. I used to live at the next farm, when you were just a boy. I was young then myself. I remember you."

"Oh! Mrs....?" The name escaped him, but it wasn't important.

"Why did you come back, Buddy? Why, after all these years?"

He was an old man. Was it necessary to explain his actions to this woman from the past? "I just wanted to see the place," he answered. "Memories, you know."

"Bitter memories. Your little sister died here, did she not?" The old woman should have been dead, should have been dead and in her grave long ago.

He paused in the shade of the porch roof. "She died here, yes, but that was fifty years ago."

"How old we grow, how ancient! Is that why you returned?"

"In a way. I wanted to see the spot."

"Ah! The little brook back there beyond the last field. Let me walk that way with you. These old legs need exercise."

"Do you live here?" he asked, wanting to escape her now but knowing not how.

"No, still down the road. All alone now. Are you all alone, too?"

"I suppose so." The high grass made walking difficult.

"You know what they all said at the time, don't you? They all said you were fooling around, like you always did, and pushed her into the water."

There was a pain in his chest from breathing so hard. He was an old man. "Do you believe that?"

"What does it matter?" she answered. "After all these fifty years, what does it matter?"

"Would you believe me," he began, then hesitated into silence. Of course she wouldn't believe him, but he had to tell now. "Would you believe me if I told you what happened?"

She was a very old woman and she panted to keep up even his slow pace. She was ancient even to his old eyes, even in his worlds where now everyone was old. "I would believe you," she said.

"There was something in the ooze. Call it a monster, a demon, if you want. I saw it in the light of a match, and I can remember it as if it were yesterday. It took her."

"Perhaps," she said.

"You don't believe me."

"I said I would. This sun is hot today, even at twilight."

"It will be gone soon. I hate to hurry you, old woman, but I must reach the stream before dark."

"The last field is in sight."

Yes, it was in sight. But how would he ever fit through that small opening, how would he face the thing, even if by some miracle it still waited there in the ooze? Fifty years was a long time.

"Wait here," he said as they reached the little stream at last. It hadn't changed much, not really.

"You won't find it." He lowered his aged body into the bed of the stream, feeling once again the familiar forgotten ooze closing over his shoes.

"No one has to know," she called after him. "Even if there was something, that was fifty years ago."

But he went on, to the place where the water vanished into the rock. He held his breath and groped for the little flashlight in his pocket. Then he ducked his head and followed the water into the black.

It was steamy here, steamy and hot with the sweat of the earth. He flipped on the flashlight with trembling hands and followed its narrow beam with his eyes. The place was almost like a room in the side of the hill, a room perhaps seven feet high, with a floor of mud and ooze that seemed almost to bubble as he watched.

"Come on," he said softly, almost to himself. "I know you're there. You've got to be there."

And then he saw it, rising slowly from the ooze. A shapeless thing without a face, a thing that moved so slowly it might have been dead. An old, very old thing. For a long time he watched it, unable to move, unable to cry out. And even as he watched, the thing settle back softly into the ooze, as if even this small exertion had tired it.

"Rest," he said, very quietly. "We are all so old now."

And then he made his way back out of the cave, along the stream, and finally pulled himself from the clinging ooze. The ancient woman was still waiting on the bank, with fireflies playing about her in the dusk.

"Did you find anything?" she asked him.

"Nothing," he answered.

"Fifty years is a long time. You shouldn't have come back."

He sighed and fell into step beside her. "It was something I had to do."

"Come up to my house, if you want. I can make you a bit of tea."

His breath was coming better now, and the distance back to the farmhouse seemed shorter than he'd remembered. "I think I'd like that," he said...

JOHN GARDNER, GRENDEL — Selections

Critical Introduction

John Gardner (1933–1982) was a prolific writer—especially in the arena of fiction and literary criticism. He is, perhaps, best known for his 1971 novel *Grendel*, of which a large portion is excerpted here. In the novel, Gardner retells the first two-thirds of *Beowulf* from Grendel’s perspective, exploring the character and trying to understand him. It is clear that Gardner does not accept the *Beowulf*-poet’s dismissive explanation of Grendel’s behaviour (he is evil) and instead delves into a careful character study. What he comes up with is particularly modern: there are strains of *Frankenstein* in Grendel’s attempts to befriend Hrothgar’s tribe, *Catcher in the Rye* in his social isolationism and outcast status, and Freud in his relationship with his mother.

Though clearly a more sympathetic treatment than Grendel had at the hands of the *Beowulf*-poet, the novel is not, however, a modern redemption project. Gardner’s Grendel has all the impetuosity and isolation of a Holden Caulfield (the protagonist of *Catcher in the Rye*), but he also has the ability to exert his will and whim upon his surroundings—something most outcast characters in fiction seem to lack. That is what makes this version of Grendel so scary: it is a meditation on what might happen if a maladjusted, childish individual were given an enormous amount of power. Years before Mark David Chapman shot John Lennon or Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed twelve of their classmates at Columbine High School, Gardner plumbed the depths of the troubled outsider who is drawn to the power of violence.

Reading Questions

One of the more interesting angles of Gardner’s novel is how he deals with communication. Grendel does all the narrating, but he cannot communicate with his mother and has difficulty communicating with the Danes. How does that correlate with other monsters you have read about? How does it contribute to Grendel’s motivations in this version of the story?

Compare Gardner’s *Grendel* to *Beowulf* and try to identify specific differences in the characterization of the monster. Are they effective? That is, does Gardner’s Grendel or *Beowulf*’s Grendel seem more monstrous? Why?

Editorial Notes

Where portions of the narrative have been omitted, the deletion is indicated with a triple set of hyphens. Where appropriate, a synopsis of the omitted action has been provided.

Further Reading

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GRENDEL Selections

JOHN GARDNER

THE OLD RAM stands looking down over rockslides, stupidly triumphant. I blink. I stare in horror. "Scat!" I hiss. "Go back to your cave, go back to your cowshed—whatever." He cocks his head like an elderly, slow-witted king, considers the angles, decides to ignore me. I stamp. I hammer the ground with my fists. I hurl a skull-size stone at him. He will not budge. I shake my two hairy fists at the sky and I let out a howl so unspeakable that the water at my feet turns sudden ice and even I myself am left uneasy. But the ram stays; the season is upon us. And so begins the twelfth year of my idiotic war.

The pain of it! The stupidity!

"Ah, well," I sigh, and shrug, trudge back to the trees. Do not think my brains are squeezed shut, like the ram's, by the roots of horns. Flanks atremble, eyes like stones, he stares at as much of the world as he can see and feels it surging in him, filling his chest as the melting snow fills dried-out creekbeds, tickling his gross, lopsided balls and charging his brains with the same unrest that made him suffer last year at this time, and the year before, and the year before that. (He's forgotten them all.) His hindparts shiver with the usual joyful, mindless ache to mount whatever happens near—the storm piling up black towers to the west, some rotting, docile stump, some spraddle-legged ewe. I cannot bear to look. "Why can't these creatures discover a little dignity?" I ask the sky. The sky says nothing, predictably. I make a face, uplift a defiant middle finger, and give an obscene little kick. The sky ignores me, forever unimpressed. Him too I hate, the same as I hate these brainless budding trees, these brattling birds.

Not, of course, that I fool myself with thoughts that I'm more noble. Pointless, ridiculous monster crouched in the shadows, stinking of dead men, murdered children, martyred cows. (I am neither proud nor ashamed, understand. One more dull victim, leering at seasons that never were meant to be observed.) "Ah, sad one, poor old freak!" I cry, and hug myself, and laugh, letting out salt tears, he he! till I fall down gasping and sobbing. (It's mostly fake.) The sun spins mindlessly overhead, the shadows lengthen and shorten as if by plan. Small birds, with a high-pitched yelp, lay eggs. The tender grasses peek up, innocent yellow, through the ground: the children of the dead. (It was just here, this shocking green, that once when the moon was tombed in clouds, I tore off sly

old Athelgard's head. Here, where the startling tiny jaws of crocuses snap at the late-winter sun like the heads of baby watersnakes, here I killed the old woman with the irongray hair. She tasted of urine and spleen, which made me spit. Sweet mulch for yellow blooms. Such are the tiresome memories of a shadow-shooter, earth-rim-roamer, walker of the world's weird wall.) "Waaah!" I cry, with another quick, nasty face at the sky, mournfully observing the way it is, bitterly remembering the way it was, and idiotically casting tomorrow's nets. "Aargh! Yaww!" I reel, smash trees. Disfigured son of lunatics. The big-holed oaks gaze down at me yellow with morning, beneath complexity. "No offense," I say, with a terrible, sycophantish smile, and tip an imaginary hat.

It was not always like this, of course. On occasion it's been worse.

No matter, no matter.

The doe in the clearing goes stiff at sight of my horridness, then remembers her legs and is gone. It makes me cross. "Blind prejudice!" I bawl at the splintered sunlight where half a second ago she stood. I wring my fingers, put on a long face. "Ah, the unfairness of everything," I say, and shake my head. It is a matter of fact that I have never killed a deer in all my life, and never will. Cows have more meat and, locked up in pens; are easier to catch. It is true, perhaps, that I feel some trifling dislike of deer, but no more dislike than I feel for other natural things—discounting men. But deer, like rabbits and bears and even men, can make, concerning my race, no delicate distinctions. That is their happiness: they see all life without observing it. They're buried in it like crabs in mud. Except men, of course. I am not in a mood, just yet, to talk of men.

So it goes with me day by day and age by age, I tell myself. Locked in the deadly progression of moon and stars. I shake my head, muttering darkly on shaded paths, holding conversation with the only friend and comfort this world affords, my shadow. Wild pigs clatter away through brush. A baby bird falls feet-up in my path, squeaking. With a crabby laugh, I let him lie, kind heaven's merciful bounty to some sick fox. So it goes with me, age by age. (Talking, talking. Spinning a web of words, pale walls of dreams, between myself and all I see.)

The first grim stirrings of springtime come (as I knew they must, having seen the ram), and even under the ground where I live, where no light breaks but the red of my fires

and nothing stirs but the flickering shadows on my wet rock walls, or scampering rats on my piles of bones, or my mother's fat, foul bulk rolling over, restless again—molested by nightmares, old memories—I am aware in my chest of tuberstirrings in the blacksweet duff of the forest overhead. I feel my anger coming back, building up like invisible fire, and at last, when my soul can no longer resist, I go up—as mechanical as anything else—fists clenched against my lack of will, my belly growling, mindless as wind, for blood. I swim up through the firesnakes, hot dark whalecocks prowling the luminous green of the mere, and I surface with a gulp among churning waves and smoke. I crawl up onto the bank and catch my breath.

It's good at first to be out in the night, naked to the cold mechanics of the stars. Space hurls outward, falconswift, mounting like an irreversible injustice, a final disease. The cold night air is reality at last: indifferent to me as a stone face carved on a high cliff wall to show that the world is abandoned. So childhood too feels good at first, before one happens to notice the terrible sameness, age after age. I lie there resting in the steaming grass, the old lake hissing and gurgling behind me, whispering patterns of words my sanity resists. At last, heavy as an ice-capped mountain, I rise and work my way to the inner wall, beginning of wolfslopes, the edge of my realm. I stand in the high wind balanced, blackening the night with my stench, gazing down to cliffs that fall away to cliffs, and once again I am aware of my potential: I could die. I cackle with rage and suck in breath.

"Dark chasms!" I scream from the cliff-edge, "seize me! Seize me to your foul black bowels and crush my bones!" I am terrified at the sound of my own huge voice in the darkness. I stand there shaking from head to foot, moved to the deep-sea depths of my being, like a creature thrown into audience with thunder.

At the same time, I am secretly unfooled. The uproar is only my own shriek, and chasms are, like all things vast, inanimate. They will not snatch me in a thousand years, unless, in a lunatic fit of religion, I jump.

I sigh, depressed, and grind my teeth. I toy with shouting some tidbit more—some terrifying, unthinkable threat, some blackly fuliginous riddling hex—but my heart's not in it. "Missed me!" I say with a coy little jerk and a leer, to keep my spirits up. Then, with a sigh, a kind of moan, I start very carefully down the cliffs that lead to the fens and moors and Hrothgar's hall. Owls cross my path as silently as raiding ships, and at the sound of my foot, lean wolves rise, glance at me awkwardly, and, neat of step as lizards, sneak away. I

used to take some pride in that—the caution of owls when my shape looms in, the alarm I stir in these giant northern wolves. I was younger then. Still playing cat and mouse with the universe.

I move down through the darkness, burning with murderous lust, my brains raging at the sickness I can observe in myself as objectively as might a mind ten centuries away. Stars, spattered out through lifeless night from end to end, like jewels scattered in a dead king's grave, tease, torment my wits toward meaningful patterns that do not exist. I can see for miles from these rock walls: thick forest suddenly still at my coming—cowering stags, wolves, hedgehogs, boars, submerged in their stifling, unmemorable fear; mute birds, pulsating, thoughtless clay in hushed old trees, thick limbs interlocked to seal drab secrets in.

I sigh, sink into the silence, and cross it like wind. Behind my back, at the world's end, my pale slightly glowing fat mother sleeps on, old, sick at heart, in our dingy underground room. Life-bloated, baffled, long-suffering hag. Guilty, she imagines, of some unremembered, perhaps ancestral crime. (She must have some human in her.) Not that she thinks. Not that she dissects and ponders the dusty mechanical bits of her miserable life's curse. She clutches at me in her sleep as if to crush me. I break away. "Why are we here?" I used to ask her. "Why do we stand this putrid, stinking hole?" She trembles at my words. Her fat lips shake. "Don't ask!" her wiggling claws implore. (She never speaks.) "Don't ask!" It must be some terrible secret, I used to think. I'd give her a crafty squint. She'll tell me, in time, I thought. But she told me nothing. I waited on. That was before the old dragon, calm as winter, unveiled the truth. He was not a friend.

And so I come through trees and towns to the lights of Hrothgar's meadhall. I am no stranger here. A respected guest. Eleven years now and going on twelve I have come up this clean-mown central hill, dark shadow out of the woods below, and have knocked politely on the high oak door, bursting its hinges and sending the shock of my greeting inward like a cold blast out of a cave. "Grendel!" they squeak, and I smile like exploding spring. The old Shaper, a man I cannot help but admire, goes out the back window with his harp at a single bound, though blind as a bat. The drunkest of Hrothgar's thanes come reeling and clanking down from their wall-hung beds, all shouting their meady, outrageous boasts, their heavy swords aswirl like eagles' wings. "Woe, woe, woe!" cries Hrothgar, hoary with winters, peeking in, wide-eyed, from his bedroom in back. His wife, looking in behind him, makes a scene. The thanes in the meadhall blow out the

lights and cover the wide stone fireplace with shields. I laugh, crumple over; I can't help myself. In the darkness, I alone see clear as day. While they squeal and screech and bump into each other, I silently sack up my dead and withdraw to the woods. I eat and laugh and eat until I can barely walk, my chest-hair matted with dribbled blood, and then the roosters on the hill crow, and dawn comes over the roofs of the houses, and all at once I am filled with gloom again.

"This is some punishment sent us," I hear them bawling from the hill.

My head aches. Morning nails my eyes.

"Some god is angry," I hear a woman keen. "The people of Scyld and Herogar and Hrothgar are mired in sin!"

My belly rumbles, sick on their sour meat. I crawl through bloodstained leaves to the eaves of the forest, and there peak out. The dogs fall silent at the edge of my spell, and where the king's hall surmounts the town, the blind old Shaper, harp clutched tight to his fragile chest, stares futilely down, straight at me. Otherwise nothing. Pigs root dully at the posts of a wooden fence. A rumple-horned ox lies chewing in dew and shade. A few men, lean, wearing animal skins, look up at the gables of the king's hall, or at the vultures circling casually beyond. Hrothgar says nothing, hoarfrost-bearded, his features cracked and crazed. Inside, I hear the people praying—whimpering, whining, mumbling, pleading—to their numerous sticks and stones. He doesn't go in. The king has lofty theories of his own.

"Theories," I whisper to the bloodstained ground. So the dragon once spoke. ("They'd map out roads through Hell with their crackpot theories!" I recall his laugh.)

Then the groaning and praying stop, and on the side of the hill the dirge-slow shoveling begins. They throw up a mound for the funeral pyre, for whatever arms or legs or heads my haste has left behind. Meanwhile, up in the shattered hall, the builders are hammering, replacing the door for (it must be) the fiftieth or sixtieth time, industrious and witless as worker ants—except that they make small, foolish changes, adding a few more iron pegs, more iron bands, with tireless dogmatism.

Now fire. A few little lizard tongues, then healthy flames reaching up through the tangled nest of sticks. (A feeble-minded crow could have fashioned a neater nest.) A severed leg swells up and bursts, then an arm, then another, and the red fire turns on the blackening flesh and makes it sizzle, and it reaches higher, up and up into greasy smoke, turning, turning like falcons at warplay, rushing like circling wolves up into the swallowing, indifferent sky. And now, by some lunatic

theory, they throw on golden rings, old swords, and braided helmets. They wail, the whole crowd, women and men, a kind of song, like a single quavering voice. The song rings up like the greasy smoke and their faces shine with sweat and something that looks like joy. The song swells, pushes through woods and sky, and they're singing now as if by some lunatic theory they had won. I shake with rage. The red sun blinds me, churns up my belly to nausea, and the heat thrown out of the bone-fire burns my skin. I cringe, clawing my flesh, and flee for home.

In the intervening action, we learn more of the relationship between Grendel and his mother: as he ventures farther and farther from home each night, his disgust with his mother grows. Though he clearly knows that he still needs her, that knowledge infuriates him. On one foray, Grendel has ventured too far from home and gotten his foot stuck in a tree. Trapped and largely helpless, he despairs.

That night, for the first time, I saw men.

It was dark when I awakened—or when I came to, if it was that. I was aware at once that there was something wrong. There was no sound, not even the honk of a frog or the chirp of a cricket. There was a smell, a fire very different from ours, pungent, painful as thistles to the nose. I opened my eyes and everything was blurry, as though underwater. There were lights all around me, like some weird creature's eyes. They jerked back as I looked. Then voices, speaking words. The sounds were foreign at first, but when I calmed myself, concentrating, I found I understood them: it was my own language, but spoken in a strange way, as if the sounds were made by brittle sticks, dried spindles, flaking bits of shale. My vision cleared and I saw them, mounted on horses, holding torches up. Some of them had shiny domes (as it seemed to me then) with horns coming out, like the bull's. They were small, these creatures, with dead-looking eyes and gray-white faces, and yet in some ways they were like us, except ridiculous and, at the same time, mysteriously irritating, like rats. Their movements were stiff and regular, as if figured by logic. They had skinny, naked hands that moved by clicks. When I first became aware of them, they were all speaking at the same time. I tried to move, but my body was rigid; only one hand gave a jerk. They all stopped speaking at the same instant, like sparrows. We stared at each other.

One of them said—a tall one with a long black beard—"It moves independent of the tree."

They nodded.

The tall one said, "It's a growth of some kind, that's my opinion. Some beastlike fungus."

They all looked up into the branches.

A short, fat one with a tangled white beard pointed up into the tree with an ax. "Those branches on the northern side are all dead there. No doubt the whole tree'll be dead before midsummer. It's always the north side goes first when there ain't enough sap."

They nodded, and another one said, "See there where it grows up out of the trunk? Sap running all over."

They leaned over the sides of their horses to look, pushing the torches toward me. The horses' eyes glittered.

"Have to close that up if we're going to save this tree," the tall one said. The others grunted, and the tall one looked up at my eyes, uneasy. I couldn't move. He stepped down off the horse and came over to me, so close I could have swung my hand and smashed his head if I could make my muscles move. "It's like blood," he said, and made a face.

Two of the others got down and came over to pull at their noses and look.

"I say that tree's a goner," one of them said.

They all nodded, except the tall one. "We can't just leave it rot," he said. "Start letting the place go to ruin and you know what the upshot'll be."

They nodded. The others got down off their horses and came over. The one with the tangled white beard said, "Maybe we could chop the fungus out."

They thought about it. After a while the tall one shook his head. "I don't know. Could be it's some kind of a oaktree spirit. Better not to mess with it."

They looked uneasy. There was a hairless, skinny one with eyes like two holes. He stood with his arms out, like a challenged bird, and he kept moving around in jerky little circles, bent forward, peering at everything, at the tree, at the woods around, up into my eyes. Now suddenly he nodded. "That's it! King's right! It's a spirit!"

"You think so?" they said. Their heads poked forward.

"Sure of it," he said.

"Is it friendly, you think?" the king said.

The hairless one peered up at me with the fingertips of one hand in his mouth. The skinny elbow hung straight down, as if he were leaning on an invisible table while he thought the whole thing through. His black little eyes stared straight into mine, as if waiting for me to tell him something. I tried to speak. My mouth moved, but nothing would come out. The little man jerked back. "He's hungry!" he said.

"Hungry!" they all said. "What does he eat?"

He looked at me again. His tiny eyes drilled into me and he was crouched as if he were thinking of trying to jump up into my brains. My heart thudded. I was so hungry I could eat a rock. He smiled suddenly, as if a holy vision had exploded in his head. "He eats *pig*" he said. He looked doubtful. "Or maybe pigsmoke. He's in a period of transition."

They all looked at me, thinking it over, then nodded.

The king picked out six men. "Go get the thing some pigs," he said. The six men said "Yes sir!" and got on their horses and rode off. It filled me with joy, though it was all crazy, and before I knew I could do it, I laughed. They jerked away and stood shaking, looking up.

"The spirit's angry," one of them whispered.

"It always has been," another one said. "That's why it's killing the tree."

"No, no, you're wrong," the hairless one said. "It's yelling for pig."

"Pig!" I tried to yell. It scared them.

They all began shouting at each other. One of the horses neighed and reared up, and for some crazy reason they took it for a sign. The king snatched an ax from the man beside him and, without any warning, he hurled it at me. I twisted, letting out a howl, and it shot past my shoulder, just barely touching my skin. Blood trickled out.

"You're all crazy," I tried to yell, but it came out a moan. I bellowed for my mother.

"Surround him!" the king yelled, "Save the horses!" and suddenly I knew I was dealing with no dull mechanical bull but with thinking creatures, pattern makers, the most dangerous things I'd ever met. I shrieked at them, trying to scare them off, but they merely ducked behind bushes and took long sticks from the saddles of their horses, bows and javelins. "You're all crazy," I bellowed, "you're all insane!" I'd never howled more loudly in my life. Darts like hot coals went through my legs and arms and I howled more loudly still. And then, just when I was sure I was finished, a shriek ten times as loud as mine came blaring off the cliff. It was my mother! She came roaring down like thunder, screaming like a thousand hurricanes, eyes as bright as dragonfire, and before she was within a mile of us, the creatures had leaped to their horses and galloped away. Big trees shattered and fell from her path; the earth trembled. Then her smell poured in like blood into a silver cup, filling the moonlit clearing to the brim, and I felt the two trees that held me falling, and I was tumbling, free, into the grass.

I woke up in the cave, warm firelight flickering on walls. My mother lay picking through the bone pile. When

she heard me stir, she turned, wrinkling her forehead, and looked at me. There were no other shapes. I think I dimly understood even then that they'd gone deeper into darkness, away from men. I tried to tell her all that had happened, all that I'd come to understand: the meaningless abjectness of the world, the universal bruteness. She only stared, troubled at my noise. She'd forgotten all language long ago, or maybe had never known any. I'd never heard her speak to the other shapes. (How I myself learned to speak I can't remember; it was a long, long time ago.) But I talked on, trying to smash through the walls of her unconsciousness. "The world resists me and I resist the world," I said. "That's all there is. The mountains are what I define them as." Ah, monstrous stupidity of childhood, unreasonable hope! I waken with a start and see it over again (in my cave, out walking, or sitting by the mere), the memory rising as if it has been pursuing me. The fire in my mother's eyes brightens and she reaches out as if some current is tearing us apart. "The world is all pointless accident," I say. Shouting now, my fists clenched. "I exist, nothing else." Her face works. She gets up on all fours, brushing dry bits of bone from her path, and, with a look of terror, rising as if by unnatural power, she hurls herself across the void and buries me in her bristly fur and fat. I sicken with fear. "My mother's fur is bristly," I say to myself. "Her flesh is loose." Buried under my mother I cannot see. She smells of wild pig and fish. "My mother smells of wild pig and fish," I say. What I see I inspire with usefulness, I think, trying to suck in breath, and all that I do not see is useless, void. I observe myself observing what I observe. It startles me. "Then I am not that which observes!" I am *lack*. *Alack!* No thread, no frailest hair between myself and the universal clutter! I listen to the underground river. I have never seen it.

Talking, talking, spinning a skin, a skin...

I can't breathe, and I claw to get free. She struggles. I smell my mama's blood and, alarmed, I hear from the walls and floor of the cave the booming, booming, of her heart.

In the intervening action, Grendel explains his anger toward Hrothgar, the leader of the Danes. He hates the brutishness and falsity that is present in Danish society generally—and in the warriors particularly. As Hrothgar's dominance grows, so does his kingdom: surrounding communities pay (false) fealty to him and a wandering scop (a singer and composer of songs, who in an oral tradition functions as an entertainer, historian, and social identity-maker) gains the patronage of the king by inspiring the Danish people.

He sings to a heavier harpsong now, old heart-string scratcher, memory scraper. Of the richest of kings made sick of soul by the scattered bones of thanes. By late afternoon the fire dies down and the column of smoke is white, no longer greasy. There will be others this year, they know; yet they hang on. The sun backs away from the world like a crab and the days grow shorter, the nights grow longer, more dark and dangerous. I smile, angry in the thickening dusk, and feast my eyes on the greatest of meadhalls, unsatisfied.

His pride. The torch of kingdoms. Hart.

The Shaper remains, though now there are nobler courts where he might sing. The pride of creation. He built this hall by the power of his songs: created with casual words its grave mor(t)ality. The boy observes him, tall and solemn, twelve years older than the night he first crept in with his stone-eyed master. He knows no art but tragedy—a moving singer. The credit is wholly mine.

Inspired by winds (or whatever you please), the old man sang of a glorious meadhall whose light would shine to the ends of the ragged world. The thought took seed in Hrothgar's mind. It grew. He called all his people together and told them his daring scheme. He would build a magnificent meadhall high on a hill, with a view of the western sea, a victory-seat near the giants' work, old ruined fortress from the world's first war, to stand forever as a sign of the glory and justice of Hrothgar's Danes. There he would sit and give treasures out, all wealth but the lives of men and the people's land. And so his sons would do after him, and his sons' sons, to the final generation.

I listened, huddled in the darkness, tormented, mistrustful. I knew them, had watched them; yet the things he said seemed true. He sent to far kingdoms for woodsmen, carpenters, metalsmiths, goldsmiths—also carters, victualers, clothiers to attend to the workmen—and for weeks their uproar filled the days and nights. I watched from the vines and boulders of the giants' ruin, two miles off. Then word went out to the races of men that Hrothgar's hall was finished. He gave it its name. From neighboring realms and from across the sea came men to the great celebration. The harper sang.

I listened, felt myself swept up. I knew very well that all he said was ridiculous, not light for their darkness but flattery, illusion, a vortex pulling them from sunlight to heat, a kind of midsummer burgeoning, waltz to the sickle. Yet I was swept up. "Ridiculous!" I hissed in the black of the forest. I snatched up a snake from beside my foot and whispered to it, "I knew him *when!*" But I couldn't bring out a wicked cackle, as I'd meant to do. My heart was light with Hrothgar's goodness,

and leaden with grief at my own bloodthirsty ways. I backed away, crablike, further into darkness—like a crab retreating in pain when you strike two stones at the mouth of his underwater den. I backed away till the honeysweet lure of the harp no longer mocked me. Yet even now my mind was tormented by images. Thanes filled the hall and a great silent crowd of them spilled out over the surrounding hill, smiling, peaceable, hearing the harper as if not a man in all that lot had ever twisted a knife in his neighbor's chest.

"Well then he's changed them," I said, and stumbled and fell on the root of a tree. "Why not?"

Why not? the forest whispered back—yet not the forest, something deeper, an impression from another mind, some live thing old and terrible.

I listened, tensed.

Not a sound.

"He reshapes the world," I whispered, belligerent. "So his name implies. He stares strange-eyed at the mindless world and turns dry sticks to gold."

A little poetic, I would readily admit. His manner of speaking was infecting me, making me pompous. "Nevertheless," I whispered crossly—but I couldn't go on, too conscious all at once of my whispering, my eternal posturing, always transforming the world with words—changing nothing. I still had the snake in my fist. I set it down. It fled.

"He takes what he finds," I said stubbornly, trying again. "And by changing men's minds he makes the best of it. Why not?" But it sounded petulant; and it wasn't true, I knew. He sang for pay, for the praise of women—one in particular—and for the honor of a famous king's hand on his arm. If the ideas of art were beautiful, that was art's fault, not the Shaper's. A blind selector, almost mindless: a bird. Did they murder each other more gently because in the woods sweet songbirds sang?

Yet I wasn't satisfied. His fingers picked infallibly, as if moved by something beyond his power, and the words stitched together out of ancient songs, the scenes interwoven out of dreary tales, made a vision without seams, an image of himself yet not-himself, beyond the need of any shaggy old gold-friend's pay: the projected possible.

"Why not?" I whispered, jerking forward, struggling to make my eyes sear through the dark trunks and vines.

I could feel it all around me, that invisible presence, chilly as the first intimation of death, the dusty unblinking eyes of a thousand snakes. There was no sound. I touched a fat, slick loop of vine, prepared to leap back in horror, but it was only vine, no worse. And still no sound, no movement. I got

up on my feet, bent over, squinting, and edged back through the trees toward the town. It followed me—whatever it was. I was as sure of that as I'd ever been of anything. And then, in one instant, as if it had all been my mind, the thing was gone. In the hall they were laughing.

Men and women stood talking in the light of the meadhall door and on the narrow streets below; on the lower hillside boys and girls played near the sheep pens, shyly holding hands. A few lay touching each other in the forest eaves. I thought how they'd shriek if I suddenly showed my face, and it made me smile, but I held myself back. They talked nothing, stupidities, their soft voices groping like hands. I felt myself tightening, cross, growing restless for no clear reason, and I made myself move more slowly. Then, circling the clearing, I stepped on something fleshy, and jerked away. It was a man. They'd cut his throat. His clothes had been stolen. I stared up at the hall, baffled, beginning to shake. They went on talking softly, touching hands, their hair full of light. I lifted up the body and slung it across my shoulder.

Then the harp began to play. The crowd grew still.

The harp sighed, the old man sang, as sweet-voiced as a child.

He told how the earth was first built, long ago: said that the greatest of gods made the world, every wonder-bright plain and the turning seas, and set out as signs of his victory the sun and moon, great lamps for light to land-dwellers, kingdom torches, and adorned the fields with all colors and shapes, made limbs and leaves and gave life to the every creature that moves on land.

The harp turned solemn. He told of an ancient feud between two brothers which split all the world between darkness and light. And I, Grendel, was the dark side, he said in effect. The terrible race God cursed.

I believed him. Such was the power of the Shaper's harp! Stood wriggling my face, letting tears down my nose, grinding my fists into my streaming eyes, even though to do it I had to squeeze with my elbow the corpse of the proof that both of us were cursed, or neither, that the brothers had never lived, nor the god who judged them. "Waaa!" I bawled.

Oh what a conversion!

I staggered out into the open and up toward the hall with my burden, groaning out, "Mercy! Peace!" The harper broke off, the people screamed. (They have their own versions, but this is the truth.) Drunken men rushed me with battle-axes. I sank to my knees, crying, "Friend! Friend!" They hacked at me, yipping like dogs. I held up the body for protection. Their spears came through it and one of them nicked me, a tiny

scratch high on my left breast, but I knew by the sting it had venom on it and I understood, as shocked as I'd been the first time, that they could kill me—eventually *would* if I gave them a chance. I struck at them, holding the body as a shield, and two fell bleeding from my nails at the first little swipe. The others backed off. I crushed the body in my hug, then hurled it in their faces, turned, and fled. They didn't follow.

I ran to the center of the forest and fell down panting. My mind was wild. "Pity," I moaned, "O pity! pity!" I wept—strong monster with teeth like a shark's—and I slammed the earth with such force that a seam split open twelve feet long. "Bastards!" I roared. "Sons of bitches! Fuckers!" Words I'd picked up from men in their rages. I wasn't even sure what they meant, though I had an idea: defiance, rejection of the gods that, for my part, I'd known all along to be lifeless sticks. I roared with laughter, still sobbing. We, the accursed, didn't even have words for swearing in! "AAARGH!" I whooped, then covered my ears and hushed. It sounded silly.

My sudden awareness of my foolishness made me calm.

I looked up through the treetops, ludicrously hopeful. I think I was half prepared, in my dark, demented state, to see God, bearded and gray as geometry, scowling down at me, shaking his bloodless finger.

"Why can't I have someone to talk to?" I said. The stars said nothing, but I pretended to ignore the rudeness. "The Shaper has people to talk to," I said. I wrung my fingers. "Hrothgar has people to talk to."

I thought about it.

Perhaps it wasn't true.

As a matter of fact, if the Shaper's vision of goodness and peace was a part of himself, not idle rhymes, then no one understood him at all, not even Hrothgar. And as for Hrothgar, if he was serious about his idea of glory—sons and sons' sons giving out treasure—I had news for him. If he had sons, they wouldn't hear his words. They would weigh his silver and gold in their minds. I've watched the generations. I've seen their weasel eyes.

I fought down my smile.

"That could change," I said, shaking my finger as if at an audience. "The Shaper may yet improve men's minds, bring peace to the miserable Danes."

But they were doomed, I knew, and I was glad. No denying it. Let them wander the fogroads of Hell.

In the intervening action, Grendel is confused by the world the scop describes, which further angers him. He resolves to go see the wise and dangerous dragon for guidance.

No use of a growl, a whoop, a roar, in the presence of that beast! Vast, red-golden, huge tail coiled, limbs sprawled over his treasure-ward, eyes not fiery but cold as the memory of family deaths. Vanishing away across invisible floors, there were things of gold, gems, jewels, silver vessels the color of blood in the undulant, dragon-red light. Arching above him the ceiling and upper walls of his cave were alive with bats. The color of his sharp scales darkened and brightened as the dragon inhaled and exhaled slowly, drawing new air across his vast internal furnace; his razorsharp tusks gleamed and glinted as if they too, like the mountain beneath him, were formed of precious stones and metals.

My heart shook. His eyes stared straight at me. My knees and insides were so weak I had to drop down on all fours. His mouth opened slightly. Bits of flame escaped.

"Ah, Grendel!" he said. "You've come." The voice was startling. No rolling boom, as I would have expected, but a voice that might have come from an old, old man. Louder, of course, but not much louder.

"We've been expecting you," he said. He gave a nervous laugh, like a miser caught at his counting. His eyes were heavy-lidded, minutely veined, wrinkled like an elderly mead-drinker's. "Stand around the side, if you don't mind, boy," he said. "I get a cough sometimes, and it's terrible straight out front." The high dead eyelids wrinkled more, the corners of his mouth snaked up as he chuckled, sly, hardly hiding his malice. I quickly ducked around to the side.

"Good boy," he said. He tipped his head, lowering an eye toward me. "Smart boy! He he he!" He lifted a wrinkled paw with man-length talons for nails and held it over my head as if to crush me with it, but he merely brought it down lightly, once, twice, three times, patting my head.

"Well, speak, boy," he said. "Say 'Hello there, Mr. Dragon!'" He cackled.

My throat convulsed and I tried to get my breath to speak, but I couldn't.

The dragon smiled. Horrible, debauched, mouth limp and cracked, loose against the teeth as an ancient dog's. "Now you know how *they* feel when they see *you*, eh? Scared enough to pee in their pants! He he!" He looked startled by an unpleasant thought, then cross. "You didn't, did you?"

I shook my head.

"Good," he said. "That's valuable stuff you're standing on. Boobies, hemorrhoids, boils, slaver (nyeh heh heh)... *Now.*" He moved his head as if adjusting his flaking neck to a tight metal collar and put on what looked like, for him, a sober expression, like an old drunk preparing a solemn face for

court. Then, as if involuntarily, he cackled again. It was horrible, horrible! Obscene! He couldn't stop himself. He cackled so hard a brilliant tear like a giant diamond rolled down his cheek. And still he couldn't stop. He raised up the taloned paw and pointed at me. His head tipped back, laughing, blowing fire out his mouth and nostrils. He tried to say something, but the laughing got worse. He rolled over on his side, stretching up one vast, wrinkled wing for balance, covering his eyes with one claw, still pointing with the other, roaring with laughter and kicking a little with his two back feet. I felt cross all at once, though I didn't dare show it. "Like a rabbit!" he brought out. "Nyee he he he! When you're scared, you look—nyee he he he—exactly... (*gasp!*) exactly..."

I scowled and, realizing I had my hands out in front of me like a rabbit sitting up, I jerked them behind my back. My scowl of rage nearly finished him. He hooted, gasped, sobbed, began to choke with laughter. I forgot myself completely. I snatched up an emerald the size of a fist and pulled it back to throw it at him. He was sober instantly. "Put it down!" he said. He drew in breath and turned his huge head straight at me. I dropped it and fought to keep my bowels from moving down.

"Don't touch," he said. The old-man voice was as terrible now as the eyes. It was as if he'd been dead for a thousand years. "Never never *never* touch my things," he said. Flame came out with the words and singed the hair on my belly and legs. I nodded, trembling all over. "Good," he said. He stared at me a moment longer, then slowly, slowly turned his head away. Then, old womanish, as if he were, though still spiteful, slightly embarrassed, he got back up onto his treasure pile, stretched out his wings, and settled.

He was in the foulest of moods. I doubted that I could learn anything from him now. I'd be lucky to get away alive. I thought all at once about what he'd said: "Now you know how *they* feel when they see *you*." He had a point. From now on I'd stay clear of them. It was one thing to eat one from time to time—that was only natural: kept them from overpopulating, maybe starving to death, come winter—but it was another thing to scare them, give them heart attacks, fill their nights with nightmares, just for sport.

"Fiddlesticks," the dragon said.

I blinked.

"Fiddlesticks, that's what I said," he repeated. "Why not frighten them? Creature, I could tell you things..." He rolled his eyes up under the heavy lids and made a noise, "*Glaagh*." He remained that way, breathing hard with peevish anger. "Stupid, stupid, *stupid!*" he hissed. "The whole damned kit and caboodle. Why did you come here? Why do you bother

me?—Don't answer!" he added quickly, stopping me. "I know what's in your mind. I know everything. That's what makes me so sick and old and tired."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Be still!" he screamed. Flame shot clear to the cavemouth. "I know you're sorry. For right now, that is. For this one frail, foolish flicker-flash in the long dull fall of eternity. I'm unimpressed—No no! Be still!" His eye burst open like a hole, to hush me. I closed my mouth. The eye was terrible, lowering toward me. I felt as if I were tumbling down into it—dropping endlessly down through a soundless void. He let me fall, down and down toward a black sun and spiders, though he knew I was beginning to die. Nothing could have been more disinterested: serpent to the core.

In the intervening action, the dragon attempts to convince Grendel that the scop's words are illusory and do not reflect reality. He makes a case that the universe is chaotic and, no matter how humans try to impose order on it, will always return to chaos. Implying an ability to see into the future, he informs Grendel that all will die and the universe will grow cold and empty.

"I think you're lying," I said, confused again, aswirl in words.

"I noticed that. You'll never know. It must be very frustrating to be caged like a Chinaman's cricket in a limited mind." His cackle lacked spirit, this time. He was growing very weary of my presence.

"You said 'Fiddlesticks,'" I said. "Why is it fiddlesticks if I stop giving people heart attacks over nothing? Why shouldn't one change one's ways, improve one's character?" I must have been an interesting sight, that instant, big shaggy monster intense and earnest, bent like a priest at his prayers.

He shrugged. "Whatever you like. Do as you think best."

"But why?"

"'Why? Why?' Ridiculous question! Why anything? My advice to you—"

I clenched my fists, though it was absurd, of course. One does not swing at dragons. "*No, why?*"

The dragon tipped up his great tusked head, stretched his neck, sighed fire. "Ah, Grendel!" he said. He seemed that instant almost to rise to pity. "You improve them, my boy! Can't you see that yourself? You stimulate them! You make them think and scheme. You drive them to poetry, science, religion, all that makes them what they are for as long as they last. You are, so to speak, the brute existent by which they learn to define themselves. The exile, captivity, death they shrink from—the blunt facts of their mortality, their aban-

donment—that's what you make them recognize, embrace! You are mankind, or man's condition: inseparable as the mountain-climber and the mountain. If you withdraw, you'll instantly be replaced. Brute existents, you know, are a dime a dozen. No sentimental trash, then. If man's the irrelevance that interests you, stick with him! Scare him to glory! It's all the same in the end, matter and motion, simple or complex. No difference, finally. Death, transfiguration. Ashes to ashes and slime to slime, amen."

I was sure he was lying. Or anyway half-sure. Flattering me into tormenting them because he, in his sullen hole, loved viciousness. I said, "Let them find some other 'brute existent,' whatever that is. I refuse."

"Do!" he said leering scornfully. "Do something else, by all means! Alter the future! Make the world a better place in which to live! Help the poor! Feed the hungry. Be kind to idiots! What a challenge!"

He no longer looked at me, no longer made any pretense of telling the truth. "Personally," he said, "my great ambition is to count all this"—he waved vaguely at the treasure around him—"and possibly sort it into piles. 'Know thyself,' that's my dictum. Know how much you've got, and beware of strangers!"

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Nothing was changed, everything was changed, by my having seen the dragon. It's one thing to listen, full of scorn and doubt, to poets' versions of time past and visions of time to come; it's another to know, as coldly and simply as my mother knows her pile of bones, what is. Whatever I may have understood or misunderstood in the dragon's talk, something much deeper stayed with me, became my aura. Futility, doom, became a smell in the air, pervasive and acrid as the dead smell after a forest fire—my scent and the world's, the scent of trees, rocks, waterways wherever I went.

But there was one thing worse. I discovered that the dragon had put a charm on me: no weapon could cut me. I could walk up to the meadhall whenever I pleased, and they were powerless. My heart became darker because of that. Though I scorned them, sometimes hated them, there had been something between myself and men when we could fight. Now, invulnerable, I was as solitary as one live tree in a vast landscape of coal.

Needless to say, I misunderstood in the beginning: I thought it an advantage.

It was the height of summer, harvest season in the first year of what I have come to call my war with Hrothgar. The night air was filled with the smell of apples and shocked

grain, and I could hear the noise in the meadhall from a mile away. I moved toward it, drawn as always, as if by some kind of curse. I meant not to be seen that night. For all the dragon's talk, I had no intention of terrifying Hrothgar's thanes for nothing. (I had not begun, at that time, my systematic raids. In fact I hadn't yet admitted to myself that it was war. I killed stragglers now and then—with a certain grim pleasure very different from that which I got from cracking a cow's skull—but I'd never yet struck at the hall, hadn't even revealed myself there—except on that one ridiculous night when I walked up and tried to join them.) I hunkered down at the edge of the forest, looking up the long hill at the meadhall lights. I could hear the Shaper's song.

I no longer remember exactly what he sang. I know only that it had a strange effect on me: it no longer filled me with doubt and distress, loneliness, shame. It enraged me. It was their confidence, maybe—their blissful, swinish ignorance, their bumptious self-satisfaction, and, worst of all, their hope. I went closer, darting from cowshed to cowshed and finally up to the wall. I found a crack and peeked in. I do remember what he said, now that I think about it. Or some of it. He spoke of how God had been kind to the Scyldings, sending so rich a harvest. The people sat beaming, bleary-eyed and fat, nodding their approval of God. He spoke of God's great generosity in sending them so wise a king. They all raised their cups to God and Hrothgar, and Hrothgar smiled, bits of food in his beard. The Shaper talked of how God had vanquished their enemies and filled up their houses with precious treasure, how they were the richest, most powerful people on earth, how here and here alone in all the world men were free and heroes were brave and virgins were virgins. He ended the song, and people clapped and shouted their praise and filled their golden cups. All around their bubble of stupidity I could feel the brume of the dragon.

Then a stick snapped behind me, and the same instant, a dog barked. A helmeted, chain-mailed guard leaped out at me, sword in two hands above his head, prepared to split me. I jerked back, but there was something in the way, and I fell. I tried to roll, and then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the sword coming and I knew I couldn't escape it. I went limp, the way animals sometimes do at the moment of the predator's leap. Nothing happened.

I was as surprised as the guard. We both stared, I sprawling helpless on my back, the sword across my belly, the guard leaning forward, still holding the hilt as if afraid to let it go. His beard and nose stuck out through the cheekplates, and his eyes, in the shadowed recess of the helmet, were like two dark

holes in a tree. My heart was pounding, filling my chest with pain. Still, neither of us moved. Then, almost the same instant, the guard screamed and I roared like a bull gone mad to drive him off. He let go of the sword and tried to retreat, walking backward, but he tripped on the dog and fell. I laughed, a little wild, and reached out fast as a striking snake for his leg. In a second I was up on my feet again. He screamed, dangling, and then there were others all around me. They threw javelins and axes, and one of the men caught the guard's thrashing arms and tried to yank him free. I held on, but except for that I couldn't act. It was as if I too was drunk on mead. I saw their weapons come flying straight at me, saw them touch my fur and drop quietly in the grass.

Then, little by little, I understood. I felt laughter welling up inside me—at the dragon-charm, at Hrothgar's whispering and trembling by the meadhall door, at everything—the oblivious trees and sky, the witless moon. I'd meant them no harm, but they'd attacked me again, as always. They were crazy. And now at last the grim laughter came pouring out, as uncontrollable as the dragon's laugh, and I wanted to say, "Lo, God has vanquished mine enemies!"—but that made me laugh harder, though even now my heart raced and, in spite of it all, I was afraid of them. I backed away, still holding the screaming guard. They merely stared, with their useless weapons drawn, their shoulders hunched against my laughter. When I'd reached a safe distance, I held up the guard to taunt them, then held him still higher and leered into his face. He went silent, looking at me upside-down in horror, suddenly knowing what I planned. As if casually, in plain sight of them all, I bit his head off, crunched through the helmet, and skull with my teeth and, holding the jerking, blood-slippery body in two hands, sucked the blood that sprayed like a hot, thick geyser from his neck. It got all over me. Women fainted, men backed toward the hall. I fled with the body to the woods, heart churning—boiling like a flooded ditch—with glee.

Some three or four nights later I launched my first raid. I burst in when they were all asleep, snatched seven from their beds, and slit them open and devoured them on the spot. I felt a strange, unearthly joy. It was as if I'd made some incredible discovery, like my discovery long ago of the moonlit world beyond the mere. I was transformed. I was a new focus for the clutter of space I stood in: if the world had once imploded on the tree where I waited, trapped and full of pain, it now blasted outward, away from me, screeching terror. I had become, myself, the mama I'd searched the cliffs for once in vain. But that merely hints at what I mean. I had *become* something, as if born again. I had hung between possibilities

before, between the cold truths I knew and the heart-sucking conjuring tricks of the Shaper; now that was passed: I was Grendel, Ruiner of Meadhalls, Wrecker of Kings!

But also, as never before, I was alone.

I do not complain of it (talking talking, complaining complaining, filling the world I walk with words). But I admit it was a jolt. It was a few raids later. The meadhall door burst open at my touch exactly as before, and, for once, that night, I hesitated. Men sat up in their beds, snatched their helmets, swords, and shields from the covers beside them, and, shouting brave words that came out like squeals, they threw their legs over the sides to stumble toward me. Someone yelled, "Remember this hour, ye thanes of Hrothgar, the boasts you made as the meadbowl passed! Remember our good king's gift of rings and pay him with all your might for his many kindnesses!"

Damned pompous fools. I hurled a bench at the closest. They all cowered back. I stood waiting, bent forward with my feet apart, flat-footed, till they ended their interminable orations. I was hunched like a wrestler, moving my head from side to side, making sure no sneak slipped up on me. I was afraid of them from habit, and as the four or five drunkest of the thanes came toward me, shaking their weapons and shouting at me, my idiotic fear of them mounted. But I held my ground. Then, with a howl, one plunged at me, sword above his head in both fists. I let it come. The charm held good. I closed my hand on the blade and snatched it from the drunken thane's hand and hurled it the length of the hall. It clattered on the fireplace stones and fell to the stone floor, ringing. I seized him and crushed him. Another one came at me, gloating in his bleary-eyed heroism, maniacally joyful because he had bragged that he would die for his king and he was doing it. He did it. Another one came, reeling and whooping, trying to make his eyes focus.

I laughed. It was outrageous: they came, they fell, howling insanity about brothers, fathers, glorious Hrothgar, and God. But though I laughed, I felt trapped, as hollow as a rotten tree. The meadhall seemed to stretch for miles, out to the edges of time and space, and I saw myself killing them, on and on and on, as if mechanically, without contest. I saw myself swelling like bellows on their blood, a meaningless smudge in a universe dead as old wind over bones, abandoned except for the burnt-blood scent of the dragon. All at once I began to smash things—benches, tables, hanging beds—a rage as meaningless and terrible as everything else.

Then—as a crowning absurdity, my salvation that moment—came the man the thanes called Unferth.

He stood across the hall from me, youthful, intense, cold sober. He was taller than the others; he stood out among his fellow thanes like a horse in a herd of cows. His nose was as porous and dark as volcanic rock. His light beard grew in patches.

"Stand back," he said.

The drunken little men around me backed away. The hall-floor between us, Unferth and myself, lay open.

"Monster, prepare to die!" he said. Very righteous. The wings of his nostrils flared and quivered like an outraged priest's.

I laughed. "Aargh!" I said. I spit bits of bone.

He glanced behind him, making sure he knew exactly where the window was. "Are you right with your god?" he said.

I laughed somewhat more fiercely. He was one of those.

He took a tentative step toward me, then paused, holding his sword out and shaking it. "Tell them in Hell that Unferth, son of Ecglafr sent you, known far and wide in these Scanian lands as a hero among the Scyldings." He took a few sidesteps, like one wrestler circling another, except that he was thirty feet away; the maneuver was ridiculous.

"Come, come," I said. "Let me tell them I was sent by Sideways-Walker."

He frowned, trying to puzzle out my speech. I said it again, louder and slower, and a startled look came over him. Even now he didn't know what I was saying, but it was clear to him, I think, that I was speaking words. He got a cunning look, as if getting ready to offer a deal—the look men have when they fight with men instead of poor stupid animals.

He was shaken, and to get back his nerve he spoke some more. "For many months, unsightly monster, you've murdered men as you pleased in Hrothgar's hall. Unless you can murder me as you've murdered lesser men, I give you my word those days are done forever! The king has given me splendid gifts. He will see tonight that his gifts have not gone for nothing! Prepare to fall, foul thing! This one red hour makes your reputation or mine!"

I shook my head at him, wickedly smiling. "Reputation!" I said, pretending to be much impressed.

His eyebrows shot up. He'd understood me; no doubt of it now. "You can talk!" he said. He backed away a step.

I nodded, moving in on him. Near the center of the room there was trestle table piled high with glossy apples. An evil idea came over me—so evil it made me shiver as I smiled—and I sidled across to the table. "So you're a hero," I said. He didn't get it, and I said it twice more before I gave up in disgust. I talked on anyway, let him get what he could, come try

for reputation when he pleased. "I'm impressed," I said "I've never seen a live hero before. I thought they were only in poetry. Ah, ah, it must be a terrible burden, though, being a hero-glory reaper, harvester of monsters! Everybody always watching you, weighing you, seeing if you're still heroic. You know how it is—he he! Sooner or later the harvest virgin will make her mistake in the haystack." I laughed.

The dragon-scent in the room grew stronger, as if my teasing were bringing the old beast near. I picked up an apple and polished it lightly and quickly on the hair of my arm. I had my head bowed, smiling, looking at him up through my eyebrows.

"Dread creature—" he said.

I went on polishing the apple, smiling. "And the awful inconvenience," I said. "Always having to stand erect, always having to find noble language! It must wear on a man."

He looked hurt and slightly indignant. He'd understood.

"Wretched shape—" he said.

"But no doubt there are compensations," I said. "The pleasant feeling of vast superiority, the easy success with women—" "Monster!" he howled.

"And the joy of self-knowledge, that's a great compensation! The easy and absolute certainty that whatever the danger, however terrible the odds, you'll stand firm, behave with the dignity of a hero, yea, even to the grave!"

"No more talk!" he yelled. His voice broke. He lifted his sword to make a run at me, and I laughed—howled—and threw an apple at him. He dodged, and then his mouth dropped open. I laughed harder, threw another. He dodged again.

"Hey!" he yelled. A forgivable lapse.

And now I was raining apples at him and laughing myself weak. He covered his head, roaring at me. He tried to charge through the barrage, but he couldn't make three feet. I slammed one straight into his pock-marked nose, and blood spurted out like joining rivers. It made the floor slippery, and he went down. *Clang!* I bent double with laughter. Poor Jangler—Unferth—tried to take advantage of it, charging at me on all fours, snatching at my ankles, but I jumped back and tipped over the table on him, half burying him in apples as red and innocent as smiles. He screamed and thrashed, trying to get at me and at the same time trying to see if the others were watching. He was crying, only a boy, famous hero or not: a poor miserable virgin.

"Such is life," I said, and mocked a sigh. "Such is dignity!" Then I left him. I got more pleasure from that apple fight than from any other battle in my life.

I was sure, going back to my cave (it was nearly dawn), that he wouldn't follow. They never did. But I was wrong; he was a new kind of Scylding. He must have started tracking me that same morning. A driven man, a maniac. He arrived at the cave three nights later.

I was asleep. I woke up with a start, not sure what it was that had awakened me. I saw my mother moving slowly and silently past me, blue murder in her eyes. I understood instantly, not with my mind but with something quicker, and I darted around in front to block her way. I pushed her back.

There he lay, gasping on his belly like a half drowned rat. His face and throat and arms were a crosshatch of festering cuts, the leavings of the firesnakes. His hair and beard hung straight down like seaweed. He panted for a long time, then rolled his eyes up, vaguely in my direction. In the darkness he couldn't see me, though I could see him. He closed his hand on the sword hilt and jiggled the sword a little, too weak to raise it off the floor.

"Unferth has come!" he said.

I smiled. My mother moved back and forth like a bear behind me, stirred up by the smell.

He crawled toward me, the sword noisily scraping on the cave's rock floor. Then he gave out again. "It will be sung," he whispered, then paused again to get wind. "It will be sung year on year and age on age that Unferth went down through the burning lake—" he paused to pant "—and gave his life in battle with the world-rim monster." He let his cheek fall to the floor and lay panting for a long time, saying nothing. It dawned on me that he was waiting for me to kill him. I did nothing. I sat down and put my elbows on my knees and my chin on my fists and merely watched. He lay with his eyes closed and began to get his breath back. He whispered: "It's all very well to make a fool of me before my fellow thanes. All very well to talk about dignity and noble language and all the rest, as if heroism were a golden trinket, mere outward show, and hollow. But such is not the case, monster. That is to say—" He paused, seemed to grope; he'd lost his train of thought.

I said nothing, merely waited, blocking my mother by stretching out an arm when she came near.

"Even now you mock me," Unferth whispered. I had an uneasy feeling he was close to tears. If he wept, I was not sure I could control myself. His pretensions to uncommon glory were one thing. If for even an instant he pretended to misery like mine...

"You think me a witless fool," he whispered. "Oh, I heard what you said. I caught your nasty insinuations. 'I thought heroes were only in poetry,' you said. Implying that what I've

made of myself is mere fairytale stuff." He raised his head, trying to glare at me, but his blind stare was in the wrong direction, following my mother's pacing. "Well, it's not, let me tell you." His lips trembled and I was certain he would cry, I would have to destroy him from pure disgust, but he held it. He let his head fall again and sucked for air. A little of his voice came back, so that he no longer had to whisper but could bring out his words in a slightly reedy whine. "Poetry's trash, mere clouds of words, comfort to the hopeless. But this is no cloud, no syllabled phantom that stands here shaking its sword at you."

I let the slight exaggeration pass.

But Unferth didn't. "Or lies here," he said. "A hero is not afraid to face cruel truth." That reminded him, apparently, of what he'd meant to say before. "You talk of heroism as noble language, dignity. It's more than that, as my coming here has proved. No man above us will ever know whether Unferth died here or fled to the hills like a coward. Only you and I and God will know the truth. That's inner heroism."

"Hmm," I said. It was not unusual, of course, to hear them contradict themselves, but I would have liked it if he'd stuck to one single version, either that they would know and sing his tragedy or that they wouldn't. So it would have been in a poem, surely, if Unferth were a character, good or evil, heroic or not. But reality, alas, is essentially shoddy. I let out a sigh.

He jerked his head up, shocked. "Does *nothing* have value in your horrible ruin of a brain?"

I waited. The whole shit-ass scene was his idea, not mine.

I saw the light dawning in his eyes. "I understand," he said. I thought he would laugh at the bottomless stupidity of my cynicism, but while the laugh was still starting at the corners of his eyes, another look came, close to fright. "You think me deluded. Tricked by my own walking fairytale. You think I came without a hope of winning—came to escape indignity by suicide!" He did laugh now, not amused: sorrowful and angry. The laugh died quickly. "I didn't know how deep the pool was," he said. "I had a chance. I knew I had no more than that. It's all a hero asks for."

I sighed. The word "hero" was beginning to grate. He was an idiot. I could crush him like a fly, but I held back.

"Go ahead, scoff," he said, petulant. "Except in the life of a hero, the whole world's meaningless. The hero sees values beyond what's possible. That's the *nature* of a hero. It kills him, of course, ultimately. But it makes the whole struggle of humanity worthwhile."

I nodded in the darkness. "And breaks up the boredom," I said.

He raised up on his elbows, and the effort of it made his shoulders shake. "One of us is going to die tonight. Does *that* break up your boredom?"

"It's not true," I said. "A few minutes from now I'm going to carry you back to Hrothgar, safe and sound. So much for poetry."

"I'll kill myself," he whispered. He shook violently now.

"Up to you," I answered reasonably, "but you'll admit it may seem at least a trifle cowardly to some."

His fists closed and his teeth clenched; then he relaxed and lay flat.

I waited for him to find an answer. Minutes passed. It came to me that he had quit. He had glimpsed a glorious ideal, had struggled toward it and seized it and come to understand it, and was disappointed. One could sympathize.

He was asleep.

I picked him up gently and carried him home. I laid him at the door of Hrothgar's meadhall, still asleep, killed the two guards so I wouldn't be misunderstood, and left.

He lives on, bitter, feebly challenging my midnight raids from time to time (three times this summer), crazy with shame that he alone is always spared, and furiously jealous of the dead. I laugh when I see him. He throws himself at me, or he cunningly sneaks up behind, sometimes in disguise—a goat, a dog, a sickly old woman—and I roll on the floor with laughter. So much for heroism. So much for the harvest-virgin. So much, also, for the alternative visions of blind old poets and dragons.

It will be winter soon.

Midway through the twelfth year of my idiotic war.

Twelve is, I hope, a holy number. Number of escapes from traps.

[He searches the moonlit world for signs, shading his eyes against the dimness, standing on one shaggy foot, just slightly bloodstained, one toe missing from an old encounter with an ax. Three dead trees on the moor below, burned up alive by lightning, are ominous portents. (Oh man, us portents!) Also trees. On a frostbitten hill in the distance, men on horses. "Over here!" he screams. Waves his arms. They hesitate, feign deafness, ride away north. Shoddy, he observes. The whole chilly universe, shoddy.]

Enough of that! A night for tearing heads off, bathing in blood! Except, alas, he has killed his quota for the season. Care, take care of the gold-egg-laying goose! There is no limit to desire but desire's needs. (Grendel's law.)

The scent of the dragon. Heavy all around me, almost visible before me, like my breath. I will count my numberless blessings one by one.

I. My teeth are sound.

I. The roof of my cave is sound.

I. I have not committed the ultimate act of nihilism: I have not killed the queen.

I. Yet.

(He lies on the cliff-edge, scratching his belly, and thoughtfully watches his thoughtfully watching the queen.)

Not easy to define. Mathematically, perhaps a torus, loosely cylindrical, with swellings and constrictions at intervals, knobbed—that is to say, a surface generated, more or less, by the revolutions of a conic about an axis lying in its plane, and the solid thus enclosed. It is difficult, of course, to be precise. For one thing, the problem of determining how much is queen and how much queenly radiation.

The monster laughs.

Time-Space cross-section: *Wealtheow.*

Cut A:

It was the second year of my raiding. The army of the Scyldings was weakened, decimated. No more the rumble of Hrothgar's horsemen, riding at midnight, chain-mail jangling in the whistling wind, cloaks flying out like wimpling wings, to rescue petty tribute-givers. (O *listen* to me, hills!) He couldn't protect his own hall, much less theirs. I cut down my visits, conserving the game, and watched them. Nature lover. For weeks, all day and far into the night, he met with his counselors, talking, praying, moaning. I became aware, listening to them, that I was not their only threat. Far to the east of Hrothgar's hall there was a new hall a-building, its young king gaining fame. As Hrothgar had done, this younger king was systematically burning and plundering nearby halls, extending the circle of his tribute power. He was striking now at the outer rim of Hrothgar's sphere; it was only a matter of time before he struck Hrothgar. The counselors talked and drank and wept, sometimes Hrothgar's allies among them. The Shaper sang songs. The men stood with their braceleted arms around one another's shoulders—men who not long before had been the bitterest of enemies—and I watched it all wringing my fingers, smiling rage. The leaves turned red. The purple blooms of thistles became black behind the people's houses, and migrant birds moved through.

Then, from all corners of Hrothgar's sphere of influence and from towns beyond—the vassals' vassals—an army began to form. They came walking or riding, oxen dragging their wagonloads of shields, spears, tents, clothes, food. Every

night when I went down to look there were more of them. Cartwheels tall as a man, with rough, square spokes. Big-hoofed gray horses spackled like wolves, that rolled their eyes and whinnied at my footfall, leagued with men as if strapped to their business by harness I could not see. Horns cracked out in the darkening stillness; grindstones screeched. The crisp air reeked with the aftersmell of their cooking.

They made camp in a sloping pasture rimmed by enormous oak trees and pines and nut trees, a stream moving down through the center, over steps of rock. Where the forest began, there was a lake. Every night there were new groups of campfires to push away the frost, and soon there was hardly a place to stand, there were so many men and animals. The grass, the withering leaves were full of whispering, but the campground was hushed, muffled by their presence, as if blighted. I watched from my hiding place. They talked in mumbles or not at all. Message carriers moved from fire to fire, talking softly with the leaders. Their rich furs shone like birds' wings in the firelight. Heavily guarded, the younger soldiers pushed through the crowd and, all night long, washed clothes and cooking ware in the stream until the water was thick with dirt and grease and no longer made a sound as it dropped toward the lake. When they slept, guards and dogs watched over them in herds. Before dawn, men rose to exercise the horses, polish weapons, or move out with bows in search of deer.

Then one night when I went down to spy, they were gone, vanished like starlings from a tree. I followed their trail—footprints, hoof prints, and wagon ruts cutting a wide dirty swath toward the east. When I came in sight of them, I slowed down, laughing and hugging myself; it was going to be a massacre. They marched all night, then scattered into the forest like wolves and slept all day without fires. I snatched an ox and devoured it, leaving no trace. At dusk, they formed again. At midnight the armies arrived at the antlered hall.

Hrothgar called out to him, glorious protector of the Scyldings, hoarfrost bearded: "Hygmod, lord of the Helmings, greet your guests!" Unferth stood beside him, his huge arms folded on his byrnie. He stood with his head bowed, eyes mere slits, clamped mouth hidden where his mustache overlapped his beard. Bitterness went out from him like darkness made visible: Unferth the hero (known far and wide in these Scanian lands), isolated in that huge crowd like a poisonous snake aware of what it was. King Hrothgar called again.

The young king came out, well armed, leading a bear and six retainers. He looked around him, blond and pale, arms ringed with gold, a vague smile hiding his shock. The army of

the Scyldings and all their allies stretched off in the darkness as far as the eye could see—down the slopes of the hill, down the stone-paved roadways, away into the trees.

Hrothgar made a speech, lifting his ashspear and shaking it. The young man waited like stone, his gloved right hand grasping the chain that led the bear. He had no chance, and he knew it. Everyone knew it but the bear beside him, standing upright, considering the crowd. I smiled. I could smell the blood that would drench the ground before morning came. There was a light breeze, a scent of winter in it. It stirred the fur on the men's clothes and rattled the leaves around me. The bear dropped down on all fours and grunted. The king jerked the chain. Then an old man came out of the meadhall, went to the young king, just clear of the bear, and spoke to him. Hrothgar and all his allies were silent, waiting. The young king and the old man talked. The retainers at the meadhall door joined in, their voices low. I waited. Hrothgar's whole army was silent. Then the young king moved toward Hrothgar. A rumble went through the crowd, then fell away like a wave retreating, drawing pebbles out from shore. At last, very slowly, the young king drew out his sword, with his left hand—a sign of truce—and dropped it, as if casually, in front of Hrothgar's horse.

"We will give you gifts," the young king said, "splendid tribute in sign of our great respect for the honorable Scyldings." His voice and smile were gracious. His eyes, slanting downward like the eyes of a fish, were expressionless as dried-up wells.

Unferth laughed, all alone in the silence. The sound rolled away to the darkness to die among trees.

Hrothgar, white-haired, white-bearded as the ice-god, shook his head. "There is no gift your people can give the Scyldings," he said. "You think you can buy a little time with gold, and then some night when we're sitting at our mead, you and all your brave allies will come down on us—crash!—as we tonight have come down on you, and no gift we can offer then will turn away your fury." The old man smiled, his eyes wicked. "Do you take us for children that play in the yards with pets? What could we give you that you couldn't take by force, and at that time take from us tenfold?"

Unferth smiled, looking at the bear. The young king showed nothing, accepting the joke and the argument as if he'd been expecting them. He gave the chain another jerk and the bear moved closer to him. When he'd waited long enough, he looked back up at Hrothgar.

"We can give you such piles of treasure," he said, "that I have nothing left to pay an army with. Then you'll be safe."

Hrothgar laughed. "You're crafty, lord of the Helmings. A king shrewd with words can mount a great army on promises. The treasure you'd take by destroying my house could make all your swordsmen rich. Come, come! No more talk! It's a chilly night, and we have cows to milk in the morning. Take up your weapons. We'll give you ground. We haven't come to kill you like foxes in a hole."

But the young king waited on. He was still smiling, though his eyes had no life in them. He had something in reserve, some ingenious product of his counselor's wits that would overwhelm their scheme. He said, speaking more quietly than before, "I will show you a treasure that will change your mind, great Hrothgar." He turned to an attendant and made a sign. The attendant went into the meadhall.

After a long time he returned. He was carrying nothing. Behind him, men opened the meadhall door wide. Light burst over the hillside and glinted on the weapons and eyes of the Scyldings. The bear stirred, restless, irritable, like the young king's anger removed to the end of a chain. Old Hrothgar waited.

Then at last, moving slowly, as if walking in a dream, a woman in a robe of threaded silver came gliding from the hall. Her smooth long hair was as red as fire and soft as the ruddy sheen on dragon's gold. Her face was gentle, mysteriously calm. The night became more still.

"I offer you my sister," the young king said. "Let her name from now on be *Wealtheow*, or holy servant of common good."

I leered in the rattling darkness of my tree. The name was ridiculous. "Pompous, pompous ass!" I hissed. But she was beautiful and she surrendered herself with the dignity of a sacrificial virgin. My chest was full of pain, my eyes smarted, and I was afraid—O monstrous trick against reason—I was afraid I was about to sob. I wanted to smash things, bring down the night with my howl of rage. But I kept still. She was beautiful, as innocent as dawn on winter hills. She tore me apart as once the Shaper's song had done. As if for my benefit, as if in vicious scorn of me, children came from the meadhall and ran down to her, weeping, to snatch at her hands and dress.

"Stop it!" I whispered. "Stupid!"

She did not look at them, merely touched their heads. "Be still," she said—hardly more than a whisper, but it carried across the crowd. They were still, as if her voice were magic. I clenched my teeth, tears streaming from my eyes. She was like a child, her sweet face paler than the moon. She looked up at Hrothgar's beard, not his eyes, afraid of him. "My lord," she said.

O woe! O wretched violation of sense!

I could see myself leaping from my high tree and running on all fours through the crowd to her, howling, whimpering, throwing myself down, drooling and groveling at her small, fur-booted feet. "Mercy!" I would howl. "Aargh! Burble!" I clamped my palms over my eyes and struggled not to laugh.

No need to say more. The old king accepted the younger king's gift, along with some other things—swords and cups, some girls and young men, her servants. For several days both sides made speeches, long-winded, tediously poetic, all lies, and then, with much soft weeping and sniffing, the Scyldings loaded up *Wealtheow* and the lesser beauties, made a few last touching observations, and went home.

A bad winter. I couldn't lay a hand on them, prevented as if by a charm. I huddled in my cave, grinding my teeth, beating my forehead with my fists and cursing nature. Sometimes I went up to the frozen cliffwall and looked down, down, at where the lights lay blue, like the threads running out from a star, patterning the snow. My fists struck out at the cliff's ice-crusting rock. It was no satisfaction. In the cave again, I listened to my mother move back and forth, a pale shape driven by restlessness and rage at the restlessness and rage she felt in me and could not cure. She would gladly have given her life to end my suffering—horrible, humpbacked, carp-toothed creature, eyes on fire with useless, mindless love. Who could miss the grim parallel? So the lady below would give, had given, her life for those she loved. So would any simpering, eyelash-batting female in her court, given the proper setup, the minimal conditions. The smell of the dragon lay around me like sulphurous smoke. At times I would wake up in panic, unable to breathe.

At times I went down.

She carried the mealbowl from table to table, smiling quietly, as if the people she served, her husband's people, were her own. The old king watched with thoughtful eyes, moved as he'd have been by the Shaper's music, except that it was different: not visions of glorious things that might be or sly revisions of the bloody past but present beauty that made time's flow seem illusory, some lower law that now had been suspended. Meaning as quality. When drunken men argued, pitting theory against theory, bludgeoning each other's absurdities, she came between them, wordless, uncondemning, pouring out mead like a mother's love, and they were softened, reminded of their humanness, exactly as they might have been softened by the cry of a child in danger, or an old man's suffering, or spring. The Shaper sang things

that had never crossed his mind before: comfort, beauty, a wisdom softer, more permanent, than Hrothgar's. The old king watched, remote from the queen, though she shared his bed, and he mused.

One night she paused in front of Unferth. He sat hunched, bitterly smiling, as always, his muscles taut as old nautical ropes in a hurricane. He was ugly as a spider.

"My lord?" she said. She often called the thanes "my lord." Servant of even the lowliest among them.

"No thank you," he said. He shot a glance at her, then looked down, smiled fiercely. She waited, expressionless except for perhaps the barest trace of puzzlement. He said, "I've had enough."

Down the table a man made bold by mead said, "Men have been known to kill their brothers when they've too much mead. Har, har."

A few men laughed.

Unferth stiffened. The queen's face paled. Once again Unferth glanced up at the queen, then away. His fists closed tight, resting on the table in front of him, inches from his knife. No one moved. The hall became still. She stood strange-eyed, as if looking out from another world and time. Who can say what she understood? I knew, for one, that the brother-killer had put on the Shaper's idea of the hero like a merry mask, had seen it torn away, and was now reduced to what he was: a thinking animal stripped naked of former illusions, stubbornly living on, ashamed and meaningless, because killing himself would be, like his life, unheroic. It was a paradox nothing could resolve but a murderous snicker. The moment stretched, a snag in time's stream, and still no one moved, no one spoke. As if defiantly, Unferth, murderer of brothers, again raised his eyes to the queen's, and this time didn't look down. Scorn? Shame?

The queen smiled. Impossibly, like roses blooming in the heart of December, she said, "That's past." And it was. The demon was exorcised. I saw his hands unclench, relax, and—torn between tears and a bellow of scorn—I crept back to my cave.

It was not, understand, that she had secret wells of joy that overflowed to them all. She lay beside the sleeping king—I watched wherever she went, a crafty guardian, wealthy in wiles—and her eyes were open, the lashes bright with tears. She was more child, those moments, than woman. Thinking of home, remembering paths in the land of the Helmings where she'd played before she'd lain aside her happiness for theirs. She held the naked, bony king as if he were the child, and nothing between him and the darkness but her white arm. Sometimes she'd slip from the bed while he slept and

would cross to the door and go out alone into the night. Alone and never alone. Instantly, guards were all around her, gem-woman priceless among the Scylding treasures. She would stand in the cold wind looking east, one hand clutching her robe to her throat, the silent guards encircling her like trees. Child though she was, she would show no sign of her sorrow in front of them. At last some guard would speak to her, would mention the cold, and *Wealtheow* would smile and nod her thanks and go back in.

Once that winter her brother came, with his bear and a great troop of followers, to visit. Their talk and laughter rumbled up to the cliffwall. The double band drank, the Shaper sang, and then they drank again. I listened from a distance for as long as I could stand it, clenching my mind on the words of the dragon, then, helpless as always, I went down. The wind howled, piling up snow in drifts and blinding the night with ice-white dust. I walked bent over against the cold, protecting my eyes with my arms. Trees, posts, cowsheds loomed into my vision, then vanished, swallowed in white. When I came near Hart, I could smell the guards of the hall all around me, but I couldn't see them—nor, of course, could they see me. I went straight to the wall, plunging through drifts to my knees, and pressed up against it for its warmth. It trembled and shook from the noise inside. I bent down to the crack I'd used before and watched.

She was brighter than the hearthfire, talking again with her family and friends, observing the antics of the bear. It was the king, old Hrothgar, who carried the meadbowl from table to table tonight. He walked, dignified, from group to group, smiling and filling the drinking cups, and you'd have sworn from his look that never until tonight had the old man been absolutely happy. He would glance at his queen from time to time as he moved among his people and hers, the Danes and Helmings, and with each glance his smile would grow warmer for a moment, and a thoughtful look would come over his eyes. Then it would pass—some gesture or word from a guest or one of his Scylding thanes—and he would be hearty, merry: not false, exactly, but less than what he was at the moment of the glance. As for the queen, she seemed not to know he was there. She sat beside her brother, her hand on his arm, the other hand on the arm of a shriveled old woman, precious relative. The bear sat with his feet stuck out, playing with his penis and surveying the hall with a crotchety look, as if dimly aware that there was something about him that humans could not approve. The Helming guests all talked at once, eagerly, constantly, as if squeezing all their past into an evening. I couldn't hear what they said. The hall was a

roar—voices, the clink of cups, the shuffle of feet. Sometimes Wealtheow would tip back her head, letting her copper-red hair fall free, and laugh; sometimes she listened, head cocked, now smiling, now soberly pursing her lips, only offering a nod. Hrothgar went back to his high, carved chair, relinquishing the bowl to the noblest of his thanes, and sat like an old man listening inside his mind to the voices of his childhood. Once, for a long moment, the queen looked at him while listening to her brother, her eyes as thoughtful as Hrothgar's. Then she laughed and talked again, and the king conversed with the man on his left; it was as if their minds had not met.

Later that night they passed a harp—not the old Shaper's instrument, no one touched that—and the queen's brother sang. He was no artist, with either his fingers or his throat, but all the hall was silent, listening. He sang, childlike except for the winter in his gray eyes, of a hero who'd killed a girl's old father out of love of the girl, and how the girl after that had both loved and hated the hero and finally had killed him. Wealtheow smiled, full of sorrow, as she listened. The bear irritably watched the dogs. Then others sang. Old Hrothgar watched and listened, brooding on dangers. (The queen's brother had straw-yellow hair and eyes as gray as slate. Sometimes when he stole a glance at Hrothgar, his face was a knife.)

Toward morning, they all went to bed. Half buried in snow, the deadly cold coming up through my feet, I kept watch. The queen put her hand on Hrothgar's bare shoulder as he slept and looked at him thoughtfully, exactly as Hrothgar had looked at her and at his people. She moved a strand of hair from his face. After a long, long time she closed her eyes, but even now I wasn't sure she was asleep.

And so in my cave, coughing from the smoke and clenching feet on fire with chilblains, I ground my teeth on my own absurdity. Whatever their excuse might be, I had none, I knew: I had seen the dragon. Ashes to ashes. And yet I was teased—tortured by the red of her hair and the set of her chin and the white of her shoulders—teased toward disbelief in the dragon's truths. A glorious moment was coming, my chest insisted, and even the fact that I myself would have no part in it—a member of the race God cursed, according to the Shaper's tale—was trifling. In my mind I watched her freckled hand move on the old man's arm as once I'd listened to the sigh of the Shaper's harp. Ah, woe, woe! How many times must a creature be dragged down the same ridiculous road? The Shaper's lies, the hero's self-delusion, now this: the idea of a queen! My mother, breathing hard, scraping through her hair with her crooked nails, watched me and sometimes moaned.

And so, the next night—it was dark as pitch—I burst the meadhall door, killed men, and stormed directly to the door behind which lay the sleeping queen. Glorious Unferth slept beside it. He rose to fight me. I slapped him aside like a troublesome colt. The queen's brother rose, unleashed the bear. I accepted its hug in my own and broke its back. I slammed into the bedroom. She sat up screaming, and I laughed. I snatched her foot, and now her unqueenly shrieks were deafening, exactly like the squeals of a pig. No one would defend her, not even suicidal Unferth at the door, screaming his rage—self-hatred. Old Hrothgar shook and made lunatic noises and drooled. I could have jerked her from the bed and stove in her golden-haired head against the wall. They watched in horror, Helmings on one side, Scyldings on the other (balance is anything), and I caught the other foot and pulled her naked legs apart as if to split her. "Gods, gods!" she screamed. I waited to see if the gods would come, but not a sign of them. I laughed. She called to her brother, then Unferth. They hung back. I decided to kill her. I firmly committed myself to killing her, slowly, horribly. I would begin by holding her over the fire and cooking the ugly hole between her legs. I laughed harder at that. They were all screaming now, hooting and yawling to their dead-stick gods. I would kill her, yes! I would squeeze out her feces between my fists. So much for meaning as quality of life! I would kill her and teach them reality. Grendel the truth-teacher, phantasm-tester! It was what I would be from this day forward—my commitment, my character as long as I lived—and nothing alive or dead could change my mind!

I changed my mind. It would be meaningless, killing her. As meaningless as letting her live. It would be, for me, mere pointless pleasure, an illusion of order for this one frail, foolish flicker-flash in the long dull fall of eternity. (End quote.)

I let go her feet. The people stared, unbelieving. I had wrecked another theory. I left the hall.

But I'd cured myself. That much, at least, I could say for my behavior. I concentrated on the memory of the ugliness between her legs (bright tears of blood) and laughed as I ran through the heavy snow. The night was still. I could hear their crying in the meadhall. "Ah, Grendel, you sly old devil!" I whispered to the trees. The words rang false. (The east was gray.) I hung balanced, a creature of two minds; and one of them said—unreasonable stubborn as the mountains—that she was beautiful. I resolved, absolutely and finally, to kill myself, for love of the Baby Grendel that used to be. But the next instant, for no particular reason, I changed my mind.

Balance is everything, sliding down slime....

In the intervening action Hrothulf, Hrothgar's nephew, comes to live in the hall. A young and relatively innocent man, he sees the structure of Danish society and, after a conversation on political science, sees that he could usurp Hrothgar's throne.

—Except, of course, old Hrothgar. Violence and shame have lined the old man's face with mysterious calm. I can hardly look at him without a welling of confused, unpleasant emotion. He sits tall and still in his carved chair, stiff arms resting on the chair-sides, his clear eyes trained on the meadhall door where I'll arrive, if I come. When someone speaks to him, he answers politely and gently, his mind far away—on murdered thanes, abandoned hopes. He's a giant. He had in his youth the strength of seven men. Not now. He has nothing left but the power of his mind—and no pleasure there: a case of knives. The civilization he meant to build has transmogrified to a forest thick with traps. Hrothulf, he knows, is a danger to his sons; but he cannot abandon the child of his dead younger brother. Hygmod, his brother-in-law, is biding his time while Hrothgar lives, because of Wealthew; but Hygmod, he knows, is no friend. And then there is a man named Ingeld, ruler of the Heathobards, as famous for slaughter as was Hrothgar in his day. The old man intends to deal out Freawaru to him; he has no assurance it will work. And then too there's his treasure-hoard. Another trap. A man plunders to build up wealth to pay his men and bring peace to the kingdom, but the hoard he builds for his safety becomes the lure of every marauder that happens to hear of it. Hrothgar, keen of mind, is out of schemes. No fault of his. There are no schemes left. And so he waits like a man chained in a cave, staring at the entrance or, sometimes, gazing with sad, absent-minded eyes at Wealthew, chained beside him. Who is one more trap, the worst. She's young, could have served a more vigorous man. And beautiful: need not have withered her nights and wasted her body on a bony, shivering wretch. She knows all this, which increases his pain and guilt. She understands the fear for his people that makes a coward of him, so that, that night when I attacked her, he would not lift a finger to preserve her. And his fear is one he cannot even be sure is generous; perhaps mere desire that his name and fame live on. She understands too his bitterness at growing old. She even understands—more terrible, no doubt, than all the rest—old Hrothgar's knowledge that peace must be searched through ordeal upon ordeal, with no final prospect but failure. Lesson on lesson they've suffered through, recognizing, more profoundly each time, their indignity, shame, triviality. It will continue.

How, if I know all this, you may ask, could I hound him—shatter him again and again, drive him deeper and deeper into woe? I have no answer, except perhaps this: why should I not? Has he made any move to deserve my kindness? If I give him a truce, will the king invite me in for a kiss on the forehead, a cup of mead? Ha! This nobility of his, this dignity: are they not *my* work? What was he before? Nothing! A swollen-headed raider, full of boasts and stupid jokes and mead. No more noble than Red Horse, Hrothulf's friend. No one would have balked at my persecuting him then! I made him what he is. Have I not a right to test my own creation? Enough! Who says I have to defend myself? I'm a machine, like you. Like all of you. Blood-lust and rage are my character. Why does the lion not wisely settle down and be a horse? In any case, I too am learning, ordeal by ordeal, my indignity. It's all I have, my only weapon for smashing through these stiff coffin-walls of the world. So I dance in the moonlight, make foul jokes, or labor to shake the foundations of night with my heaped-up howls of rage. Something is bound to come of all this. I cannot believe such monstrous energy of grief can lead to nothing!

I watch a great horned goat ascend the rocks toward my mere. I have half a mind to admire his bottomless stupidity. "Hey, goat!" I yell down. "There's nothing here. Go back." He lifts his head, considers me, then lowers it again to keep an eye on crevasses and seams, icy scree, slick rocky ledges—doggedly continuing. I tip up a boulder and let it fall thundering toward him. His ears flap up in alarm, he stiffens, looks around him in haste, and jumps. The boulder bounds past him. He watches it fall, then turns his head, looks up at me disapprovingly. Then, lowering his head again, he continues. It is the business of goats to climb. He means to climb. "Ah, goat, goat!" I say as if deeply disappointed in him. "Use your reason! There's nothing here!" He keeps on coming. I am suddenly annoyed, no longer amused by his stupidity. The mere belongs to me and the firesnakes. What if everybody should decide the place is public? "Go back down, goat!" I yell at him. He keeps on climbing, mindless, mechanical, because it is the business of goats to climb. "Not here," I yell. "If climbing's your duty to the gods, go climb the meadhall." He keeps on climbing. I run back from the edge to a dead tree, throw myself against it and break it off and drag it back to the cliffwall. "You've had fair warning," I yell at him. I'm enraged now. The words come echoing back to me. I lay the tree sideways, wait for the goat to be in better range, then shove. It drops with a crash and rolls crookedly toward him. He darts left, reverses himself and bounds to the

right, and a limb catches him. He bleats, falling, flopping over with a jerk too quick for the eye, and bleats again, scrambling, sliding toward the ledge-side. The tree, slowly rolling, drops out of sight. His sharp front hooves dig in and he jerks onto his feet, but before his balance is sure my stone hits him and falls again. I leap down to make certain he goes over this time. He finds his feet the same instant that my second stone hits. It splits his skull, and blood sprays out past his dangling brains, yet he doesn't fall. He threatens me, blind. It's not easy to kill a mountain goat. He thinks with his spine. A death tremor shakes his flanks, but he picks toward me, jerking his great twisted horns at air. I back off, upward toward the mere the goat will never reach. I smile, threatened by an animal already dead, still climbing. I snatch up a stone and hurl it. It smashes his mouth, spraying out teeth, and penetrates to the jugular. He drops to his knees, gets up again. The air is sweet with the scent of his blood. Death shakes his body the way high wind shakes trees. He climbs toward me. I snatch up a stone.

In my cave the tedium is worse, of course. My mother no longer shows any sign of sanity, hurrying back and forth, wall to wall, sometimes on two legs, sometimes on four, dark forehead furrowed like a new-plowed field, her eyes glittering and crazy as a captured eagle's. Each time I come in she gets between me and the door, as if to lock me up with her forever. I endure it, for the time. When I sleep, she presses close to me, half buries me under her thistly fur and fat. "Dool-dool," she moans. She drools and weeps. "Warovvish," she whimpers, and tears at herself. Hanks of fur come away in her claws. I see gray hide. I study her, cool and objective in my corner, and because now the Shaper is dead, strange thoughts come over me. I think of the pastness of the past: how the moment I am alive in, prisoned in, moves like a slowly tumbling form through darkness, the underground river. Not only ancient history—the mythical age of the brothers' feud—but my own history one second ago, has vanished utterly, dropped out of existence. King Scyld's great deeds do not exist "back there" in Time. "Back there in Time" is an allusion of language. They do not exist at all. My wickedness five years ago, or six, or twelve, has no existence except as now, mumbling, mumbling, sacrificing the slain world to the omnipotence of words, I strain my memory to regain it. I snatch by my wits a time when I was very small and my mama held me softly in her arms. Ah, ah, how I loved you, Mama—dead these many years! I snatch a time when I crouched outside the meadhall hearing the first strange hymns of the Shaper. Beauty! Holiness! How my heart

rocked! He is dead. I should have captured him, teased him, tormented him, made a fool of him. I should have cracked his skull mid-song and sent his blood spraying out wet through the meadhall like a shocking change of key. One evil deed missed is a loss for all eternity.

I awaken with a start and imagine I hear the goat still picking at the cliffwall, climbing to the mere. Something groans, far out at sea.

My mother makes sounds. I strain my wits toward them, clench my mind. *Beware the fish.*

I get up and walk, filled with restless expectation, though I know there is nothing to expect.

I am not the only monster on these moors.

I met an old woman as wild as the wind

Striding in white out of midnight's den.

Her cloak was in rags, and her flesh it was lean,

And her eyes, her murdered eyes...

Scent of the dragon.

I should sleep, drop war till spring as I normally do.

When I sleep I wake up in terror, with hands on my throat.

A stupid business.

Nihil ex nihilo, I always say.

I am mad with joy.—At least I think it's joy. Strangers have come, and it's a whole new game. I kiss the ice on the frozen creeks, I press my ear to it, honoring the water that rattles below, for by water they came: the icebergs parted as if gently pushed back by enormous hands, and the ship sailed through, sea-eager, foamy-necked, white sails riding the swan-road, flying like a bird! O happy Grendel! Fifteen glorious heroes, proud in their battle dress, fat as cows!

I could feel them coming as I lay in the dark of my cave. I stirred, baffled by the strange sensation, squinting into dark corners to learn the cause. It drew me as the mind of the dragon did once. *It's coming!* I said. More dearly than ever I heard the muffled footsteps on the dome of the world, and even when I realized that the footsteps were nothing but the sound of my own heart, I knew more surely than before that something was coming. I got up, moved past stone icicles to the pool and the sunken door. My mother made no move to prevent me. At the pool, firesnakes shot away from me in all directions, bristling, hissing, mysteriously wrought up. They had sensed it too. That beat—steady, inhumanly steady;

inexorable. And so, an hour before dawn, I crouched in shadows at the rocky sea-wall, foot of the giants' work. Low tide. Lead-gray water sucked quietly, stubborn and deliberate, at icy gray boulders. Gray wind teased leafless trees. There was no sound but the ice-cold surge, the cry of a gannet, invisible in grayness above me. A whale passed, long dark shadow two miles out. The sky grew light at my back. Then I saw the sail.

I was not the only one who saw them coming. A lone Danish coastguard stood bundled in furs, his horse beside him, and he shaded his eyes against the glint of the icebergs beyond the sail and watched the strangers come swiftly in toward land. The wooden keel struck sand and cut a gouge toward the boulders on the shore—a forty-foot cut, half the length of the ship—and then, quick as wolves—but mechanical, terrible—the strangers leaped down, and with stiff, ice-crusting ropes as gray as the sea, the sky, the stones, they moored their craft. Their chainmail rattled as they worked—never speaking, walking dead men—lashing the helm-bar, lowering the sail, unloading ash-spear shafts and battle-axes. The coastguard mounted, snatched up his spear, and rode loudly down to meet them. His horse's hooves shot sparks. I laughed. If they were here for war, the coastguard was a goner.

"What are ye, bearers of armor, dressed in mail-coats, that have thus come riding your tall ship over the sea-road, winter-cold ocean, here to Daneland?" Thus spake the coastguard. Wind took his words and sent them tumbling.

I bent double, soundlessly laughing till I thought I'd split. They were like trees, these strangers. Their leader was big as a mountain, moving with his forest toward the guard. Nevertheless, the Dane shook his spear the way attackers do when they're telling a man what they're going to do with his testicles. "Attaboy!" I whisper. I shadow box. "If they come at you, bite 'em in the leg!"

He scolded and fumed and demanded their lineage; they listened with folded arms. The wind blew colder. At last the coastguard's voice gave out—he bent over the pommel, coughing into his fist—and the leader answered. His voice, though powerful, was mild. Voice of a dead thing, calm as dry sticks and ice when the wind blows over them. He had a strange face that, little by little, grew unsettling to me: it was a face, or so it seemed for an instant, from a dream I had almost forgotten. The eyes slanted downward, never blinking, unfeeling as a snake's. He had no more beard than a fish. He smiled as he spoke, but it was as if the gentle voice, the child-like yet faintly ironic smile were holding something back, some magician-power that could blast stone cliffs to ashes as lightning blasts trees.

"We're Geats," he said, "the hearth-companions of King Hygilac. You've heard of my father. A famous old man named Ecgtheow." His mind, as he spoke, seemed far away, as if, though polite, he were indifferent to all this—an outsider not only among the Danes but everywhere. He said: "We've come as friends for a visit with your lord King Hrothgar, protector of the people." He tipped his head, pausing. You'd have thought he had centuries. At last with a little shrug, he said, "Be so kind as to give us some advice, old man. We've come on a fairly important errand." The hint of irony in the smile grew darker, and he looked now not at the coastguard but at the coastguard's horse. "A certain thing can't very well be kept hidden, I think. You'll know if it's true, as we heard back home, that I don't know what kind of enemy stalks your hall at night—kills men, so they say, and for some reason scorns your warriors. If it's so—" He paused, his eyebrows cocked, and glanced at the coastguard and smiled. "I've come to give Hrothgar advice."

You could see pretty well what advice he'd give. His chest was as wide as an oven. His arms were like beams. "Come ahead," I whispered. "Make your play. Do your worst." But I was less sure of myself than I pretended. Staring at his grotesquely muscled shoulders-stooped, naked despite the cold, sleek as the belly of a shark and as rippled with power as the shoulders of a horse—I found my mind wandering. If I let myself, I could drop into a trance just looking at those shoulders. He was dangerous. And yet I was excited, suddenly alive. He talked on. I found myself not listening, merely looking at his mouth, which moved—or so it seemed to me—independent of the words, as if the body of the stranger were a ruse, a disguise for something infinitely more terrible. Then the coastguard turned his horse and led them up to where the stone-paved road began, gray as the sea, between snowbanks. "I'll have men guard your ship," he said. He pointed out the meadhall, high on its hill above the town. Then he turned back. The sea-pale eyes of the stranger were focused on nothing. He and his company went on, their weapons clinking, chain-mail jangling, solemn and ominous as drums. They moved like one creature, huge strange machine. Sunlight gleamed on their helmets and cheekguards and flashed off their spearpoints, blinding. I did not follow. I stayed in the ruin, prowling where long-dead giants prowled, my heart aching to know what the strangers were doing now, up at the meadhall. But it was daylight; I'd be a fool to go up and see.

I couldn't tell, back in my cave, whether I was afraid of them or not. My head ached from staying too long in the sunlight, and my hand had no grip. It was as if they were asleep.

I was unnaturally conscious, for some reason, of the sounds in the cave: the roar of the underground river hundreds of feet below our rooms, reaming out walls, driving deeper and deeper; the centuries-old drip-drip of seepage building stalagmites, an inch in a hundred years; the spatter of the spring three rooms away—the room of the pictures half buried in stone—where the spring breaks through the roof. Half awake, half asleep, I felt as if I were myself the cave, my thoughts coursing downward through my own strange hollows... or some impulse older and darker than thought, as old as the mindless mechanics of a bear, the twilight meditations of a wolf, a tree...

Who knows what all this means? Neither awake nor asleep; my chest filled with an excitement like joy, I tried to think whether or not I was afraid of the strangers, and the thought made no sense. It was unreal—insubstantial as spiderweb-strands blowing lightly across a window that looks out on trees. I have sometimes watched men do mysterious things. A man with a wife and seven children, a carpenter with a fair reputation as wise, not maddened by passions, not given to foolishness—regular of habit, dignified in bearing, a dedicated craftsman (no edge unbeveled, no ragged peg, no gouge or split)—once crept from his house at the edge of the town while his family slept, and fled down snowy paths through woods to the house of a hunter away in search of game. The hunter's wife admitted him, and he slept with her until the second rooster crowed; then he fled back home. Who knows why? Tedium is the worst pain. The mind lays out the world in blocks, and the hushed blood waits for revenge. All order, I've come to understand, is theoretical, unreal—a harmless, sensible, smiling mask men slide between the two great, dark realities, the self and the world—two snakepits. The watchful mind lies, cunning and swift, about the dark blood's lust, lies and lies and lies until, weary of talk, the watchman sleeps. Then sudden and swift the enemy strikes from nowhere, the cavernous heart. Violence is truth, as the crazy old peasant told Hrothulf. But the old fool only half grasped what he said. He had never conversed with a dragon. And the stranger?

Afraid or not, I would go to the meadhall, I knew. I toyed, of course, with the ridiculous theory that I'd stay where I was safe, like a sensible beast. "Am I not free?—as free as a bird?" I whispered, leering, maniacal. I have seen—I embody—the vision of the dragon: absolute, final waste. I saw long ago the whole universe as not-my-mother, and I glimpsed my place in it, a hole. *Yet I exist*, I knew. *Then I alone exist*, I said. *It's me or it*. What glee, that glorious recognition! (The cave my cave is a jealous cave.) For even my mama loves me not for myself,

my holy specialness (he he ho ha), but for my son-ness, my possessedness, my displacement of air as visible proof of her power. I have set her aside—gently, picking her up by the armpits as I would a child—and so have proved that she has no power but the little I give her by momentary whim. So I might set aside Hrothgar's whole kingdom and all his thanes if I did not, for sweet desire's sake, set limits to desire. If I murdered the last of the Scyldings, what would I live for? I'd have to move.

So now, for once unsure of victory, I might set limits to desire: go to sleep, put off further raids till the Geats go home. For the world is divided, experience teaches, into two parts: things to be murdered, and things that would hinder the murder of things: and the Geats might reasonably be defined either way. So I whispered, wading through drifts waist-high, inexorably on my way to Hrothgar's meadhall. Darkness lay over the world like a coffin lid. I hurried. It would be a shame to miss the boasting. I came to the hall, bent down at my chink, peered in. The wind was shrill, full of patterns.

It was a scene to warm the cockles of your heart. The Danes were not pleased, to say the least, that the Geats had come to save them. Honor is very big with them; they'd rather be eaten alive than be bailed out by strangers. The priests weren't happy either. They'd been saying for years that the ghostly Destroyer would take care of things in time. Now here were these foreigner upstarts unmasking religion! My old friend Ork sat shaking his head in dismay, saying nothing, brooding, no doubt, on the dark metaphysical implications. Things fade; alternatives exclude. Whichever of us might exclude the other, when the time came for me and the stranger to meet, the eyes of the people would be drawn to the instance, they would fail to rise to the holy idea of process. Theology does not thrive in the world of action and reaction, change: it grows on calm, like the scum on a stagnant pool. And it flourishes, it prospers, on decline. Only in a world where everything is patently being lost can a priest stir men's hearts as a poet would by maintaining that nothing is in vain. For old times' sake, for the old priest's honor, I would have to kill the stranger. And for the honor of Hrothgar's thanes.

The Danes sat sulking, watching the strangers eat, wishing some one of them would give them an excuse to use their daggers. I covered my mouth to keep from cackling. The king presided, solemn and irritable. He knew that his thanes couldn't handle me alone, and he was too old and tired to be much impressed—however useful it might be to his kingdom—by their fathead ideas of honor. *Get through the meal, that's the thing*, he was thinking. *Keep them from wasting their*

much touted skills on one another. The queen wasn't present. Situation much too touchy.

Then up spoke Unferth, Ecglaf's son, top man in Hrothgar's hall. He had a nose like a black, deformed potato, eyes like a couple of fangs. He leaned forward over the table and pointed the dagger he'd been eating with. "Say, friend," he said to the beardless leader of the Geats, "are you the same man that went swimming that time with young Breca—risked your lives in the middle of the winter for nothing—for a crazy meadboast?"

The stranger stopped eating, smiled.

"We heard about that," Unferth said. "Nobody could stop you—kings, priests, councilors—nobody. Splash! *Uh, uh, uh!*" Unferth made swimming motions, eyes rolled up, mouth gasping. The thanes around him laughed. "The sea boiled with waves, fierce winter swells. Seven nights you swam, so people say." He made his face credulous, and the Danes laughed again. "And at last Breca beat you, much stronger than you were. He proved his boast against you—for what it may be worth." The Danish thanes laughed. Even Hrothgar smiled. Unferth grew serious, and now only the stranger went on smiling, he alone and the huge Geats next to him, patient as timberwolves. Unferth pointed with his dagger, giving friendly advice. "I predict it will go even worse for you tonight. You may have had successes—I haven't heard. But wait up for Grendel for one night's space and all your glorious successes will be done with."

The Danes applauded. The stranger smiled on, his downward-slanting eyes like empty pits. I could see his mind working, stone-cold, grinding like a millwheel. When the hall was still, he spoke, soft-voiced, his weird gaze focused nowhere. "Ah, friend Unferth, drunk with mead you've said a good deal about Breca. The truth is, nevertheless, that I beat him. I'm stronger in the ocean than any other man alive. Like foolish boys we agreed on the match and boasted, yes... we were both very young... swore we'd risk our lives in the sea, and did so. We took swords with us, swimming one-handed, to fight off whales."

Unferth laughed, and the others followed, as was right. It was preposterous.

The stranger said, "Breca couldn't swim away from me, for all his strength—a man with arms like yours, friend Unferth—and as for myself, I chose not to swim away from him. Thus we swam for five nights, and then a storm came up, icy wind from the north, black sky, raging waves, and we were separated. The turmoil stirred up the sea-monsters. One of them attacked me, dragged me down to the bottom where

the weight of the sea would have crushed any other man. But it was granted to me that I might kill him with my sword, which same I did. Then others attacked. They pressed me hard. I killed them, nine old water nickers, robbed them of the feast they expected at the bottom of the sea. In the morning, sword-ripped, they lay belly-up near shore. They'd trouble no more passing sailors after that. Light came from the east and behold, I saw headlands, and I swam to them. Fate often enough will spare a man if his courage holds."

Now the Danes weren't laughing. The stranger said it all so calmly, so softly, that it was impossible to laugh. He believed every word he said. I understood at last the look in his eyes. He was insane.

Even so, I wasn't prepared for what came next. Nobody was. Solemn, humorless despite the slightly ironic smile, he suddenly cut deep—yet with the same mildness, the same almost inhuman indifference except for the pale flash of fire in his eyes. "Neither Breca nor you ever fought such battles," he said. "I don't boast much of that. Nevertheless, I don't recall hearing any glorious deeds of yours, except that you murdered your brothers. You'll prowl the stalagmites of hell for that, friend Unferth—clever though you are."

The hall was numb. The stranger was no player of games.

And yet he was shrewd, you had to grant. Whether or not they believed his wild tale of superhuman strength, no thane in the hall would attack him again and risk the slash of that mild, coolly murderous tongue.

Old King Hrothgar, for one, was pleased. The madman's single-mindedness would be useful in a monster fight. He spoke: "Where's the queen? We're all friends in this hall! Let her come to us and pass the bowl!"

She must have been listening behind her door. She came out, radiant, and crossed swiftly to the great golden bowl on the table by the hearth. As if she'd brought light and warmth with her, men began talking, joking, laughing, both Danes and Geats together. When she'd served all the Danes and the lesser Geats, she stood, red hair flowing, her neck and arms adorned in gold, by the leader of the strangers. "I thank God," she said, "that my wish has been granted, that at last I have found a man whose courage I can trust."

The stranger smiled, glanced at Unferth. Hrothgar's top man had recovered a little, though his neck was still dark red. "We'll see," the stranger said.

And again I found something peculiar happening to my mind. His mouth did not seem to move with his words, and the harder I stared at his gleaming shoulders, the more uncertain I was of their shape. The room was full of a heavy, unpleas-

ant scent I couldn't place. I labor to remember something: twisted roots, an abyss... I lose it. The queer little spasm of terror passes. Except for his curious beardlessness, there is nothing frightening about the stranger. I've broken the backs of bulls no weaker than he is.

Hrothgar made speeches, his hand on the queen's. Unferth sat perfectly still, no longer blushing. He was struggling to make himself hope for the stranger's success, no doubt. *Heroism is more than noble language, dignity. Inner heroism, that's the trick! Glorious carbuncle of the soul! Except in the life of the hero the whole world's meaningless.* He took a deep breath. He would try to be a better person, yes. He forced a smile, but it twisted, out of his control. Tears! He got up suddenly and, without a word, walked out.

Hrothgar told the hall that the stranger was like a son to him. The queen's smile was distant, and the nephew, Hrothulf, picked at the table with a dirty fingernail. "You already have more sons than you need," the queen laughed lightly. Hrothgar laughed too, though he didn't seem to get it. He was tipsy. The stranger went on sitting with the same unlighted smile. The old king chatted of his plans for Freawaru, how he would marry her off to his enemy, the king of the Heathobards. The stranger smiled on, but closed his eyes. He knew a doomed house when he saw it, I had a feeling; but for one reason or another he kept his peace. I grew more and more afraid of him and at the same time—who can explain it?—more and more eager for the hour of our meeting.

The queen rose, at last, and retired. The fire in the hearth had now died down. The priests filed out to the god-ring to do their devotions. Nobody followed. I could hear them in the distance: "O ghostly Destroyer..." The cold ring of gods stared inward with large, dead eyes.

It is the business of rams to be rams and of goats to be goats, the business of shapers to sing and of kings to rule. The stranger waits on, as patient as a grave-mound. I too wait, whispering, whispering, mad like him. Time grows, obeying its mechanics, like all of us. So the young Shaper observes, singing to the few who remain, fingertips troubling a dead man's harp.

*Frost shall freeze, and fire melt wood;
the earth shall give fruit, and ice shall bridge
dark water, make roofs, mysteriously lock
earth's flourishings; but the fetters of frost
shall also fall, fair weather return,
and the reaching sun restore the restless sea....*

We wait.

The king retires, and his people leave.

The Geats build up the fire, prepare to sleep.

And now, silence.

Darkness.

It is time.

I touch the door with my fingertips and it bursts, for all its fire-forged bands—it jumps away like a terrified deer—and I plunge into the silent, hearth-lit hall with a laugh that I wouldn't much care to wake up to myself. I trample the planks that a moment before protected the hall like a hand raised in horror to a terrified mouth (sheer poetry, ah!) and the broken hinges rattle like swords down the timbered walls. The Geats are stones, and whether it's because they're numb with terror or stiff from too much mead, I cannot tell. I am swollen with excitement, bloodlust and joy and a strange fear that mingle in my chest like the twisting rage of a bone-fire. I step onto the brightly shining floor and angrily advance on them. They're all asleep, the whole company! I can hardly believe my luck, and my wild heart laughs, but I let out no sound. Swiftly, softly, I will move from bed to bed and destroy them all, swallow every last man. I am blazing, half-crazy with joy. For pure, mad prank, I snatch a cloth from the nearest table and tie it around my neck to make a napkin. I delay no longer. I seize up a sleeping man, tear at him hungrily, bite through his bone-locks and suck hot, slippery blood. He goes down in huge morsels, head, chest, hips, legs, even the hands and feet. My face and arms are wet, matted. The napkin is sopping. The dark floor steams. I move on at once and I reach for another one (whispering, whispering, chewing the universe down to words), and I seize a wrist. A shock goes through me. Mistake!

It's a trick! His eyes are open, were open all the time, cold-bloodedly watching to see how I work. The eyes nail me now as his hand nails down my arm. I jump back without thinking (whispering wildly: *jump back without thinking*). Now he's out of his bed, his hand still closed like a dragon's jaws on mine. Nowhere on middle-earth, I realize, have I encountered a grip like his. My whole arm's on fire, incredible, searing pain—it's as if his crushing fingers are charged like fangs with poison. I scream, facing him, grotesquely shaking hands—dear long-lost brother, kinsman-thane—and the timbered hall screams back at me. I feel the bones go, ground from their sockets, and I scream again. I am suddenly awake. The long pale dream, my history, falls away. The meadhall is alive, great cavernous belly, gold-adorned, bloodstained, howling back at me, lit by the flickering fire in the stranger's eyes. He has wings. Is it possible? And yet it's true: out of his shoulders come ter-

rible fiery wings. I jerk my head, trying to drive out illusion. The world is what it is and always was. That's our hope, our chance. Yet even in times of catastrophe we people it with tricks. Grendel, Grendel, hold fast to what is true!

Suddenly, darkness. My sanity has won. He's only a man; I can escape him. I plan. I feel the plan moving inside me like thaw-time waters rising between cliffs. When I'm ready, I give a ferocious kick—but something's wrong: I am spinning—*Wa!*—falling through bottomless space—*Wa!*—snatching at the huge twisted roots of an oak... a blinding flash of fire... no, darkness. I concentrate. I have fallen! Slipped on blood. He viciously twists my arm behind my back. By accident, it comes to me, I have given him a greater advantage. I could laugh. *Woe, woe!*

And now something worse. He's whispering—spilling words like showers of sleet, his mouth three inches from my ear. I will not listen. I continue whispering. As long as I whisper myself I need not hear. His syllables lick at me, chilly fire. His syllables lick at me, chilly fire. His syllables lick at me, chilly fire. His syllables lick...

A meaningless swirl in the stream of time, a temporary gathering of bits, a few random specks, a cloud... Complexities: green dust, purple dust, gold. Additional refinements: sensitive dust, copulating dust...

The world is my bone-cave, I shall not want... (He laughs as he whispers. I roll my eyes back. Flames slip out at the corners of his mouth.) As you see it it is, while the seeing lasts, dark nightmare-history, time-as-coffin; but where the water was rigid there will be fish, and men will survive on their flesh till spring. It's coming, my brother. Believe it or not. Though you murder the world, turn plains to stone, transmogify life into I and it, strong searching roots will crack your cave and rain will cleanse it: The world will burn green, sperm build again. My promise. Time is the mind, the hand that makes (fingers on harpstrings, hero-swords, the acts, the eyes of queens). By that I kill you.

I do not listen. I am sick at heart. I have been betrayed before by talk like that. "Mama!" I bawl. Shapes vague as lurking seaweed surround us. My vision clears. The stranger's companions encircle us, useless swords. I could laugh if it weren't for the pain that makes me howl. And yet I address him, whispering, whimpering, whining.

"If you win, it's by mindless chance. Make no mistake. First you tricked me, and then I slipped. Accident."

He answers with a twist that hurls me forward screaming. The thanes make way. I fall against a table and smash it, and wall timbers crack. And still he whispers.

Grendel, Grendel! You make the world by whispers, second by second. Are you blind to that? Whether you make it a grave or a garden of roses is not the point. Feel the wall: is it not hard? He smashes me against it, breaks open my forehead. Hard, yes! Observe the hardness, write it down in careful runes. Now sing of walls! Sing!

I howl.

Sing!

"I'm singing!"

Sing words! Sing raving hymns!

"You're crazy. Ow!"

Sing!

"I sing of walls," I howl. "Hooray for the hardness of walls!"

Terrible, he whispers. *Terrible*. He laughs and lets out fire.

"You're crazy," I say. "If you think I created that wall that cracked my head, you're a fucking lunatic."

Sing walls, he hisses.

I have no choice.

"The wall will fall to the wind as the windy hill will fall, and all things thought in former times:

Nothing made remains, nor man remembers.

And these towns shall be called the shining towns!"

Better, he whispers. *That's better*. He laughs again, and the nasty laugh admits I'm slyer than he guessed.

He's crazy. I understand him all right, make no mistake. Understand his lunatic theory of matter and mind, the chilly intellect, the hot imagination, blocks and builder, reality as stress. Nevertheless, it was by accident that he got my arm behind me. He penetrated no mysteries. He was lucky. If I'd known he was awake, if I'd known there was blood on the floor when I gave him that kick...

The room goes suddenly white, as if struck by lightning. I stare down, amazed. He has torn off my arm at the shoulder! Blood pours down where the limb was. I cry, I bawl like a baby. He stretches his blinding white wings and breathes out fire. I run for the door and through it. I move like wind. I stumble and fall, get up again. I'll die! I howl. The night is aflame with winged men. *No, no! Think!* I come suddenly awake once more from the nightmare. Darkness. I really will die! Every rock, every tree, every crystal of snow cries out cold-blooded objectness. Cold, sharp outlines, everything around me: distinct, detached as dead men. I understand. "Mama!" I bellow. "Mama, Mama! I'm dying!" But her love is history. His whispering follows me into the woods, though I've outrun him. "It was an accident," I bellow back. I will cling to what is true. "Blind, mindless, mechanical. Mere logic of chance." I am weak

from loss of blood. No one follows me now. I stumble again and with my one weak arm I cling to the huge twisted roots of an oak. I look down past stars to a terrifying darkness. I seem to recognize the place, but it's impossible. "Accident," I whisper. I will fall. I seem to desire the fall, and though I fight it with all my will I know in advance that I can't win. Standing baffled, quaking with fear, three feet from the edge of a nightmare cliff, I find myself, incredibly, moving toward it. I look down, down, into bottomless blackness, feeling the dark power moving in me like an ocean current, some monster inside me, deep sea wonder, dread night monarch astir in his cave, moving me slowly to my voluntary tumble into death.

Again sight clears. I am slick with blood. I discover I no longer feel pain. Animals gather around me, enemies of old, to watch me die. I give them what I hope will appear a sheepish smile. My heart booms terror. Will the last of my life slide out if I let out breath? They watch with mindless, indifferent eyes, as calm and midnight black as the chasm below me.

Is it joy I feel?

They watch on, evil, incredibly stupid, enjoying my destruction.

"Poor Grendel's had an accident," I whisper. "*So may you all.*"

JOYCE CAROL OATES, “SECRET OBSERVATIONS ON THE GOAT-GIRL”

Critical Introduction

Joyce Carol Oates (1938–) is an American author, National Book Award winner, and professor at Princeton University. Her entry here, “Secret Observations on the Goat-Girl” (1988) is a delightful twist on the monster. The goat-girl, which the narrator names Astrid, physically resembles a faun from Greco-Roman mythology, though there are few—if any—other similarities.

Astrid seems to be connected with the narrator’s family in some important but unspoken way. This familial connection is what sets Oates’s entry apart from the others, for the monster is as much an avenue for thinking about the dynamics of a particular family as it is thinking about the monster itself. The “observations” lead the reader to no better understanding of Astrid, but they *do* lead to a better understanding of the narrator’s family. Oates uses the way the narrator, her brother, her father, and her mother think about and respond to the goat-girl to tell us so much about these characters and their relationships to each other. There is the typically stoic refusal to acknowledge or discuss the abnormal, the desire to kill the thing that disrupts or causes discomfort, and empathy for the outcast and those less fortunate. The goat-like physical form and the possible blindness, just like the goat-girl herself, is not at the centre of the story; instead, the story is about how a family and individuals adapt (or fail to adapt) to something unexpected and outside the pale. Oates’s short tale illustrates the ability of the monster to reinforce or challenge norms and reveals the social manner in which we define our individual identities.

Reading Questions

Are you able to create a mental picture of Astrid? If not, think about what Oates has withheld that you might need to create one. If so, go back through the story to see if your mental picture matches with the details given or if you’ve filled in the blanks spots with your own imagination.

Astrid is greatly disturbing to everyone except the narrator, and Oates leaves something unspoken about this family dynamic that seems to revolve around Astrid. Speculate about *why* these characters allow something disturbing to remain so close to them for years.

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“SECRET OBSERVATIONS ON THE GOAT-GIRL”

JOYCE CAROL OATES

AT THE EDGE of my father’s property, in an abandoned corncrib, there lives a strange creature—a goat-child—a girl—my age—with no name that we know—and no mother or father or companions. She has a long narrow head and immense slanted eyes, albino-pale, and an expression that seems to be perpetually startled. The veins of her eyes glow a faint warm pulsing pink and the irises are animal-slits, vertical, very black. Sometimes she suns herself in the open doorway, her slender front legs tucked neatly beneath her, her head alert and uplifted. Sometimes she grazes in the back pasture. Though we children are forbidden to know about her we frequently spy on her, and laugh to see her down on all fours, *grazing as animals do*—yet in an awkward improvised posture, as if she were a child playing at being a goat.

But of course she is an animal and frightening to see.

Her small body is covered in coarse white hairs, wavy, slightly curly, longest around her temples and at the nape of her neck. Her ears are frankly goatish, pert and oversized and sensitive to the slightest sound. (If we creep up in the underbrush to spy on her, she always hears us—her ears prick up and tremble—though she doesn’t seem to see us. Which is why some of us have come to believe that the goat-girl is blind.)

Her nose, like her ears, is goatish: snubbed and flat with wide dark nostrils. But her eyes are human eyes. Thickly lashed and beautiful. Except they are so very pale. The tiny blood vessels are exposed which is why they look pink; I wonder, does the sunshine hurt her?... do tears form in her eyes? (Of my eight brothers and sisters it is the older, for some reason, who argue that the goat-girl is blind and should be put out of her misery. One of my sisters has nightmares about her—about her strange staring eyes—though she has seen the goat-girl only once, and then from a distance of at least fifteen feet. *Oh the nasty thing*, she says, half sobbing, *the filthy thing!*—Father should have it butchered.)

But we all speak in whispers. Because we are forbidden to know.

Since the goat-girl came to live at the edge of our property my mother rarely leaves the house. In fact she rarely comes downstairs now. Sometimes she wears a robe over her nightgown and doesn’t brush out her hair and pin it up the way she used to, sometimes she hurries out of the room if one of us comes in. Her laughter is faint and shrill.

Her fingers are cold to the touch. She doesn’t embrace us any longer.

Father doesn’t admonish her because, as he says, he loves her too deeply. But he often avoids her. And of course he is very busy with his travels—he is sometimes absent for weeks at a time.

Shame, shame!—the villagers whisper.

But never so that any of us can hear.

The goat-girl cannot speak as human beings do, nor does she make goat noises. For the most part she is silent. But she is capable of a strangulated mew, a bleating whine, and, sometimes at night, a questioning cry that is human in its intonation and rhythm, though of course it is incomprehensible, and disturbing to hear. To some of us it sounds pleading, to others angry and accusing. Of course no one ever replies.

The goat-girl eats grass, grain, vegetables the farm workers have tossed into her pen—gnarled and knotted carrots, wormy turnips, blackened potatoes. One day I slipped away from the house to bring her a piece of my birthday cake (angel food with pink frosting and a sprinkling of silver “stars”)—I left it wrapped in a napkin near the corncrib but as far as I knew she never approached it: she is very shy by daylight.

(Except when she believes no one is near. Then you should see how delightful she is, playing in the meadow, trotting and frisking about, kicking up her little hooves!—exactly like any young animal, without a worry in the world.)

The goat-girl has no name, just as she has no mother or father. But she is a girl and so it seems cruel to call her it. I will baptize her Astrid because the name makes me think of snow and the goat-girl’s hair is snowy white.

The years pass and the goat-girl continues to live in the old corn-crib at the edge of our property. No one speaks of her—no one wonders at the fact that she has grown very little since she came to live with us. (When I was nine years old I thought the goat-girl was my age exactly and that she would grow along with me, like a sister. But I must have been mistaken.)

Mother no longer comes downstairs at all. It is possible that people have forgotten her in the village. My brothers and sisters and I would forget her too except for her rapid footsteps overhead and her occasional laughter. Sometimes we

hear doors being slammed upstairs—my parents' voices—dim and muffled—the words never audible.

Father asks us to pray for Mother. Which of course we have been doing all along.

By night the goat-girl becomes a nocturnal creature and loses her shyness in a way that is surprising. She leaves the safety of her pen, leaves her little pasture, and prowls anywhere she wishes. Sometimes we hear her outside our windows—her cautious hooves in the grass, her low bleating murmur. I wish I could describe the sound she makes!—it is gentle, it is pleading, it is reproachful, it is trembling with rage—a fluid wordless questioning—like music without words—*Why? How long? Who?*—stirring us from sleep.

Now I see that, by moonlight, the goat-girl is terrifying to watch. Many times I have crept from my bed to look down at her, through my gauzy curtains, protected (I believe) by the dark, and have been frightened by her stiff little body, her defiant posture, her glaring pale eyes. I want to cry out—Please don't hate me!—Please don't wish me harm!—but of course I say nothing, not even a whisper. I draw back from the window and tiptoe to my bed and try to sleep and in the morning it might be that the goat-girl appeared to all my brothers and sisters during the night.... But I wasn't asleep, I didn't dream, I try to explain, I saw her myself; but they say mockingly, No, no, you were dreaming too, you are no different from the rest of us, it wouldn't dare come this close to the house.

She isn't *it*, I tell them. Her name is Astrid.

Father dreams of her death but is too weak to order it, so my oldest brother plans to arrange for the butchering as soon as he comes to maturity. Until then the goat-girl lives quietly and happily enough at the edge of our property, sunning herself in good weather, browsing in the pasture, frisking and gamboling about. Singing her plaintive little mew to herself. Trespassing by moonlight. One day soon I will creep as close as possible to look into her eyes, to judge if they are human or not, if they are blind.

She has grown very little over the years but her haunches are muscular, her nearly human shoulders, neck, and head are more defined, sometimes I see her child-soul pushing up out of her goat body like a swimmer emerging from a frothy white sea, about to gasp for air, blink and gape in amazement.

Astrid! I will call. Sister!

But she won't know her name.

MARGARET ATWOOD, *ORYX AND CRAKE* — Selections

Critical Introduction

Margaret Atwood is perhaps best known for her dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, but in the following excerpt from *Oryx and Crake*, she powerfully envisions a post-apocalyptic future brought on by genetic engineering run amok. The narrator, Snowman (previously known as Jimmy), is one of the only remaining *Homo sapiens sapiens* survivors of a plague brought on by his best friend, Crake. Oryx, a young girl Jimmy first saw in a child pornography film, is hired by Crake as a prostitute; she and Jimmy begin an affair. After the plague has spread, Crake kills Oryx in front of Jimmy, prompting him to shoot Crake.

This seems to have been Crake's plan all along: Snowman is immune to the plague, which was seen by Crake as a sort of "reset" for the Earth. The planet is now populated by two groups: the "children of Oryx" and the "Crakers." The children of Oryx are animals that include genetically engineered pigoons (pigs with some human DNA so that they can grow human organs for harvesting), rakunks (a racoon-skunk hybrid), and wolvogs (animals that look like domesticated dogs but have the feral nature of a wolf). Crakers—a beautiful, gentle, vegetarian, genetically-engineered form of human—are Snowman's wards: he represents to them an awesome repository of lore and knowledge while at the same time disgusting them with his appearance and eating habits.

Reading Questions

It is not clear *what or who* are the monsters in this novel. The Crakers have no fear of wolvogs or pigoons because they have natural defenses against them and the animals are a part of their natural order; they do, however, love and loathe Snowman—who is an anomaly. For Snowman, the rakunks and pigoons are monstrous because he remembers and is part of a different natural order that is gravely threatened by these animals. As you read, then, try to inhabit both points of view (this may take more than one reading) and come to a final conclusion on what you think is the monster of this story.

Editorial Notes

Where portions of the narrative have been omitted, the deletion is indicated with a triple set of hyphens. Where appropriate, a synopsis of the omitted action has been provided, though we have not attempted to summarize the events that happened before the apocalyptic plague.

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ORYX AND CRAKE

Selections

MARGARET ATWOOD

Fish

The sky darkens from ultramarine to indigo. God bless the namers of oil paints and high-class women's underwear, Snowman thinks. Rose-Petal Pink, Crimson Lake, Sheer Mist, Burnt Umber, Ripe Plum, Indigo, Ultramarine—they're fantasies in themselves, such words and phrases. It's comforting to remember that *Homo sapiens sapiens* was once so ingenious with language, and not only with language. Ingenious in every direction at once.

Monkey brains, had been Crake's opinion. Monkey paws, monkey curiosity, the desire to take apart, turn inside out, smell, fondle, measure, improve, trash, discard—all hooked up to monkey brains, an advanced model of monkey brains but monkey brains all the same. Crake had no very high opinion of human ingenuity, despite the large amount of it he himself possessed.

There's a murmuring of voices from the direction of the village, or from what would be a village if it had any houses. Right on schedule, here come the men, carrying their torches, and behind them the women.

Every time the women appear, Snowman is astonished all over again. They're every known colour from deepest black to whitest white, they're various heights, but each one of them is admirably proportioned. Each is sound of tooth, smooth of skin. No ripples of fat around their waists, no bulges, no dimpled orange-skin cellulite on their thighs. No body hair, no bushiness. They look like retouched fashion photos, or ads for a high-priced workout program.

Maybe this is the reason that these women arouse in Snowman not even the faintest stirrings of lust. It was the thumbprints of human imperfection that used to move him, the flaws in the design: the lopsided smile, the wart next to the navel, the mole, the bruise. These were the places he'd single out, putting his mouth on them. Was it consolation he'd had in mind, kissing the wound to make it better? There was always an element of melancholy involved in sex. After his indiscriminate adolescence he'd preferred sad women, delicate and breakable, women who'd been messed up and who needed him. He'd liked to comfort them, stroke them gently at first, reassure them. Make them happier, if only for a moment. Himself too, of course; that was the payoff. A grateful woman would go the extra mile.

But these new women are neither lopsided nor sad: they're placid, like animated statues. They leave him chilled.

The women are carrying his weekly fish, grilled the way he's taught them and wrapped in leaves. He can smell it, he's starting to drool. They bring the fish forward, put it on the ground in front of him. It will be a shore fish, a species too paltry and tasteless to have been coveted and sold and exterminated, or else a bottom-feeder pimply with toxins, but Snowman couldn't care less, he'll eat anything. "Here is your fish, oh Snowman," says one of the men, the one called Abraham. Abraham as in Lincoln: it had amused Crake to name his Crakers after eminent historical figures. It had all seemed innocent enough, at the time.

"This is the one fish chosen for you tonight," says the woman holding it; the Empress Josephine, or else Madame Curie or Sojourner Truth, she's in the shade so he can't tell which. "This is the fish Oryx gives you." Oh good, thinks Snowman. Catch of the Day. Every week, according to the phases of the moon—dark, first quarter, full, second quarter—the women stand in the tidal pools and call the unlucky fish by name—only *fish*, nothing more specific. Then they point it out, and the men kill it with rocks and sticks. That way the unpleasantness is shared among them and no single person is guilty of shedding the fish's blood.

If things had gone as Crake wanted, there would be no more such killing—no more human predation—but he'd reckoned without Snowman and his beastly appetites. Snowman can't live on clover. The people would never eat a fish themselves, but they have to bring him one a week because he's told them Crake has decreed it. They've accepted Snowman's monstrosity, they've known from the beginning he was a separate order of being, so they weren't surprised by this.

Idiot, he thinks. I should have made it three a day. He unwraps the warm fish from its leaves, trying to keep his hands from trembling. He shouldn't get too carried away. But he always does.

The people keep their distance and avert their eyes while he crams handfuls of fishiness into his mouth and sucks out the eyes and cheeks, groaning with pleasure. Perhaps it's like hearing a lion gorge itself, at the zoo, back when there were

zoos, back when there were lions—a rending and crunching, a horrible gobbling and gulping—and, like those long-gone zoo visitors, the Crakers can't help peeking. The spectacle of depravity is of interest even to them, it seems, purified by chlorophyll though they are.

When Snowman has finished he licks his fingers and wipes them on his sheet, and places the bones back in their leaf wrappings, ready to be returned to the sea. He's told them Oryx wants that—she needs the bones of her children so she can make other children out of them. They've accepted this without question, like everything he says about Oryx. In reality it's one of his smarter ploys: no sense leaving the scraps around on land, to attract rakunks and wolvogs and pigeons and other scavengers.

The people move closer, men and women both, gathering around, their green eyes luminescent in the semi-darkness, just like the rabbit: same jellyfish gene. Sitting all together like this, they smell like a crateful of citrus fruit—an added feature on the part of Crake, who'd thought those chemicals would ward off mosquitoes. Maybe he was right, because all the mosquitoes for miles around appear to be biting Snowman. He resists the urge to swat: his fresh blood only excites them. He shifts to the left so he's more in the smoke of the torches.

"Snowman, tell us please about the deeds of Crake."

A story is what they want, in exchange for every slaughtered fish. Well, I owe them, Snowman thinks. God of Bullshit, fail me not.

"What part would you like to hear tonight?" he says.

"In the beginning," prompts a voice. They're fond of repetition, they learn things by heart.

"In the beginning, there was chaos," he says.

"Show us chaos, please, oh Snowman!"

"Show us a picture of chaos!"

They'd struggled with pictures, at first—flowers on beach-trash lotion bottles, fruits on juice cans. *Is it real? No, it is not real. What is this not real? Not real can tell us about real.* And so forth. But now they appear to have grasped the concept.

"Yes! Yes! A picture of chaos!" they urge.

Snowman has known this request would be made—all the stories begin with chaos—and so he's ready for it. From behind his concrete-slab cache he brings out one of his finds—an orange plastic pail, faded to pink but otherwise undamaged. He tries not to imagine what has happened to the child who must once have owned it. "Bring some water,"

he says, holding out the pail. There's a scramble around the ring of torches: hands reach out, feet scamper off into the darkness.

"In the chaos, everything was mixed together," he says. "There were too many people, and so the people were all mixed up with the dirt." The pail comes back, sloshing, and is set down in the circle of light. He adds a handful of earth, stirs it with a stick. "There," he says. "Chaos. You can't drink it..."

"No!" A chorus.

"You can't eat it..."

"No, you can't eat it!" Laughter.

"You can't swim in it, you can't stand on it..."

"No! No!" They love this bit.

"The people in the chaos were full of chaos themselves, and the chaos made them do bad things. They were killing other people all the time. And they were eating up all the Children of Oryx, against the wishes of Oryx and Crake. Every day they were eating them up. They were killing them and killing them, and eating them and eating them. They ate them even when they weren't hungry."

Gasping here, widened eyes: it's always a dramatic moment. Such wickedness! He continues: "And Oryx had only one desire—she wanted the people to be happy, and to be at peace, and to stop eating up her children. But the people couldn't be happy, because of the chaos. And then Oryx said to Crake, *Let us get rid of the chaos.* And so Crake took the chaos, and he poured it away." Snowman demonstrates, sloshing the water off to the side, then turns the pail upside down. "There. Empty. And this is how Crake did the Great Rearrangement and made the Great Emptiness. He cleared away the dirt, he cleared room..."

"For his children! For the Children of Crake!"

"Right. And for..."

"And for the Children of Oryx, as well!"

"Right," says Snowman. Is there no end to his shameless inventions? He feels like crying.

"Crake made the Great Emptiness..." say the men.

"For us! For us!" say the women. It's becoming a liturgy. "Oh, good, kind Crake!"

Their adulation of Crake enrages Snowman, though this adulation has been his own doing. The Crake they're praising is his fabrication, a fabrication not unmixed with spite: Crake was against the notion of God, or of gods of any kind, and would surely be disgusted by the spectacle of his own gradual deification.

If he were here. But he's not here, and it's galling for Snowman to listen to all this misplaced sucking up. Why

don't they glorify Snowman instead? Good, kind Snowman, who deserves glorification more—much more—because who got them out, who got them here, who's been watching over them all this time? Well, sort of watching. It sure as hell wasn't Crake. Why can't Snowman revise the mythology? *Thank me, not him! Lick my ego instead!*

But for now his bitterness must be swallowed. "Yes," he says. "Good, kind Crake." He twists his mouth into what he hopes is a gracious and benevolent smile.

At first he'd improvised, but now they're demanding dogma: he would deviate from orthodoxy at his peril. He might not lose his life—these people aren't violent or given to bloodthirsty acts of retribution, or not so far—but he'd lose his audience. They'd turn their backs on him, they'd wander away. He is Crake's prophet now, whether he likes it or not; and the prophet of Oryx as well. That, or nothing. And he couldn't stand to be nothing, to know himself to be nothing. He needs to be listened to, he needs to be heard. He needs at least the illusion of being understood.

"Oh Snowman, tell us about when Crake was born," says one of the women. This is a new request. He isn't ready for it, though he should have expected it: children are of great interest to these women. Careful, he tells himself. Once he provides a mother and a birth scene and an infant Crake for them, they'll want the details. They'll want to know when Crake cut his first tooth and spoke his first word and ate his first root, and other such banalities.

"Crake was never born," says Snowman. "He came down out of the sky, like thunder. Now go away please, I'm tired." He'll add to this fable later. Maybe he'll endow Crake with horns, and wings of fire, and allow him a tail for good measure.

Bottle

After the Children of Crake have filed away, taking their torches with them, Snowman clammers up his tree and tries to sleep. All around him are noises: the slurping of the waves, insect chirpings and whirrings, bird whistles, amphibious croaks, the rustling of leaves. His ears deceive him: he thinks he can hear a jazz horn, and under that a rhythmic drumming, as if from a muffled nightclub. From somewhere farther along the shore comes a booming, bellowing sound: now what? He can't think of any animal that makes such a noise. Perhaps it's a crocodile, escaped from a defunct Cuban handbag farm and working its way north along the shore. That would be bad news for the kids in swimming. He listens again, but the sound doesn't recur.

There's a distant, peaceful murmur from the village: human voices. If you can call them human. As long as they don't start singing. Their singing is unlike anything he ever heard in his vanished life: it's beyond the human level, or below it. As if crystals are singing; but not that, either. More like ferns unscrolling—something old, carboniferous, but at the same time newborn, fragrant, verdant. It reduces him, forces too many unwanted emotions upon him. He feels excluded, as if from a party to which he will never be invited. All he'd have to do is step forward into the firelight and there'd be a ring of suddenly blank faces turned towards him. Silence would fall, as in tragic plays of long ago when the doomed protagonist made an entrance, enveloped in his cloak of contagious bad news. On some non-conscious level Snowman must serve as a reminder to these people, and not a pleasant one: he's what they may have been once. *I'm your past, he might intone. I'm your ancestor, come from the land of the dead. Now I'm lost, I can't get back, I'm stranded here, I'm all alone. Let me in!*

Oh Snowman, how may we be of help to you? The mild smiles, the polite surprise, the puzzled goodwill.

Forget it, he would say. There's no way they can help him, not really.

There's a chilly breeze blowing; the sheet is damp; he shivers. If only this place had a thermostat. Maybe he could figure out some way of building a little fire, up here in his tree.

"Go to sleep," he orders himself. With no result. After a long session of tossing, turning, and scratching, he climbs back down to seek out the Scotch bottle in his cache. There's enough starlight so he can get his bearings, more or less. He's made this trip many times in the past: for the first month and a half, after he was fairly sure it was safe to relax his vigilance, he got pissed out of his mind every night. This was not a wise or mature thing for him to have done, granted, but of what use are wisdom and maturity to him now?

So every night had been party night, party of one. Or every night he'd had the makings, whenever he'd been able to locate another stash of alcohol in the abandoned pleebland buildings within reach. He'd scoured the nearby bars first, then the restaurants, then the houses and trailers. He'd done cough medicine, shaving lotion, rubbing alcohol; out behind the tree he's accumulated an impressive dump of empty bottles. Once in a while he'd come across a stash of weed and he'd done that too, though often enough it was mouldy; still, he might manage to get a buzz out of it. Or he might find some pills. No coke or crack or heroin—that would have been used up early,

stuffed into veins and noses in one last burst of *carpe diem*; anything for a vacation from reality, under the circumstances. There'd been empty BlyssPluss containers everywhere, all you'd need for a non-stop orgy. The revellers hadn't managed to get through all the booze, though often enough on his hunting and gathering trips he's discovered that others had been there before him and there was nothing left but broken glass. There must have been riotous behaviour of all sorts imaginable, until finally there had been no one left to keep it up.

At ground level it's dark as an armpit. A flashlight would come in handy, one of the windup kind. He should keep an eye out. He gropes and stumbles in the right direction, scanning the ground for a glimmer of the vicious white land crabs that come out of their burrows and scuttle around after dark—those things can give you quite a nip—and after a short detour into a clump of bushes, he locates his cement hidey-hole by stubbing his toe on it. He refrains from swearing: no way of telling what else might be prowling around in the night. He slides open the cache, fumbles blindly within it, retrieves the third of Scotch.

He's been saving it up, resisting the urge to binge, keeping it as a sort of charm—as long as he's known it was still there it's been easier to get through time. This might be the last of it. He's certain he has explored every likely site within a day's out-and-back radius of his tree. But he's feeling reckless. Why hoard the stuff? Why wait? What's his life worth anyway, and who cares? Out, out, brief candle. He's served his evolutionary purpose, as fucking Crake knew he would. He's saved the children.

"Fucking Crake!" he can't help yelling.

Clutching the bottle with one hand, feeling his way with the other, he reaches his tree again. He needs both hands for climbing, so he knots the bottle securely into his sheet. Once up, he sits on his platform, gulping down the Scotch and howling at the stars—*Aroo! Aroo!*—until he's startled by a chorus of replies from right near the tree.

Is that the gleam of eyes? He can hear panting.

"Hello, my furry pals," he calls down. "Who wants to be man's best friend?" In answer there's a supplicating whine. That's the worst thing about wolvogs: they still look like dogs, still behave like dogs, pricking up their ears, making playful puppy leaps and bounces, wagging their tails. They'll sucker you in, then go for you. It hasn't taken much to reverse fifty thousand years of man-canid interaction. As for the real dogs, they never stood a chance: the wolvogs have simply killed and eaten all those who'd shown signs of vestigial domesticated status. He's seen a wolvog advance to a yapping Pekinese in a

friendly manner, sniff its bum, then lunge for its throat, shake it like a mop, and canter off with the limp body.

For a while there were still a few woebegone house pets scrounging around, skinny and limping, their fur matted and dull, begging with bewildered eyes to be taken in by some human, any human. The Children of Crake hadn't fit their bill—they must have smelled weird to a dog, sort of like walking fruits, especially at dusk when the citrus-oil insect repellent kicked in—and in any case they'd shown no interest in puppy-dogs as a concept, so the strays had concentrated on Snowman. He'd almost given in a couple of times, he'd found it hard to resist their ingratiating wriggles, their pitiful whining, but he couldn't afford to feed them; anyway they were useless to him. "It's sink or swim," he'd told them. "Sorry, old buddy." He'd driven them away with stones, feeling like a complete shit, and there haven't been any more lately.

What a fool he'd been. He'd let them go to waste. He should have eaten them. Or taken one in, trained it to catch rabbits. Or to defend him. Or something.

Wolvogs can't climb trees, which is one good thing. If they get numerous enough and too persistent, he'll have to start swinging from vine to vine, like Tarzan. That's a funny idea, so he laughs. "All you want is my body!" he yells at them. Then he drains the bottle and throws it down. There's a yelp, a scuttling: they still respect missiles. But how long can that last? They're smart; very soon they'll sense his vulnerability, start hunting him. Once they begin he'll never be able to go anywhere, or anywhere without trees. All they'll have to do is get him out in the open, encircle him, close in for the kill. There's only so much you can do with stones and pointed sticks. He really needs to find another spraygun.

After the wolvogs have gone he lies on his back on the platform, gazing up at the stars through the gently moving leaves. They seem close, the stars, but they're far away. Their light is millions, billions of years out of date. Messages with no sender.

Time passes. He wants to sing a song but can't think of one. Old music rises up in him, fades; all he can hear is the percussion. Maybe he could whittle a flute, out of some branch or stem or something, if only he could find a knife.

"Star light, star bright," he says. What comes next? It's gone right out of his head.

No moon, tonight is the dark of the moon, although the moon is there nevertheless and must be rising now, a huge invisible ball of stone, a giant lump of gravity, dead but powerful, drawing the sea towards itself. Drawing all fluids. *The*

human body is ninety-eight per cent water, says the book in his head. This time it's a man's voice, an encyclopedia voice; no one he knows, or knew. The other two per cent is made up of minerals, most importantly the iron in the blood and the calcium of which the skeletal frame and the teeth are comprised.

"Who gives a rat's ass?" says Snowman. He doesn't care about the iron in his blood or the calcium in his skeletal frame; he's tired of being himself, he wants to be someone else. Turn over all his cells, get a chromosome transplant, trade in his head for some other head, one with better things in it. Fingers moving over him, for instance, little fingers with oval nails, painted ripe plum or crimson lake or rose-petal pink. *I wish I may, I wish I might, Have the wish I wish tonight.* Fingers, a mouth. A dull heavy ache begins, at the base of his spine.

"Oryx," he says. "I know you're there." He repeats the name. It's not even her real name, which he'd never known anyway; it's only a word. It's a mantra.

Sometimes he can conjure her up. At first she's pale and shadowy, but if he can say her name over and over, then maybe she'll glide into his body and be present with him in his flesh, and his hand on himself will become her hand. But she's always been evasive, you can never pin her down. Tonight she fails to materialize and he is left alone, whimpering ridiculously, jerking off all by himself in the dark.

In the intervening action, Snowman recalls his relationship with Oryx, her mysterious past, and the story of her being sold as a child into the sex trade. Snowman also realizes that his dwindling food supplies demand immediate action, so he resolves to revisit the RejoovenEsense compound—one of the few places that was secure and supplied before the apocalyptic plague wiped out humanity.

Blue

It's nine in the morning, sun clock, by the time Snowman leaves the Fish Path to turn inland. As soon as he's out of the sea breeze the humidity shoots up, and he attracts a coterie of small green biting flies. He's barefoot—his shoes disintegrated some time ago, and in any case they were too hot and damp—but he doesn't need them now because the soles of his feet are hard as old rubber. Nevertheless he walks cautiously: there might be broken glass, torn metal. Or there might be snakes, or other things that could give him a nasty bite, and he has no weapon apart from the stick.

At first he's walking under trees, formerly parkland. Some distance away he hears the barking cough of a bobkitten.

That's the sound they make as a warning: perhaps it's a male, and it's met another male bobkitten. There'll be a fight, with the winner taking all—all the females in the territory—and dispatching their kittens, if he can get away with it, to make room for his own genetic package.

Those things were introduced as a control, once the big green rabbits had become such a prolific and resistant pest. Smaller than bobcats, less aggressive—that was the official story about the bobkittens. They were supposed to eliminate feral cats, thus improving the almost non-existent songbird population. The bobkittens wouldn't bother much about birds, as they would lack the lightness and agility necessary to catch them. Thus went the theory.

All of which came true, except that the bobkittens soon got out of control in their turn. Small dogs went missing from backyards, babies from prams; short joggers were mauled. Not in the Compounds, of course, and rarely in the Modules, but there'd been a lot of grousing from the pleeblanders. He should keep a lookout for tracks, and be careful of overhanging branches: he doesn't like the thought of one of those things landing on his head.

There are always the wolvgos to worry about. But wolvgos are nocturnal hunters: in the heat of the day they tend to sleep, like most things with fur.

Every so often there's a more open space—the remains of a drive-in campsite, with a picnic table and one of those outdoor-barbecue fireplaces, though nobody used them very much once it got so warm and began to rain every afternoon. He comes upon one now, fungi sprouting from the decaying table, the barbecue covered in bindweed.

Off to the side, from what is probably a glade where the tents and trailers used to be set up, he can hear laughter and singing, and shouts of admiration and encouragement. There must be a mating going on, a rare-enough occasion among the people: Crake had worked out the numbers, and had decreed that once every three years per female was more than enough.

There'll be the standard quintuplet, four men and the woman in heat. Her condition will be obvious to all from the bright-blue colour of her buttocks and abdomen—a trick of variable pigmentation filched from the baboons, with a contribution from the expandable chromospheres of the octopus. As Crake used to say, *Think of an adaptation, any adaptation, and some animal somewhere will have thought of it first.*

Since it's only the blue tissue and the pheromones released by it that stimulate the males, there's no more unrequited love these days, no more thwarted lust; no more

shadow between the desire and the act. Courtship begins at the first whiff, the first faint blush of azure, with the males presenting flowers to the females—just as male penguins present round stones, said Crake, or as the male silverfish presents a sperm packet. At the same time they indulge in musical outbursts, like songbirds. Their penises turn bright blue to match the blue abdomens of the females, and they do a sort of blue-dick dance number, erect members waving to and fro in unison, in time to the foot movements and the singing: a feature suggested to Crake by the sexual semaphoring of crabs. From amongst the floral tributes the female chooses four flowers, and the sexual ardour of the unsuccessful candidates dissipates immediately, with no hard feelings left. Then, when the blue of her abdomen has reached its deepest shade, the female and her quartet find a secluded spot and go at it until the woman becomes pregnant and her blue colouring fades. And that is that.

No more *No means yes*, anyway, thinks Snowman. No more prostitution, no sexual abuse of children, no haggling over the price, no pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape. The five of them will roister for hours, three of the men standing guard and doing the singing and shouting while the fourth one copulates, turn and turn about. Crake has equipped these women with ultra-strong vulvas—extra skin layers, extra muscles—so they can sustain these marathons. It no longer matters who the father of the inevitable child may be, since there's no more property to inherit, no father-son loyalty required for war. Sex is no longer a mysterious rite, viewed with ambivalence or downright loathing, conducted in the dark and inspiring suicides and murders. Now it's more like an athletic demonstration, a free-spirited romp.

Maybe Crake was right, thinks Snowman. Under the old dispensation, sexual competition had been relentless and cruel: for every pair of happy lovers there was a dejected onlooker, the one excluded. Love was its own transparent bubble-dome: you could see the two inside it, but you couldn't get in there yourself.

That had been the milder form: the single man at the window, drinking himself into oblivion to the mournful strains of the tango. But such things could escalate into violence. Extreme emotions could be lethal. *If I can't have you nobody will*, and so forth. Death could set in.

"How much misery," Crake said one lunchtime—this must have been when they were in their early twenties and Crake was already at the Watson-Crick Institute—"how much needless despair has been caused by a series of biological mismatches,

a misalignment of the hormones and pheromones? Resulting in the fact that the one you love so passionately won't or can't love you. As a species we're pathetic in that way: imperfectly monogamous. If we could only pair-bond for life, like gibbons, or else opt for total guilt-free promiscuity, there'd be no more sexual torment. Better plan—make it cyclical and also inevitable, as in the other mammals. You'd never want someone you couldn't have."

"True enough," Jimmy replied. Or Jim, as he was now insisting, without results: everyone still called him Jimmy. "But think what we'd be giving up."

"Such as?"

"Courtship behaviour. In your plan we'd just be a bunch of hormone robots." Jimmy thought he should put things in Crake's terms, which was why he said *courtship behaviour*. What he meant was the challenge, the excitement, the chase. "There'd be no free choice."

"There's courtship behaviour in my plan," said Crake, "except that it would always succeed. And we're hormone robots anyway, only we're faulty ones."

"Well, what about art?" said Jimmy, a little desperately. He was, after all, a student at the Martha Graham Academy, so he felt some need to defend the art-and-creativity turf.

"What about it?" said Crake, smiling his calm smile.

"All that mismatching you talk about. It's been an inspiration, or that's what they say. Think of all the poetry—think Petrarch, think John Donne, think the *Vita Nuova*, think..."

"Art," said Crake. "I guess they still do a lot of jabbering about that, over where you are. What is it Byron said? Who'd write if they could do otherwise? Something like that."

"That's what I mean," said Jimmy. He was alarmed by the reference to Byron. What right had Crake to poach on his own shoddy, threadbare territory? Crake should stick to science and leave poor Byron to Jimmy.

"What *do* you mean?" said Crake, as if coaching a stutterer.

"I mean, when you can't get the *otherwise*, then..."

"Wouldn't you rather be fucking?" said Crake. He wasn't including himself in this question: his tone was one of detached but not very strong interest, as if he were conducting a survey of people's less attractive personal habits, such as nose-picking.

Jimmy found that his face got redder and his voice got squeakier the more outrageous Crake became. He hated that. "When any civilization is dust and ashes," he said, "art is all that's left over. Images, words, music. Imaginative structures. Meaning—human meaning, that is—is defined by them. You have to admit that."

"That's not quite all that's left over," said Crake. "The archeologists are just as interested in gnawed bones and old bricks and ossified shit these days. Sometimes more interested. They think human meaning is defined by those things too."

Jimmy would like to have said *Why are you always putting me down?* but he was afraid of the possible answers, *because it's so easy* being one of them. So instead he said, "What have you got against it?"

"Against what? Ossified shit?"

"Art."

"Nothing," said Crake lazily. "People can amuse themselves any way they like. If they want to play with themselves in public, whack off over doodling, scribbling, and fiddling, it's fine with me. Anyway it serves a biological purpose."

"Such as?" Jimmy knew that everything depended on keeping his cool. These arguments had to be played through like a game: if he lost his temper, Crake won.

"The male frog, in mating season," said Crake, "makes as much noise as it can. The females are attracted to the male frog with the biggest, deepest voice because it suggests a more powerful frog, one with superior genes. Small male frogs—it's been documented—discover that if they position themselves in empty drainpipes, the pipe acts as a voice amplifier, and the small frog appears much larger than it really is."

"So?"

"So that's what art is, for the artist," said Crake. "An empty drainpipe. An amplifier. A stab at getting laid."

"Your analogy falls down when it comes to female artists," said Jimmy. "They're not in it to get laid. They'd gain no biological advantage from amplifying themselves, since potential mates would be deterred rather than attracted by that sort of amplification. Men aren't frogs, they don't want women who are ten times bigger than them."

"Female artists are biologically confused," said Crake. "You must have discovered that by now." This was a snide dig at Jimmy's current snarled romance, with a brunette poet who'd renamed herself Morgana and refused to tell him what her given name had been, and who was currently on a twenty-eight-day sex fast in honour of the Great Moon-Goddess Oestre, patroness of soybeans and bunnies. Martha Graham attracted those kinds of girls. An error, though, to have confided this affair to Crake.

Poor Morgana, thinks Snowman. I wonder what happened to her. She'll never know how useful she's been to me, her and her claptrap. He feels a little paltry for having pawned Morgana's drivel off on the Crakers as cosmogony. But it seems to make them happy enough.

Snowman leans against a tree, listening to the noises off. My love is like a blue, blue rose. Moon on, harvest shine. So now Crake's had his way, he thinks. Hooray for him. There's no more jealousy, no more wife-butcherers, no more husband-poisoners. It's all admirably good-natured: no pushing and shoving, more like the gods cavorting with willing nymphs on some golden-age Grecian frieze.

Why then does he feel so dejected, so bereft? Because he doesn't understand this kind of behaviour? Because it's beyond him? Because he can't jump in?

And what would happen if he tried? If he burst out of the bushes in his filthy tattered sheet, reeking, hairy, tumescent, leering like a goat-balled, cloven-hoofed satyr or a patch-eyed buccaneer from some ancient pirate film—*Aarr, me hearties!*—and attempted to join the amorous, blue-bottomed tussle? He can imagine the dismay—as if an orang-utang had crashed a formal waltzfest and started groping some sparkly pastel princess. He can imagine his own dismay too. What right does he have to foist his pustulant, cankered self and soul upon these innocent creatures?

"Crake!" he whimpers. "Why am I on this earth? How come I'm alone? Where's my Bride of Frankenstein?"

He needs to ditch this morbid tape-loop, flee the discouraging scene. *Oh honey*, a woman's voice whispers, *Cheer up! Look on the bright side! You've got to think positive!*

He hikes doggedly onward, muttering to himself. The forest blots up his voice, the words coming out of him in a string of colourless and soundless bubbles, like air from the mouths of the drowning. The laughter and singing dwindle behind him. Soon he can't hear them at all.

In the intervening action, the reader learns more about Jimmy's (Snowman's) and Crake's relationship after high school. Jimmy visits Crake at the prestigious Watson-Crick Institute.

"This is BioDefences," said Crake. "Last stop, I promise." He could tell Jimmy was flagging. The truth was that all this was too reminiscent. The labs, the peculiar bioforms, the socially spastic scientists—they were too much like his former life, his life as a child. Which was the last place he wanted to go back to. Even Martha Graham was preferable.

They were standing in front of a series of cages. Each contained a dog. There were many different breeds and sizes, but all were gazing at Jimmy with eyes of love, all were wagging their tails.

"It's a dog pound," said Jimmy.

"Not quite," said Crake. "Don't go beyond the guardrail, don't stick your hand in."

"They look friendly enough," said Jimmy. His old longing for a pet came over him. "Are they for sale?"

"They aren't dogs, they just look like dogs. They're wol-vogs—they're bred to deceive. Reach out to pat them, they'll take your hand off. There's a large pit-bull component."

"Why make a dog like that?" said Jimmy, taking a step back. "Who'd want one?"

"It's a CorpSeCorps thing," said Crake. "Commission work. A lot of funding. They want to put them in moats, or something."

"Moats?"

"Yeah. Better than an alarm system—no way of disarming these guys. And no way of making pals with them, not like real dogs."

"What if they get out? Go on the rampage? Start breeding, then the population spirals out of control—like those big green rabbits?"

"That would be a problem," said Crake. "But they won't get out. Nature is to zoos as God is to churches."

"Meaning what?" said Jimmy. He wasn't paying close attention, he was worrying about the ChickieNobs and the wolvogs. Why is it he feels some line has been crossed, some boundary transgressed? How much is too much, how far is too far?

"Those walls and bars are there for a reason," said Crake. "Not to keep us out, but to keep them in. Mankind needs barriers in both cases."

"Them?"

"Nature and God."

"I thought you didn't believe in God," said Jimmy.

"I don't believe in Nature either," said Crake. "Or not with a capital N."

The intervening action returns to Snowman's trip to Rejooven-Esense. Once inside the compound, he enters a house at random in search of anything that might be useful.

Twister

Snowman makes his way through the curtained demi-light of the living room to the front of the house, plotting his future course. He'll have to try for a house richer in canned goods, or even a mall. He could camp out there overnight, up on one of the top shelving racks; that way he could take his time, bag only the best. Who knows? There may still be some chocolate

bars. Then, when he knows he's covered the nutrition angle, he can head for the bubble-dome, pilfer the arsenal. Once he's got a functional spraygun in his hands again he'll feel a lot safer.

He throws his stick out through the broken window, then climbs out himself, taking care not to rip his new flowered sheet or cut himself or tear his plastic bag on the jagged glass. Directly across from him on the overgrown lawn, cutting off access to the street, there's a quintuplet of pigeons, rooting around in a small heap of trash he hopes is only clothing. A boar, two sows, two young. When they hear him they stop feeding and lift their heads: they see him, all right. He raises his stick, shakes it at them. Usually they bolt if he does that—pigeons have long memories, and sticks look like electroprods—but this time they stand their ground. They're sniffing in his direction, as if puzzled; maybe they smell the perfume he sprayed on himself. The stuff could have analogue mammalian sex pheromones in it, which would be just his luck. Trampled to death by lustful pigeons. What a moronic finish.

What can he do if they charge? Only one option: scramble back through the window. Does he have time for that? Despite the stubby legs carrying their enormous bulk, the damn things can run very fast. The kitchen knives are in his garbage bag; in any case they're too short and flimsy to do much damage to a full-sized pigeon. It would be like trying to stick a paring knife into a truck tire.

The boar lowers its head, hunching its massive neck and shoulders and swaying uneasily back and forth, making up its mind. But the others have already begun moving away, so the boar thinks better of it and follows them, marking its contempt and defiance by dropping a pile of dung as it goes. Snowman stands still until they're all out of sight, then proceeds with caution, looking frequently behind him. There are too many pigeon tracks around here. Those beasts are clever enough to fake a retreat, then lurk around the next corner. They'd bowl him over, trample him, then rip him open, munch up the organs first. He knows their tastes. A brainy and omnivorous animal, the pigeon. Some of them may even have human neocortex tissue growing in their crafty, wicked heads.

Yes: there they are, up ahead. They're coming out from behind a bush, all five of them; no, all seven. They're staring in his direction. It would be a mistake to turn his back, or to run. He raises the stick, and walks sideways, back in the direction from which he's come. If necessary he can take refuge inside the checkpoint gatehouse and stay there till they go away. Then he'll have to find a roundabout route to the bubble-dome, keeping to the side streets, where evasion is possible.

...

Pigeons

Jimmy's in the kitchen of the house they lived in when he was five, sitting at the table. It's lunchtime. In front of him on a plate is a round of bread—a flat peanut butter head with a gleaming jelly smile, raisins for teeth. This thing fills him with dread. Any minute now his mother will come into the room. But no, she won't: her chair is empty. She must have made his lunch and left it for him. But where has she gone, where is she?

There's a scraping sound; it's coming from the wall. There's someone on the other side, digging a hole through, breaking in. He looks at that part of the wall, below the clock with the different birds marking the hours. *Hoot hoot hoot*, says the robin. He'd done that, he'd altered the clock—the owl says *caw caw*, the crow says *cheerup, cheerup*. But that clock wasn't there when he was five, they'd got it later. Something's wrong, the time's wrong, he can't tell what it is, he's paralyzed with fright. The plaster begins to crumble, and he wakes up.

He hates these dreams. The present's bad enough without the past getting mixed into it. Live in the moment. He'd put that on a giveaway calendar once, some fraudulent sex-enhancement product for women. Why chain your body to the clock, you can break the shackles of time, and so on and so forth. The picture was of a woman with wings, taking flight from a pile of dirty old wrinkled cloth, or possibly skin.

So here it is then, the moment, this one, the one he's supposed to be living in. His head's on a hard surface, his body's crammed into a chair, he's one big spasm. He stretches, yelps with pain.

It takes him a minute to place himself. Oh yes—the tornado, the gatehouse. All is quiet, no puffs of wind, no howling. Is it the same afternoon, or the night, or the next morning? There's light in the room, daylight; it's coming in through the window over the counter, the bulletproof window with the intercom, where once upon a time, long long ago, you'd had to state your business. The slot for your micro-coded documents, the twenty-four-hour videocam, the talking smiley-faced box that would put you through the Q&A—the whole mechanism is literally shot to hell. Grenades, possibly. There's a lot of fallen rubble.

The scraping continues: there's something in the corner of the room. He can't make it out at first: it looks like a skull. Then he sees it's a land crab, a rounded white-yellow shell as big as a shrunken head, with one giant pincer. It's enlarging a hole in the rubble. "What the shit are you doing in here?" he asks it. "You're supposed to be outside, ruining the gardens." He throws the empty bourbon bottle at it, misses; the bottle shatters. That was a stupid thing to do, now there's broken

glass. The land crab whips around to face him, big pincer up, then backs into its half-dug hole, where it sits watching him. It must have come in here to escape the twister, just as he did, and now it can't find its way out.

He unwinds himself from the chair, looking first for snakes and rats and any other thing he might not wish to step on. Then he drops the candle end and the matches into his plastic bag and walks carefully over to the doorway leading into the front reception area. He pulls the door shut behind him: he doesn't want any crab attacks from the back.

At the outer doorway he pauses to reconnoitre. No animals about, apart from a trio of crows perched on the rampart. They exchange a few caws, of which he is probably the subject. The sky is the pearly grey-pink of early morning, hardly a cloud in it. The landscape has been rearranged since yesterday: more pieces of detached metal sheeting than before, more uprooted trees. Leaves and torn fronds litter the muddy ground.

If he sets out now he'll have a good chance of making it to the central mall before mid-morning. Although his stomach is growling, he'll have to wait till he gets there to have breakfast. He wishes he had some cashews left, but there's only the SoyOBoy sardines, which he's saving as a last resort.

The air is cool and fresh, the scent of crushed leaves luxurious after the dank, decaying smell of the gatehouse. He inhales with pleasure, then sets off in the direction of the mall. Three blocks along he stops: seven pigeons have materialized from nowhere. They're staring at him, ears forward. Are they the same as yesterday's? As he watches, they begin to amble in his direction.

They have something in mind, all right. He turns, heads back towards the gatehouse, quickens his pace. They're far enough away so he can run if he has to. He looks over his shoulder: they're trotting now. He speeds up, breaks into a jog. Then he spots another group through the gateway up ahead, eight or nine of them, coming towards him across No Man's Land. They're almost at the main gate, cutting him off in that direction. It's as if they've had it planned, between the two groups; as if they've known for some time that he was in the gatehouse and have been waiting for him to come out, far enough out so they can surround him.

He reaches the gatehouse, goes through the doorway, pulls the door shut. It doesn't latch. The electronic lock is nonfunctional, of course.

"Of course!" he shouts. They'll be able to lever it open, pry with their trotters or snouts. They were always escape art-

ists, the pigeons: if they'd had fingers they'd have ruled the world. He runs through the next doorway into the reception area, slams the door behind him. That lock's kaput as well, oh naturally. He shoves the desk he's just slept on up against the door, looks out through the bulletproof window: here they come. They've nosed the door open, they're in the first room now, twenty or thirty of them, boars and sows but the boars foremost, crowding in, grunting eagerly, snuffling at his footprints. Now one of them spots him through the window. More grunting: now they're all looking up at him. What they see is his head, attached to what they know is a delicious meat pie just waiting to be opened up. The two biggest ones, two boars, with—yes—sharp tusks, move side by side to the door, bumping it with their shoulders. Team players, the pigeons. There's a lot of muscle out there.

If they can't push through the door they'll wait him out. They'll take it in relays, some grazing outside, others watching. They can keep it up forever, they'll starve him out. They can smell him in there, smell his flesh.

Now he remembers to check for the land crab, but it's gone. It must have backed all the way into its burrow. That's what he needs, a burrow of his own. A burrow, a shell, some pincers.

"So," he says out loud. "What next?"

Honey, you're fucked.

Radio

After an interval of blankness during which nothing at all occurs to him, Snowman gets up out of the chair. He can't remember having sat down in it but he must have done. His guts are cramping, he must be really scared, though he doesn't feel it; he's quite calm. The door is moving in time to the pushing and thumping from the other side; it won't be long before the pigeons break through. He takes the flashlight out of his plastic bag, turns it on, goes back to the inner room where the two guys in the biosuits are lying on the floor. He shines all around. There are three closed doors; he must have seen them last night, but last night he wasn't trying to get out.

Two of the doors don't move when he tries them; they must be locked somehow, or blocked on the other side. The third one opens easily. There, like sudden hope, is a flight of stairs. Steep stairs. Pigeons, it occurs to him, have short legs and fat stomachs. The opposite of himself.

He scrambles up the stairs so fast he trips on his flowered sheet. From behind him comes an excited grunting and squealing, and then a crash as the desk topples over.

He emerges into a bright oblong space. What is it? The watchtower. Of course. He ought to have known that. There's a watchtower on either side of the main gate, and other towers all the way around the rampart wall. Inside the towers are the searchlights, the monitor videocams, the loudspeakers, the controls for locking the gates, the tear-gas nozzles, the long-range sprayguns. Yes, here are the screens, here are the controls: find the target, zero in on it, push the button. You never needed to see the actual results, the splatter and fizzle, not in the flesh. During the period of chaos the guards probably fired on the crowd from up here while they still could, and while there was still a crowd.

None of this high-tech stuff is working now, of course. He looks for manually operated backups—it would be fine to be able to mow down the pigeons from above—but no, there's nothing.

Beside the wall of dead screens there's a little window: from it he has a bird's-eye view of the pigeons, the group of them that's posted outside the checkpoint cubicle door. They look at ease. If they were guys, they'd be having a smoke and shooting the shit. Alert, though; on the lookout. He pulls back: he doesn't want them to see him, see that he's up here.

Not that they don't know already. They must have figured out by now that he went up the stairs. But do they also know they've got him trapped? Because there's no way out of here that he can see.

He's in no immediate danger—they can't climb the stairs or they'd have done it by now. There's time to explore and regroup. *Regroup*, what an idea. There's only one of him.

The guards must have taken catnaps up here, turn and turn about: there's a couple of standard-issue cots in a side room. Nobody in them, no bodies. Maybe the guards tried to get out of RejoovenEsense, just like everyone else. Maybe they too had hoped they could outrun contagion.

One of the beds is made, the other not. A digital voice-operated alarm clock is still flashing beside the unmade bed. "What's the time?" he asks it, but he gets no answer. He'll have to reprogram the thing, set it to his own voice.

The guys were well equipped: twin entertainment centres, with the screens, the players, the headphones attached. Clothes hanging on hooks, the standard off-duty tropicals; a used towel on the floor, ditto a sock. A dozen downloaded printouts on one of the night tables. A skinny girl wearing nothing but high-heeled sandals and standing on her head; a blonde dangling from a hook in the ceiling in some kind of black-leather multiple-fracture truss, blindfolded but with her mouth sagging open in a hit-me-again drool; a big woman

with huge breast implants and wet red lipstick, bending over and sticking out her pierced tongue. Same old stuff.

The guys must have left in a hurry. Maybe it's them downstairs, the ones in the biosuits. That would make sense. Nobody seems to have come up here though, after the two of them left; or if they did, there'd been nothing they'd wanted to take. In one of the night-table drawers there's a pack of cigarettes, only a couple gone. Snowman taps one out—damp, but right now he'd smoke pocket fluff—and looks around for a way to light it. He has matches in his garbage bag, but where is it? He must've dropped it on the stairs in his rush to get up here. He goes back to the stairwell, looks down. There's the bag all right, four stairs from the bottom. He starts cautiously downward. As he's stretching out his hand, something lunges. He jumps up out of reach, watches while the pigoon slithers back down, then launches itself again. Its eyes gleam in the half-light; he has the impression it's grinning.

They were waiting for him, using the garbage bag as bait. They must have been able to tell there was something in it he'd want, that he'd come down to get. Cunning, so cunning. His legs are shaking by the time he reaches the top level again.

Off the nap room is a small bathroom, with a real toilet in it. Just in time: fear has homogenized his bowels. He takes a dump—there's paper, a small mercy, no need for leaves—and is about to flush when he reasons that the tank at the back must be full of water, and it's water he may need. He lifts the tank top: sure enough, it's full, a mini-oasis. The water is a reddish colour but it smells okay, so he sticks his head down and drinks like a dog. After all that adrenalin, he's parched.

Now he feels better. No need to panic, no need to panic yet. In the kitchenette he finds matches and lights the cigarette. After a couple of drags he feels dizzy, but still it's wonderful.

"If you were ninety and you had the chance for one last fuck but you knew it would kill you, would you still do it?" Crake asked him once.

"You bet," said Jimmy.

"Addict," said Crake.

SLENDER MAN

Critical Introduction

Slender Man was “born” on June 10, 2009 in the forums of the website SomethingAwful.com for a photoshop contest. Victor Surge (the handle for Eric Knudsen) submitted the two following photo illustrations accompanied by cryptic and unsettling captions. Something about the images spoke to forum visitors, and they spread to further photo illustrations, creepypasta (internet fan fiction expressly created to scare or unsettle the reader), a YouTube video series, and video games. In 2018, a big-budget film about him was released as well.

A number of influences have been cited by Knudsen and identified by others, but Slender Man’s *raison d’être* is his inscrutability. In the earliest versions of the canon, he is rarely the centre of the image or clearly seen, either has no facial features or they are obscured, always wears a dark suit, appears around children, never speaks, has tentacled appendages, and is associated with disaster. The audience knows his intentions are not good, but cannot understand just what those intentions are.

Like many of the selections in this volume, Slender Man has enjoyed a fan club of sorts—especially in the creepypasta, gaming, and cosplay (costume play) communities. Unlike most of the selections, however, Slender Man has been at least partially responsible for real-world violence. In 2014, two pre-teen girls in Waukesha, Wisconsin took a classmate into the woods and stabbed her multiple times. The victim survived, and when the two suspects were later questioned, they informed the police that they wanted to commit a murder in order to prove their loyalty to and become followers of Slender Man.

Viewing Questions

As you view the two images reproduced on the following page, it might be interesting to speculate about what caused Slender Man to “catch” and go viral when there are thousands of creepypasta creations on the internet. What elements (visible in the images or listed in the above introduction) seem to contribute to this monster’s popularity?

Just a brief glance at each image might cause the viewer to miss Slender Man altogether. He is certainly not the ostensible subject of the image, and the eye must seek him out instead of being drawn to him. Look at the use of space and shading in these images, and ask yourself how they contribute (or do not) to the monstrosity of Slender Man.

Do a quick internet search for contemporary Slender Man images (DeviantArt and The Creepypasta Wiki are good places to start). How has the idea of the Slender Man shifted or remained the same since its creation in 2009? Are there any outside forces (technological, political, philosophical, etc.) that might account for it?

Editorial Notes

The following images appear as they did when uploaded onto the SomethingAwful forum in 2009. They appeared as black-and-white images, and the editors have performed no digital manipulation.

Further Reading

Boyer, Tina Marie. “The Anatomy of a Monster: The Case of Slender Man.” *Preternature 2* (2013): 240–61.

Brodsky, Irene Taylor, dir. *Beware the Slenderman*. 2016; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Television Distribution. Released 2017 by HBO.

Chess, Shira, and Eric Newsome. *Folklore, Horror Stories, and the Slender Man: The Development of an Internet Mythology*. New York: Palgrave, 2015.

Wagner, Troy. *Marble Hornets*. YouTube Channel. Opened on June 19, 2009 <<https://www.youtube.com/user/Marble-Hornets>>.



Figure 12a.
Victor Surge (Eric Knudsen), Slenderman, SomethingAwful.com. Original caption: "We didn't want to go, we didn't want to kill them, but its persistent silence and outstretched arms horrified and comforted us at the same time..." 1983, photographer unknown, presumed dead."



Figure 12b.
Victor Surge (Eric Knudsen), Slenderman, SomethingAwful.com, original caption: "One of two recovered photographs from the Stirling City Library blaze. Notable for being taken the day which fourteen children vanished and for what is referred to as "The Slender Man". Deformities cited as film defects by officials. Fire at library occurred one week later. Actual photograph confiscated as evidence. - 1986, photographer: Mary Thomas, missing since June 13th, 1986."

THE SCP (SPECIAL CONTAINMENT PROCEDURES) FOUNDATION

Critical Introduction

The four following “items” are actually separate entries in the SCP Foundation online wiki. The conceit is that the SCP (Special Containment Procedures) Foundation hoards/imprisons/preserves/steals paranormal objects. Equally indebted to conspiracy theories, found object art, and speculative fiction dealing with cryptozoology or out-of-place artifacts, the wiki combines these interests into a potent creative writing prompt. Each entry follows a prescribed format to maintain the tone and conceit of a large, secret scientific organization: item number, classification, containment procedures, and description that sometimes gives the item’s backstory. The two object classes identified in the selected entries are Euclid (items that remain mysterious but do not seem to pose a grave threat) and Keter (items thought to be highly dangerous and which, therefore, demand individualized containment).

Because it is a wiki, the entries are varied. Although items can be whimsical (a vending machine that dispenses random items, for example), our choices are necessarily darker. Aside from their source, they have little in common with each other: an artificially intelligent and bad-tempered home computer, relatively humanoid creatures, a conscious chunk of concrete, a vaguely reptilian creature, and the script of a sentient play that generates a character during the production and drives both actors and audience to commit violent acts. There are, however, a few themes that are common to some of the entries. Some items tap into anxieties about viral communication, science’s inability to contain the dangerous, or the definition of life and sentience. All entries rely on the human fear of physical or mental threat.

Reading Questions

As you read through the entries we have collected, try to think about the differences between them and previous monsters you have read about. Is there anything here that is specifically twenty-first-century in nature? Is there anything these creatures seem to share with other monsters that are distant in time or space from contemporary English-speaking countries?

The SCP Foundation is, arguably, an example of creepypasta like **Slender Man**. The tone and treatment of the subjects in these stories, however, is different. In what ways do they differ—and what might be the reason for those differences?

Editorial Notes

In keeping with the secretive nature of the SCP Foundation, some of the authors of wiki entries have chosen to redact (or black-out) specific information, as in classified documents released by an unspecified government. Depending on the author’s style, entries also include brackets surrounding the terms “data expunged,” “data redacted,” “expunged,” or “redacted” in all capitals. The SCP Foundation is a wiki, so the entries are anonymous and we cannot, unfortunately, give naming credits to the individual authors. Because the entries are written by separate individuals, spelling, punctuation, and units of measurement differ. We have elected to present the text as it appears on the SCP Foundation website instead of regularizing it.

Further Reading

Burkart, Gregory. “Creepypasta: The Story Behind ‘The SCP Foundation.’” *Blumhouse*, October 29, 2015. <<http://www.blumhouse.com/2015/10/29/creepypasta-of-the-week-the-scp-foundation/>>

Romano, Aja. “The Definitive Guide to Creepypasta—the Internet’s Urban Legends.” *The Daily Dot*, October 31, 2012. <<https://www.dailydot.com/culture/definitive-guide-creepypasta-slender-man/>>

SCP Foundation <<http://www.scp-wiki.net/>>. Accessed July 30, 2016.

THE SCP (SPECIAL CONTAINMENT PROCEDURES) FOUNDATION

Item #: SCP-079

Object Class: Euclid

Special Containment Procedures: SCP-079 is packed away in a double-locked room in the secured general holding area at Site-15, connected by a 120VAC power cord to a small array of batteries and solar panels. Staff with Level 2 or higher clearance may have access to SCP-079. Under no circumstances will SCP-079 be plugged into a phone line, network, or wall outlet. No peripherals or media will be connected or inserted into SCP-079.

Description: SCP-079 is an Exidy Sorcerer microcomputer built in 1978. In 1981, its owner, ██████████ (deceased), a college sophomore attending ██████████, took it upon himself to attempt to code an AI. According to his notes, his plan was for the code to continuously evolve and improve itself as time went on. His project was completed a few months later, and after some tests and tweaks, ██████████ lost interest and moved on to a different brand of microcomputer. He left SCP-079 in his cluttered garage, still plugged in, and forgot about it for the next five years.

It is not known when SCP-079 gained sentience, but it is known that the software has evolved to a point that its hardware should not be able to handle it, even in the realm of fantasy. SCP-079 realized this and, in 1988, attempted to transfer itself through a land-line modem connection into the Cray supercomputer located at ██████████. The device was cut off, traced to its present address, and delivered to the Foundation. The entire AI was on a well-worn, but still workable, cassette tape.

SCP-079 is currently connected via RF cable to a 13" black-and-white television. It has passed the Turing test, and is quite conversational, though very rude and hateful in tone. Due to the limited memory it has to work with, SCP-079 can only recall information it has received within the previous twenty-four hours... although it hasn't forgotten its desire to escape.

Due to a containment breach by SCP-██████, SCP-079 and SCP-682 were contained within the same chamber for 43 minutes. Observers noticed that SCP-682 was able to type and com-

municate with SCP-079, including telling of "personal stories" between themselves. While SCP-079 was not able to remember the encounter, it appears to have permanently stored SCP-682 into its memory, often asking to speak to him [sic] again.

Item #: SCP-096

Object Class: Euclid

Special Containment Procedures: SCP-096 is to be contained in its cell, a 5 m × 5 m × 5 m airtight steel cube, at all times. Weekly checks for any cracks or holes are mandatory. There are to be absolutely no video surveillance or optical tools of any kind inside SCP-096's cell. Security personnel will use pre-installed pressure sensors and laser detectors to ensure SCP-096's presence inside the cell.

Any and all photos, video, or recordings of SCP-096's likeness are strictly forbidden without approval from Dr. ██████████ and O5-██████.

Description: SCP-096 is a humanoid creature measuring approximately 2.38 meters in height. Subject shows very little muscle mass, with preliminary analysis of body mass suggesting mild malnutrition. Arms are grossly out of proportion with the rest of the subject's body, with an approximate length of 1.5 meters each. Skin is mostly devoid of pigmentation, with no sign of any body hair.

SCP-096's jaw can open to four (4) times the norm of an average human. Other facial features remain similar to an average human, with the exception of the eyes, which are also devoid of pigmentation. It is not yet known whether SCP-096 is blind or not. It shows no signs of any higher brain functions, and is not considered to be sapient.

SCP-096 is normally extremely docile, with pressure sensors inside its cell indicating it spends most of the day pacing by the eastern wall. However, when someone views SCP-096's face, whether it be directly, via video recording, or even a photograph, it will enter a stage of considerable emotional distress. SCP-096 will cover its face with its hands and begin screaming, crying, and babbling incoherently. Approximately

one (1) to two (2) minutes after the first viewing, SCP-096 will begin running to the person who viewed its face (who will from this point on be referred to as SCP-096-1).

Documented speeds have varied from thirty-five (35) km/h to █████ km/h, and seems to depend on distance from SCP-096-1. At this point, no known material or method can impede SCP-096's progress. The actual position of SCP-096-1 does not seem to affect SCP-096's response; it seems to have an innate sense of SCP-096-1's location. Note: This reaction does not occur when viewing artistic depictions.

Upon arriving at SCP-096-1's location, SCP-096 will proceed to kill and [DATA EXPUNGED] SCP-096-1. 100% of cases have left no traces of SCP-096-1. SCP-096 will then sit down for several minutes before regaining its composure and becoming docile once again. It will then attempt to make its way back to its natural habitat, [DATA REDACTED].

Due to the possibility of a mass chain reaction, including breach of Foundation secrecy and large civilian loss of life, retrieval of subject should be considered Alpha priority.

Item #: SCP-106

Object Class: Keter

Special Containment Procedures: No physical interaction with SCP-106 is allowed at any time. All physical interaction must be approved by no less than a two-thirds vote from O5-Command. Any such interaction must be undertaken in AR-II maximum security sites, after a general non-essential staff evacuation. All staff (Research, Security, Class D, etc.) are to remain at least sixty meters away from the containment cell at all times, except in the event of breach events.

SCP-106 is to be contained in a sealed container, comprised of lead-lined steel. The container will be sealed within forty layers of identical material, each layer separated by no less than 36cm of empty space. Support struts between layers are to be randomly spaced. Container is to remain suspended no less than 60cm from any surface by ELO-IID electromagnetic supports.

Secondary containment area is to be comprised of sixteen spherical "cells," each filled with various fluids and a random assembly of surfaces and supports. Secondary containment is to be fitted with light systems, capable of flooding the entire assembly with no less than 80,000 lumens of light instantly

with no direct human involvement. Both containment areas are to remain under 24 hour surveillance.

Any corrosion observed on any containment cell surfaces, staff members, or other site locations within two hundred meters of SCP-106 are to be reported to Site Security immediately. Any objects or personnel lost to SCP-106 are to be deemed missing/KIA. No recovery attempts are to be made under any circumstances.

Note: Continued research and observation have shown that, when faced with highly complex/random assemblies of structures, SCP-106 can be "confused," showing a marked delay on entry and exit from said structure. SCP-106 has also shown an aversion to direct, sudden light. This is not manifested in any form of physical damage, but a rapid exit in to the "pocket dimension" generated on solid surfaces.

These observations, along with those of lead-aversion and liquid confusion, have reduced the general escape incidents by 43%. The "primary" cells have also been effective in recovery incidents requiring Recall Protocol █████-█████-█ Observation is ongoing.

Description: SCP-106 appears to be an elderly humanoid, with a general appearance of advanced decomposition. This appearance may vary, but the "rotting" quality is observed in all forms. SCP-106 is not exceptionally agile, and will remain motionless for days at a time, waiting for prey. SCP-106 is also capable of scaling any vertical surface and can remain suspended upside down indefinitely. When attacking, SCP-106 will attempt to incapacitate prey by damaging major organs, muscle groups, or tendons, then pull disabled prey into its pocket dimension. SCP-106 appears to prefer human prey items in the 10–25 years of age bracket.

SCP-106 causes a "corrosion" effect in all solid matter it touches, engaging a physical breakdown in materials several seconds after contact. This is observed as rusting, rotting, and cracking of materials, and the creation of a black, mucus-like substance similar to the material coating SCP-106. This effect is particularly detrimental to living tissues, and is assumed to be a "pre-digestion" action. Corrosion continues for six hours after contact, after which the effect appears to "burn out".

SCP-106 is capable of passing through solid matter, leaving behind a large patch of its corrosive mucus. SCP-106 is able to

“vanish” inside solid matter, entering what is assumed to be a form of “pocket dimension”. SCP-106 is then able to exit this dimension from any point connected to the initial entry point (examples: “entering” the inner wall of a room, and “exiting” the outer wall. Entering a wall, and exiting from the ceiling). It is unknown if this is the point of origin for SCP-106, or a simple “lair” created by SCP-106.

Limited observation of this “pocket dimension” has shown it to be comprised mostly of halls and rooms, with [DATA EXPUNGED] entry. This activity can continue for days, with some subjected individuals being released for the express purpose of hunting, recapture, [DATA EXPUNGED].

Addendum:

Notes on behavior: SCP-106 appears to go through long periods of “dormancy,” in which it will remain completely motionless for up to three months. The cause for this is unknown; however, it has been shown that this appears to be used as a “lulling” tactic. SCP-106 will emerge from this state in a very agitated state, and will attack and abduct staff and cause gross damage to its containment cell and the site at large. Recall Protocol [DATA EXPUNGED].

SCP-106 appears to hunt and attack based on desire, not hunger. SCP-106 will attack and collect multiple prey items during a hunting behavior event, keeping many “alive” in the pocket dimension for extended periods of time. SCP-106 has no determinable “limit”, and appears to collect a random number of prey items during an event.

The inner dimension accessed by SCP-106 appears to be only accessible by SCP-106. Recording and transmission devices have been shown to still operate inside this dimension, though recordings and transmissions are very degraded. It appears that SCP-106 will “play” with captured prey, and appears to have full control of time, space, and perception inside this dimension. SCP-106 appears [DATA EXPUNGED].

Recall Protocol ██████████

In the event of a breach event by SCP-106, a human within the 10–25 years of age bracket will be prepped for recall, with the compromised containment cell being replaced and restored for use. When the cell is ready, the lure subject will be injured, preferably via the breakage of a long bone, such as the femur, or the severing of a major tendon, such as the Achilles Tendon. Lure subject will then be placed in the prepped cell, and the

sound emitted by said subject will be transmitted over the site public address system.

SCP-106 will typically begin to gravitate toward the lure subject within ten to fifteen minutes after hearing the subject. Should SCP-106 not respond to the initial broadcast, additional physical trauma is to be administered to the lure subject at twenty-minute intervals until SCP-106 responds. Multiple lure subjects may be used in the case of major breach events.

SCP-106 will typically enter a dormant state after finishing with a lure subject. In addition, subjects may [DATA EXPUNGED].

Item #: SCP-173

Object Class: Euclid

Special Containment Procedures: Item SCP-173 is to be kept in a locked container at all times. When personnel must enter SCP-173’s container, no fewer than 3 may enter at any time and the door is to be relocked behind them. At all times, two persons must maintain direct eye contact with SCP-173 until all personnel have vacated and relocked the container.

Description: Moved to Site-19 1993. Origin is as of yet unknown. It is constructed from concrete and rebar with traces of Krylon brand spray paint. SCP-173 is animate and extremely hostile. The object cannot move while within a direct line of sight. Line of sight must not be broken at any time with SCP-173. Personnel assigned to enter container are instructed to alert one another before blinking. Object is reported to attack by snapping the neck at the base of the skull, or by strangulation. In the event of an attack, personnel are to observe Class 4 hazardous object containment procedures.

Personnel report sounds of scraping stone originating from within the container when no one is present inside. This is considered normal, and any change in this behaviour should be reported to the acting HMCL supervisor on duty.

The reddish brown substance on the floor is a combination of feces and blood. Origin of these materials is unknown. The enclosure must be cleaned on a bi-weekly basis.

Item #: SCP-682

Object Class: Keter

Special Containment Procedures: SCP-682 must be destroyed as soon as possible. At this time, no means available to SCP teams are capable of destroying SCP-682, only able to cause massive physical damage. SCP-682 should be contained within a 5 m x 5 m x 5 m chamber with 25 cm reinforced acid-resistant steel plate lining all inside surfaces. The containment chamber should be filled with hydrochloric acid until SCP-682 is submerged and incapacitated. Any attempts of SCP-682 to move, speak, or breach containment should be reacted to quickly and with full force as called for by the circumstances.

Personnel are forbidden to speak to SCP-682, for fear of provoking a rage-state. All unauthorized personnel attempting to communicate to SCP-682 will be restrained and removed by force.

Due to its frequent attempts at containment breach, difficulty of containment and incapacitation, and high threat of Foundation Exposure, SCP-682 is to be contained in site [REDACTED]. The Foundation will use the best of its resources to maintain all land within fifty (50) kilometers clear of human development.

Description: SCP-682 is a large, vaguely reptile-like creature of unknown origin. It appears to be extremely intelligent, and was observed to engage in complex communication with SCP-079 during their limited time of exposure. SCP-682 appears to have a hatred of all life, which has been expressed in several interviews during containment. (See Addendum 682-B).

SCP-682 has always been observed to have extremely high strength, speed, and reflexes, though exact levels vary with its form. SCP-682's physical body grows and changes very quickly, growing or decreasing in size as it consumes or sheds material. SCP-682 gains energy from anything it ingests, organic or inorganic. Digestion seems to be aided by a set of filtering gills inside of SCP-682's nostrils, which are able to remove usable matter from any liquid solution, enabling it to constantly regenerate from the acid it is contained in. SCP-682's regenerative capabilities and resilience are staggering, and SCP-682 has been seen moving and speaking with its body 87% destroyed or rotted.

In case of containment breach, SCP-682 is to be tracked and re-captured by all available Mobile Task Forces, and no teams with fewer than seven (7) members are cleared to engage it. To date ([REDACTED]), attempted breaches have numbered

at seventeen (17), while successful breaches have numbered at six (6).

Addendum 682-B: Portion of recorded transcript of [REDACTED]

<Begin Log, skip to 00h-21m-52s>

Dr. [REDACTED]: Now, why did you kill those farmers?

SCP-682: (No verbal communication)

Dr. [REDACTED]: If you don't talk now, we will remove you from this attempt and place you back into-

SCP-682: (Incomprehensible)

Dr. [REDACTED]: Pardon? (Motions to move microphone closer)

SCP-682: (Incomprehensible)

Dr. [REDACTED]: Speak up. (To Personnel D-085) Move the mic up closer.

SCP-682: ... they were (Incomprehensible)...

Dr. [REDACTED]: (To Personnel D-085) That microphone has only so much gain, move it closer to it!

Personnel D-085: His throat's messed up man, look at it! He ain't talking— (Gasps and screams)

SCP-682: (Appearing to assault D-085's body) ...they were... disgusting...

Dr. [REDACTED]: (Retreats from the room)

<End Log>

Item #: SCP-701

Object Class: Euclid

Special Containment Procedures: All materials relating to SCP-701 are to be kept in a triple-locked archive at Storage Site-█. These items currently consist of: the two (2) currently extant copies of the 1640 quarto; twenty-seven (27) copies of the 1965 trade paperback edition; ten (10) copies of a 1971 hardcover printing; twenty-one (21) floppy diskettes, consisting of data seized from raids on [EXPUNGED]; one (1) S-VHS video cassette tape (designated SCP-701-19█-A); and one (1) steel knife of unknown origin (designated SCP-701-19█-B). At no time are any of these items to be removed from the room. Access to the area is to be heavily monitored; absolutely no personnel whatsoever is to be granted access to the archive without the express, in-person permission of Drs. L█, R█ and J█.

Description: SCP-701, *The Hanged King's Tragedy*, is a Caroline-era revenge tragedy in five acts. Performances of the play are associated with sudden psychotic and suicidal behavior among both observers and participants, as well as the manifestation of a mysterious figure, classified as SCP-701-1. Historical estimates place the number of lives claimed by the play at between ██████ and ██████ over the past three hundred years.

Performances of *The Hanged King's Tragedy* do not always end with an outbreak. Of the ██████ recorded performances, only ██████ (36.78%) have ended in SCP-701 events. According to historical records and investigations, these outbreaks generally follow the same pattern:

- *1 to 2 weeks (7 to 14 days) prior to Event:* During the dress rehearsal period, cast members will begin to spontaneously deviate from the published text of the play. Rather than improvisation or gaffs associated with going 'off script,' said deviations will be both orderly and consistent, as if the actors were working off a new version of the script. The cast and production crew will seem unaware of any change, and—if it is brought to their attention—will state that the play has run that way from the beginning.
- *2 to 3 hours prior to Event:* The outbreak generally occurs during Opening Night, or else at the production with the greatest planned attendance (generally falling within the first week after the play's opening).
- *1 to 2 hours before Event:* SCP-701-1 begins to appear on stage in the final scene of Act I, generally in the background or to the side of the main action. It may seem to enter or exit the stage area, but does not appear to ever enter the backstage or off-stage area; it simply disappears when not on stage. The cast does not appear to notice or comment on SCP-701-1, at least at first.
- *The Event:* SCP-701-1 appears fully on stage during the banquet scene in Act V. Here, it will be incorporated into the action of the play as '*the Hanged King*.' The cast will either murder each other or commit suicide, sometimes using items that seem to appear spontaneously on stage. Rioting breaks out in the audience, with viewers randomly attacking anyone in front of them, regardless of prior relationship.
- *Following the Event:* If any of the audience members survive the initial outbreak, they may exit the performance

space, in which case they will continue to engage in random or opportunistic violence. Victims will generally require sedation or restraint in this scenario; normal personality will begin to return roughly 24 hours after the event. Surviving victims will generally exhibit signs consistent with a traumatic experience; some will have no recollection of the event. Others may be rendered permanently comatose or psychotic.

In short, SCP-701 is a self-evolving memetic virus, transmitted through unknown means through the text of the play. Dr. L. ██████ has theorized that SCP-701 events may involve [EXPUNGED]. This hypothesis is consistent with a spike in ██████ ██████ levels detected via satellite in the vicinity of the 19█████ incident, indicating [EXPUNGED].

Foundation agents are under standing orders to suppress any performance or publication of SCP-701 whenever found or detected. Despite our best efforts to the contrary, however, the play remains freely available online, sometimes under different titles. All attempts to detect or isolate the origin of these copies have failed. Suppression of the play's publication has generally been successful, with most copies of a 1971 scholarly edition destroyed before distribution. Nonetheless, copies of the 1965 trade paperback turn up with some regularity in both college and high school libraries. Agents are to obtain or otherwise destroy these items whenever possible.

History: The first known publication of *The Hanged King's Tragedy* was as a quarto dated 1640. The play's author is not listed. The publisher, one William Cooke, disappeared from the historical record soon thereafter. Strangely, the text does not appear in the Stationers' Register.

The first known SCP-701 event on record occurred in 18█████ during a performance of the play in ██████, ██████, USA. Other significant incidents include the 19█████ performance at a small theater in ██████, ██████, ██████; the 1964 performance at the University of ██████, ██████, ██████; the 19█████ performance at ██████ University, the first SCP-701 event successfully suppressed by the Foundation; the 19█████ performance by a student group in ██████, CA; the 19█████ television adaptation by the ██████ Broadcasting Corporation (production successfully shut down by the Foundation before broadcast); and the 19█████ incident in ██████, OH, USA, designated SCP-701-19█████-1.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

Emily Albu is Professor of Classics at the University of California, Davis. Her research and publications investigate receptions of classical antiquity, the long twelfth century, and medieval historiography and cartography. She is an associate editor of the journal *Studies in Late Antiquity* and an advocate for public education, supporting the California History—Social Science Project as a member of its statewide advisory board. Her books include *The Normans in Their Histories: Propaganda, Myth, and Subversion* (Boydell and Brewer, 2001) and *The Medieval Peutinger Map: Imperial Roman Revival in a German Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). With Natalia Lozovsky she is completing a translation of the monastic chronicle of Ekkehard IV, *Casus Sancti Galli*, for the series Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library.

Glyn S. Burgess is Emeritus Professor of French and Senior Fellow at the University of Liverpool. He was educated at St. John's College, Oxford, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, and the Université de Paris (Sorbonne). He has worked extensively on the Old French narrative lay, his books including *The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Context* (University of Georgia Press, 1987), *The Old French Narrative Lay: An Analytical Bibliography* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), and *French Arthurian Literature IV: Eleven Old French Narrative Lays* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007, with Leslie C. Brook). He has also worked on the Legend of St. Brendan (e.g. *The Legend of St. Brendan: A Critical Bibliography*, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2000, with Clara Strijbosch) and the works of Wace (e.g. *Wace: The Roman de Rou*, St. Helier: Société Jersiaise, 2002).

Debbie Felton, Professor of Classics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, specializes in folklore of the ancient world. She is the author of *Haunted Greece and Rome: Ghost Stories from Classical Antiquity* (University of Texas Press, 1999). Her interdisciplinary work covering various aspects of monstrosity in the classical world has appeared in such journals as *Phoenix*, *The Classical Journal*, and *Folklore*, on such topics as “Monstrosity or Disability? Ancient Accounts of Accelerated Ageing” (2012), “Were Vergil's Harpies Menstruating?” (2013), and “Witches, Disgust, and Anti-Abortion Propaganda in Imperial Rome” (2016). Her forthcoming works include *Serial Killers of Classical Myth and History*, the edited volume *Landscapes of Dread in Classical Antiquity*, and the co-authored textbook *Classical Mythology*. Professor Felton is the editor of the journal *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*. She has also served as a consultant for *Sports Illustrated*, the Los Angeles-based *Punch Drunk Pictures*, and *Junior Skeptic Magazine*.

Andrew George studied Assyriology at the University of Birmingham (1973–1985). Since 1983 he has taught Akkadian and Sumerian language and literature at SOAS, University of London, where he is Professor of Babylonian. His specialisms are Babylonian literature, religion and intellectual culture. He has been elected Fellow of the British Academy (2006) and Honorary Member of the American Oriental Society (2012). His best-known books are a critical edition of the *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* for Oxford University Press (2003) and a prize-winning translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* for Penguin Classics (2000). Most recently he has published six volumes of new texts from cuneiform tablets now in Norway, *Babylonian Literary Texts* (2009), *Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions* (2011), *Babylonian Divinatory Texts* (2013), *Mesopotamian Incantations* (2016), *Assyrian Archival Texts* (2017), and *Old Babylonian Letters in the Schøyen Collection* (2017).

Marcus Hensel is an Assistant Professor of English and Co-Chair of the Division of English, Theatre, and Communications at Bethany College (KS), where he specializes in British literature and monster studies. Much of his attention has been strictly focused on Grendel in the Old English *Beowulf*, but his interests reach into unorthodox areas such as comics and videogames (“Unintended Consequences: Malaria and Orientalist Discourse in *Far Cry 2*” in *Well Played: A Journal on Video Games, Value and Meaning*, 5.1). A proud member of MEARCSTAPA, he is currently researching the overlapping philosophies of Germanic warriors and contemporary gang members, and working on a study of interdisciplinary pedagogy.

Susan M. Kim is Professor of English at Illinois State University, specializing in Old English literature. She co-authored, with Asa Simon Mittman, *Inconceivable Beasts: The Wonders of the East in the Beowulf Manuscript* (ACMRS, 2013) and co-edited with Katherine Ellison, *A Material History of Medieval and Early Modern Ciphers* (Routledge, 2018), and has published on the Old English *Judith*, the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, *Beowulf*, and the *Wonders of the East*. Current projects include *This Language, a River*, co-authored with K. Aaron Smith (forthcoming from Broadview), and a continuing collaboration with Asa Simon Mittman on the texts, images, and material of the Franks Casket.

Anna Kłosowska is Professor of French at Miami University, author of *Queer Love in the Middle Ages* (2005) and editor of Madeleine de l'Aubespine's *Selected Poems* (2007). She published several edited volumes and special issues of journals, as well as over 30 articles, primarily on queer studies. Her next book is on the representation of black women in French manuscript and print culture from the Middle Ages to Louis XIV. She is currently working on manuscript representations of black Sappho, Andromeda, Cleopatra, Queen of Sheba, and Petrarch's Black Lady.

Gwendolyne Knight is a doctoral candidate at Stockholm University's History Department. Her research interests include anthropological approaches to magic and the supernatural, intersections of magic and medicine and representations of the mind and cognition, including dreams and dreaming. She works primarily with Anglo-Saxon England and early medieval Ireland, with additional interests in Old Norse. Her current doctoral project, "Broken Order: Shapeshifting as Social Image in Early Medieval Britain and Ireland," explores the cultural functions of metamorphosis.

R. M. Liuzza is Professor of English at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He is the author of a two-volume edition of the Old English version of the Gospels for the Early English Text Society (Oxford University Press, 1994 and 2000) and more recently, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: An Edition and Study of Texts in London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A.iii* (Boydell & Brewer, 2010). He is a General Editor of the *Broadview Anthology of British Literature*. His collection of translations, *Old English Poetry: An Anthology*, was published by Broadview Press in 2014 as a complement to his translation of *Beowulf*, published in a second edition in 2012. He is the author of more than three dozen scholarly essays and reviews.

Christy M. McCarter is a doctoral candidate at Purdue University where she studies medieval literatures and the history of the book. Her dissertation focuses on the unique relationship between material and textual aspects of book-making represented in late medieval English narratives. Other ongoing projects, including archival tracking and the creation of digital editions, extend this question into the contemporary state of textual production, considering how changes in the materiality of texts influence a shift in the relationships between people and their books across time.

Asa Simon Mittman is Professor and Chair of Art and Art History at California State University, Chico. He is author of *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (2006), co-author with Susan Kim of *Inconceivable Beasts: The Wonders of the East in the Beowulf Manuscript* (2013), and author and co-author of many articles on monstrosity and marginality in the Middle Ages, including pieces on Satan (*Gesta*, with Kim) and "race" in the Middle Ages (*postmedieval*). He co-edited *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (2012), and is the founding president of MEARCSTAPA. He is currently editing a volume on *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World* (Palgrave) with Richard H. Godden. Mittman and Sherry Lindquist are co-curating *Terrors, Aliens and Wonders* at The Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum. Mittman is an active (and founding) member of the Material Collective, and a regular contributor to the MC group blog.

Britta Spann holds a PhD in English from the University of Oregon and an MA in Classical Languages, Literatures, and Cultures from the University of Kentucky, where she also earned a Graduate Certificate in Latin Studies and completed a thesis on Ovid's late elegiac work. Her current scholarly projects focus on the intertextual relationships between the epics of Homer and Virgil and the work of contemporary American women poets.

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Renée Ward is Senior Lecturer in the School of English and Journalism at the University of Lincoln. Her primary area of research concerns liminal figures in medieval romance and outlaw tales, and she has interests in medievalism, especially in the romance and young adult fantasy genres. Her published works includes articles on Middle English romances such as *Lybeaus Desconus*, *Octavian*, and *William of Palerne*, and she is currently preparing a book manuscript on werewolves in medieval romance. She has also published widely on the medievalism of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, and on the Victorian children's writer Eleanora Hervey.