THE BETTER TO SEE YOU WITH: REVEALING A HERO'S

MONSTERHOOD THROUGH VILLAINS

by

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"Oh, grandmother, what big ears you have!"

"The better to hear you with."

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"Oh grandmother, what big hands you have!"

"The better to grab you with."

"But, grandmother, what a dreadful big mouth you have!"

"The better to eat you with!"

And no sooner had the wolf spoken than he bounded out of bed and

gobbled up poor Little Red Cap.

> -*Little Red Cap* by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1819)

Martin Hallet and Barbara Karasek, in the concise edition of *Folk & Fairy Tales*, ask why "Grandmother, what big teeth you have!" is "one of the most anticipated and familiar moments in all of Western literature, let alone fairy tale?" (21). The line follows a string of parallel exclamations outlining what it means to be the typical, 19th century, cottage-bound grandmother. Little Red Cap's grandmother is characterized by smallness in body contrasting to the wolf's bigness. Ears, eyes, hands, mouth: the wolf has a distinctive physical appearance corresponding with four of the five senses. His capacity for perception is heightened by the bigness of his sensory faculties. Although anthropomorphic, he is an animal uninhibited by societal norms or moral standards— detached from the perceived rules of engagement in human society in which reasoning consciousness is labeled immoral for practicing cannibalism. So what does it mean to be

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the wolf? To be the wolf is to be the villain: an evil, monstrous, antagonizing force, which exposes the hero as moral. This thesis will study heroes, in their cultural *Otherness*, and surprisingly examine them as monsters perpetually struggling against a culture that is seeking to unmask their monsterhood.

The giant leap from hero to monster occurs through smaller theoretical steps. Monster theorists Stephen T. Asma and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen read monsters as cultural hopes and fears made manifest. Cultures build a society and establish norms, or boundaries, that demarcate morality: what is "good" and "bad" for the collective. Hegel's master-slave dialectic—marked by master and slave morality and their will to power— necessitates the distinction between good and bad, and the establishment of a binary forces an association between two monstrous *Others*: hero and villain. The hero, who is masked either by cultural acceptance or sometimes by a physical cowl or hood, is a monster who has been welcomed into the culture as the protector of its boundaries following the arrival of a cultural norm-breaking, monstrous villain. The hero comes to represent moral "goodness" while the villain's appearance signals the unmasking of the hero's "super" embodiment of goodness. It is monster against monster in a battle sure to raze a culture's moral fiber no matter who wins.

Hero and "super" typically go hand in hand. "Super"-human strength is a common characteristic of heroes. In studying heroines in ancient Greek myth, Deborah Lyons notes that ancient Greek heroes typically had the following: "heroic or divine parentage; a close relationship […] with a divinity in myth; ritual connection with a divinity […]; a tradition or evidence of a *heroon* (hero-shrine) or tomb, sacrificial offerings, or other ritual observance" (11). But strength, and where that strength derives

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from, is not the only necessary prerequisite to hero-dom.[1] Using Uri Margolin's three

dimensions of identity, the hero can be set apart from a culture he/she inhabits by any of

the following traits: "physical; behavioral […] and communicative; and mental" (72-3).

The hero's identity is limited by what is Thinkable,[2] but does not require performing

great physical or intellectual feats. However, the hero must, necessarily, be different—yet

within reason—when compared to a culture's everyday citizen. Heroes must reach almost

divine status while constantly maintaining a connection to their previous status as citizen.

But what happens when a hero becomes too "super" and tumbles past the realm of what

is Thinkable? The hero does not become the wolf in "Little Red Cap," existing on the

outskirts of human decency—bent on exposing the heroes that follow them. In surpassing

the boundary of what is morally Thinkable, the hero becomes a monster.

The hero does not become the wolf, a villain. In 2008, *The Telegraph* compiled a

list of the 50 greatest villains in history. Their list of the best of the worst acknowledges

the difficulty in labeling villians, as not all villains are "coal-black embodiments of the

principle of evil." The modern word "villains" derives from the Latin "villanus,"

meaning "one attached to a villa or farmhouse" (The British Library Board). Around

1303, *villanus* adapted two English spellings and definitions: 1) a *villain,* a low-born,

base-minded rustic; 2) a *villein*, one of the class of serfs in the feudal system. Rustics, or

country people, and serfs are at the lowest echelon of normative society. "Social and

political forces" shifted the meaning of the word to "signify illegal activities" (The

British Library Board). Labeling contemporary subjects as villains is a task muddled by

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[1] Etymologically, hero-dom is the state or condition (-dom) of being a hero.
[2] Uri Margolin uses the word "possible" here. I, instead, chose to reference Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's concept of the "Thinkable" to connect her three dimensions of identity to a subsequent reference to *Monster Theory*.

shifts in time and place; what may be villainous to one person may be righteous to another. But the contemporary villain occupies the ever-shifting position on the outskirts of a culture, engaging in activities deemed inappropriate—only at times illegal—for members of normative society.

Neither heroes nor villains are inherently monstrous. But they share overlapping qualities, as discussed by Cohen in "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," with what goes bump in the night. Phobias, repulsion and attraction, the inhuman, the *Unthinkable*, the unmanageable, the literal and the symbolic—these are common sources of monsters according to Stephen T. Asma. All of these sources align nicely with Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. A brief explanation of each source provides a foundation for understanding Cohen's seven theses.

Citing Darwinism, Asma suggests modern arachnophobia is the result of evolution. If the fear of spiders stems from below the stratum of culture, then it may find its roots in African prehistory. Avoiding the eight-legged monster may have hardwired early *homo sapiens* to believe "spiders=bad," creating a phobia and subsequently helping the species survive into the 21st century. Mass collections of strange yet intriguing evolutionary side effects like the American Mutter Museum or Ripley's Believe It or Not reveal a simultaneous repulsion and attraction to the extraordinary. The American Mutter Museum invites you to "become Disturbingly Informed" by physical pieces of Albert Einstein's brain and human bones depicting the evolution of human birth. Ripley's Believe It or Not prides itself on its "wow" factor: its website states about their San Antonio, Texas location, "Authentic shrunken heads, two-headed animals and, a 19th century vampire killing kit only scratches the surface of what's behind the doors of

Ripley's." Onlookers are commonly urged not to tap the glass, because everyone has the capacity to become monstrous: a "term […] often applied to human beings who have, by their own horrific actions, abdicated their humanity" (8).

When the monster is neither conceivable nor relatable to humans, it becomes Unthinkable; who or what is monstrous is a matter of cultural perception. Unmanageable monsters are not always evil; they often fit into the "tragic archetype of the misunderstood outcast" and might be called "accidental monsters" (12-3). Asma assigns this archetype to the Golem of Prague. Initially created to protect a Jewish populace from anti-Semitic acts of aggression, the Golem is "strong and powerful" but "stupid" (12). It is unable to perform its duties correctly and ends up accidently harming the culture it was created to protect. Its body is subsequently shut down by a rabbi and sealed away in the attic of the Altneuschul temple in Prague. The Golem is situated on the outskirts of the culture that engendered it for its unintentional "bad" behavior.

Monster derives from *monstrum*: a Latin word derived from the root *monere*, or to warn. The monster is an omen; it is a metaphor for human hopes and fears. The monster is, as Cohen says, "an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place [signifying] something other than itself" (4). Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* offers seven theses that serve to identify typical characteristics of monsters. Not every monster fits into all of Cohen's seven theses, but each thesis provides ways to interpret cultural boundaries and the breaking of them in the formation of monsters. Besides causing mayhem and destruction, monsters reveal societal norms, ideologies, concerns, and desires, which in a sense become cultural labels of "good" or "bad"—"heroic" or "villainous." Cohen's theses insist we read monsters, both the heroic

and the villainous, as products of the culture that engenders them.

Monsters are identified as a cultural creation in Thesis I, "The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body." The material monster is a metaphor for a culture's hopes and fears, representing something other than what it is. The material monster escapes before we can separate tenor—its meaning—from vehicle—its body. As will be discussed in chapter one, Grendel's body descends from the kin-killing Cain. Anglo-Saxon culture, as depicted within *Beowulf*, places grave importance on maintaining bonds amongst tribes. Killing kin acts in direct defiance of upholding unity. Grendel's body sins against Anglo-Saxon culture. Beowulf, a representative of Anglo-Saxon culture, must defeat Grendel to fulfill the expectations of Beowulf's warrior-to-ruler bond with the king, Hrothgar.

There is an implication that heroes and villains are destined to clash forever in Thesis II, "The Monster Always Escapes." Monsters never suffer one climactic death. The monster *always* reappears someplace else. Its body is different each time—tending often towards common phobias. Stephen King's novel *It* (1986) reinvigorated coulrophobia, or the fear of clowns, through the sharp-toothed, child-killing character of Pennywise The Dancing Clown. The monster reappeared in 2016 through sensationalized clown sightings across the world.

The monster's inability to fit into any culturally or socially constructed category is explored in Thesis III, "The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Chaos." The monster appears to upset binaries and "demand a radical rethinking of boundary and normality" (6). In illogically defying norms, it invites onlookers to perceive the world differently. In the fairy tale *Jack and the Beanstalk*, Jack steals from the giant to radically improve his family's quality of life. With the giant's gold coins, golden egg laying hen, and magic

harp, Jack introduces commodities to a culture unable to replicate them. What is

categorically logical is complicated by magic, and the giant's goods propel Jack's family

out of what is socially categorized as poverty.

The monster is delineated to a position on the Outside[3] in Thesis IV, "The

Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference." The monster is *Other*, or "difference made

flesh" (7). Hegel's formation of the *Other* lies in the self recognizing its difference. The

self must first recognize its individual consciousness by being recognized by another's

self-consciousness. The two "*recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* each other,"

fully aware they are being perceived beyond their control (qtd. Melchert 474). What lies

outside of the self, separate from the self's conscious control, is the *Other*. The

differences embodied by the monster tend to be revealed culturally, politically,

economically, racially, and/or sexually. In confronting the monster's difference, its author

comes face-to-face with the complications surrounding the arbitrary ascribing of

"inhuman" status to monsters. Difference lies outside the self in the form of the *Other*,

but the self defines itself using difference. The monster demands that its author explain

its existence—"and bear witness to the fact that it could have been constructed

Otherwise" (Cohen 12).

The monster is presented as a grotesque, physical demarcation of the Thinkable in

Thesis V, "The Monster Polices the Border of the Possible." The monster both invites

and warns against exploration past the boundary separating the known known—things we

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[3] Cohen argues the Outside, or "the Beyond," originates from within a culture but is
distinct and distant from it.

know that we know—and the known unknown—things we know we do not know.[4] The glass separating the Thinkable from the Unthinkable is inconceivably thin; to step beyond the boundary risks being attacked by the monster or to become a monster oneself. In Book 1, Canto 1 of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*, Redcrosse the knight ventures into the Wandering Wood despite his lady companion's wise words of warning. The invitation to prove his mettle as a knight prompts Redcrosse to step beyond the boundary of the Thinkable and challenge the monster waiting just on the other side: Errour.

The monstrous correlates with socially forbidden practices in Thesis VI, "Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire." A monster's "evil" deeds are often set in opposition to a larger community, and said community enforces laws against and punishes monsters for their collective "good." But these same creatures can both repulse and attract, fueling escapist fantasies. Those on the interior hate the monster while also envying the freedom it has from their community's social norms. Categorizing monsters as "evil" allows "good" people to live vicariously through the *Other*—experiencing "fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion" safely expressed "in [the] clearly delimited and permanently liminal space" of the monster's body (17). The monster awakens us to these pleasures of the *personal* body—over the abstract metaphysical body of the community. The monster is the "alter ego"—the me who is not, and yet is, me.

An ancestral connection between Us and Them, heroes and villains, humans and monsters, is established in Thesis VII, "The Monster Stands at the Threshold…of

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[4] On February 12th, 2002, then U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld gave a news briefing addressing the war in Iraq. In a response to a reporter, Rumsfeld says, "There are no 'knowns.' There are thing[s] we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know."

Becoming." Monsters are a culture's children. They are existences on the periphery asking to be seen—to be revealed.

Whereas Cohen argues that culture casually engenders monsters, Hegel's master-slave dialectic logically necessitates them. The master-slave dialectic is a hierarchical system that positions one person over another. The master's absolute freedom to dominate his slave is dependent on the slave's subservience. The master needs the slave—any given culture—to look up and say, "You are my master," to become the master. In this, the slave must become self-aware of his/her own status as slave before he/she can acknowledge the master as master. The slave acquires individuality on his/her own, without the help of the master, realizing he/she made the master through his/her subservience. In turn, the master becomes subservient to the slave's individuality. In terms of *Monster Theory*, the monster is enslaved to a culture's perception of the monster; one cannot exist without the *Other*. The master cannot exist without the slave and vice versa. Nietzsche notes a similar relationship between the master and the slave's formation of morality.

According to Nietzsche, "to be human is to have a morality" (Solomon and Higgins 104). All cultures have values, ideals, taboos, practical guidelines, rules, and laws; as participants of culture, humans collect from this list to form individualized morality. Morality is a construct following no established rules, prohibitions, or ideologies; it is specific to the virtues of an individual and a community. Nietzsche likens "slave morality" to herd morality, or "thinking of oneself as a good citizen and following the general rules rather than one's particular values" (108). The slave does not become who he/she is, but who everyone else expects him/her to be. However, the morality of the

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master is rooted in an ethics of excellence.

"Master morality" is made up of the values, ideals, and practices preferred by the master—whether socially acceptable or not. A master's meaning of "good" refers to what is beneficial, flattering, and pleasuring to him/her. "Bad" refers to deficiencies of good— for example, what is disadvantageous to what is *Other* than the self. A master gets what he/she wants, but what he/she wants can be "good." The virtue of slaves "lies not in being themselves but in not being the *Other*, the master, the privileged, the oppressor" (111). To the master, the slave is in a state of destitution. Whereas slave resentment acts as poison, the master, self-assured, expresses itself with abandon. Although the master/monster cannot exist without the slave/culture, the slave's limited and restrictive consciousness is not ultimately superior to the master's consciousness.

The master's superiority is rooted in a will to power. Nietzsche presupposes humans are always trying to bring other humans to heel under their power. The "will to power" is "a life-affirming view, in that creatures affirm their instincts to acquire power and dominance," resulting in "lasting pleasure and satisfaction [in] being able to live according to one's instincts" (Denneson). The master's/monster's will to power is the cause of his/her self-serving morality and his/her oppression of the slave/culture.

"Walk properly like a good little girl, and don't leave the path," Little Red Cap's mother tells her at the offset of her journey (Hallet and Karasek 29). Whether remembering to exchange pleasantries or avoiding the nooks and crannies of the wood, Little Red Cap promises to do "everything right" (29). A hunter may save her and her grandmother from the masquerading wolf's digestive juices, as in the Brothers Grimm version of the Little Red Riding Hood folktale, but Little Red Cap is undoubtedly the

narrative's hero(ine). "Everyone loved" Little Red Cap (29). Her nickname comes from her grandmother's gift of a "little red velvet cap" (29), changing her from an everyday citizen into a symbol. Little Red Cap, disguised by her cowl, is her culture's representative of moral goodness.

The wolf is the monster, perceived as "bad" or "villainous" by culture, policing the outskirts of culture: the wood. Little Red Cap's grandmother is a citizen left on the outskirts to fend for herself—"too weak" to leave her bed—and is immediately "gobbled up" (29). Little Red Cap, seduced by the wolf's promise of beautiful flowers, ventures further into the wood. Upon arriving at her grandmother's house, she feels unusually frightened. The wolf's ability to speak her culture's language and wear their common dress pushes the boundaries of the Thinkable; how many grandmothers are monstrous wolves in disguise?

Little Red Cap's fearful suspicions trigger the most anticipated line of the folktale: "But, grandmother, what a dreadful big mouth you have!" One of the culture's representatives of moral "good" is devoured, internalized by the monstrous body—or perhaps erased completely from the realms of what is Thinkable. The villain reveals that the hero's generosity, which led her from the path established by society, is naive. In a world filled with bloodthirsty, calculating beasts, the hero's lack of cautious suspicion and overall self-awareness threatens her culture's survival. No longer propagating slave morality's good, she becomes difference. She is a female who has strayed from the straight and narrow path the established society has laid out for her. Little Red Cap inadvertently possesses monstrous possibilities.

This thesis will focus on other literary heroes, villains, and the textual cultures

that engendered them. The first chapter presents a monster, Grendel, created in opposition to the mead-hall culture of the hero, Beowulf, in the epic poem *Beowulf* and John Gardner's *Grendel* (1971). But fighting the monster created to set himself apart from the everyday Anglo-Saxon, to assert himself as a hero, reveals Beowulf as a stranger on earth, *Other*, monstrous. The second chapter establishes a villain, Errour, as the physical form of a hero's, Redcrosse's, flaw. Book I of *The Faerie Queene*'s villain is a fragment of the hero, the hero's villainous self. The hero is the villain; the hero is the monster he must slay. The third chapter examines a villain, the Joker, as the hero's, Batman's, Id. *The Dark Knight* and *Batman: The Killing Joke* pit Bruce Wayne against Gotham's monstrous aggregations of mob bosses, street thugs, and indistinguishable goons. Monstrous acts appear to be the only way for Batman to finally defeat his villainous reflection, the Joker; if he is to defeat the monster, then he must become a monster himself.

Recall that monsters can aspire to both "good" and "bad"—"noble" and "villainous" deeds; it is a culture's slave morality that separates the heroes from the villains. This thesis cannot claim to know every facet of the cultures represented within the works discussed. It will scratch the surface of every work's extensively rich biographical and historical context. But I do hope it will situate the reader into the shoes of a visitor of Hrothgar's mead-hall, a passerby in the Wandering Wood, and an average Gothamite, to consider the monsters pushing at the boundaries of imaginative cultures and reconsider the roles of heroes and monsters within fictitious spaces.

II. BEOWULF AS BEOWULF IN *BEOWULF* AND *GRENDEL*

"Well? What are you waiting for? I shot a defenseless girl. I terrorized an old

man. Why don't you kick the hell out of me and get a standing ovation from the

public gallery?"

-Alan Moore, *Batman: The Killing Joke*

"I am Beowulf!" A computer-generated Ray Winstone asserts manly force against

a mead-hall's double doors, chopping off Grendel's arm with the sheer force of door

against monster flesh. Robert Zemeckis's feature length film *Beowulf* (2007) includes a

talking Grendel, Angelina Jolie as Grendel's mother, Hrothgar's suicide, and a line of

kings plagued by monstrous children—the dragon is Beowulf's son. The artistic liberties

taken by writers Neil Gaiman and Roger Avary offer a sexier vision of *Beowulf's*

fictional portrayal of Anglo-Saxon culture. I do not mention Hollywood's version of the

fight between Beowulf and Grendel to claim "the book was better than the movie." I

mention Zemeckis's film to highlight Beowulf's assertion of self.

Ray Winstone's "I am Beowulf!" forces the viewer to associate slaying monsters,

wooing women, and a general sense of naked shamelessness with Beowulf's identity as a

hero. Similarly, the epic poem *Beowulf* and John Gardner's *Grendel* (1971) create an

association between a man and his actions; to be a hero is to commit heroic deeds.

Beowulf must face the monster created in opposition to the culture in which he seeks

recognition as a hero. Grendel's attacks antagonize the heart of Anglo-Saxon culture: the

mead-hall. But fighting the monster created to set himself apart from the everyday Anglo-

Saxon, to assert himself as a hero, reveals Beowulf as a stranger on earth, *Other*,

monstrous.

In Thesis I of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, "The Monster's Body Is a Cultural Body," culture includes the "customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group" (OED). Grendel's attack on Heorot is an attack on the place where the Spear-Danes practice culture. Hrothgar built Heorot as a place where "he would share everything / with young and old that God had given him," and it was soon regarded as "the greatest of halls" (*Beowulf* 71-2, 78). R.M. Liuzza's footnote on "Heorot" defines it as "Hart"; "an object recovered from the burial-mound at Sutton Hoo, perhaps a royal insignia, is surmounted by the image of a hart," a deer (59). The Beowulf Poet implies Hrothgar's enemies will inevitably set upon the mead-hall as the heart of the *comitatus*. Heorot is the literal heart of Anglo-Saxon culture as fictionally depicted within *Beowulf*.

Stephen Pollington argues the "imaginary world of the Old English poets is the world of the mead-hall itself" (19). The term "mead-hall" relates to the traditional culture "concerning hospitality offered to strangers, informal entertainment and the maintenance of wider social relationships" (19). Old English words that denote a "hall" include *heall*, *reced*, *sele*/*salor*/*seld*, and *ærn*—meaning a "covered place," describing a place with a roof, derivative from the roots "sit" or "settle," and "[denoting] a resting place where things are put away" respectively (20). The mead-hall is thus conveyed as a public space for the community to engage in culture.

Excavations of fifth to seventh century Anglo-Saxon settlements reveal "often one building, larger and more firmly planted in the landscape than the rest," "characterized as the 'hall'" (20). The importance of consuming alcohol is inherent in the compound *mead*-hall. Kinsmen were expected to participate "in public ceremonies in which special foods

and drinks were consumed in a highly structured and ritualised manner," reflecting "a conspicuous statement of 'involvement' [and] belonging to the host community" (21). Visitors were also required to partake; when the lord formally invited visitors to his hall, they temporarily become fictive members of the community. Integration into the Anglo-Saxon culture, the mead-hall, would require one to party like a Dane.

Beowulf's assertion of self initially disrupts the cultural norms of Heorot. Thesis III of *Monster Theory*, "The Monster Is the Harbinger of Category Chaos," says the monster is dangerous because it is "a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" (Cohen 6). The established binaries in Anglo-Saxon culture are stranger and kinsman. Upon his first appearance on the Spear-Danes' coast, Beowulf occupies the forms of both monstrous stranger and trusted kinsman, disrupting the established binary. A thane, "whose duty it was to watch the sea-cliffs," guards the particular stretch of beach Beowulf alights upon (*Beowulf* 230). In Anglo-Saxon England, a thane is "a man who held land granted by the king or by a military nobleman, ranking between an ordinary freeman and a hereditary noble" (OED).

The thane simultaneously reacts to Beowulf as a human warrior and a stranger, not just to the land of the Spear-Danes but as stranger than anyone else on earth. He speaks a "challenge" to the intruders fully adorned in "ready battle gear":

No her cuolicor   cuman ongunnon

lindhæbbende,   ne ge leafnesword

guofremmendra   gearwe ne wisson,

maga gemedu   Næfre ic maran geseah

eorla ofer eorþan,   ðonne is eower sum   (*Beowulf* 244-8)

[Never more openly have there ever come shield-bearers here, nor have you heard any word of leave from our warriors or consent of kinsmen. I have never seen a greater earl on earth than that one among you.]

<div style="text-align:center">Nu ic eower sceal</div>

frumcyn witan,   ær ge fyr heonan (251-2)

[Now I must know your lineage, lest you go hence.]

Hrothgar's thane is rightly skeptical of these unfamiliar "shield-bearers." Warriors arriving on the shores of a land under a twelve-year siege by a monster pose an immediate threat to Hrothgar's reign. Beowulf appears like an unknown stranger, but his appearance is that of a known kinsman; this duality disrupts the binaries of Anglo-Saxon culture. The thane thus challenges Beowulf to legitimize the self as kinsman—a singular self.

Beowulf's lineage grounds him in the realm of the Thinkable. The monster exists beyond the boundaries of culture, or the Thinkable, according to *Monster Theory*'s sixth thesis, "Fear of the Monster Is Really a Kind of Desire." Beowulf claims he is the son of a "noble commander named Ecgtheow" (263). Hrothgar affirms Beowulf's "noble appearance," as described by his sea guarding thane, and parentage by welcoming the man he knew "when he was nothing but a boy" (251, 371). Hrothgar later reveals Beowulf is a debtor to his throne; Hrothgar "pays the *wergild*[5] for the man Ecgtheow killed, and Ecgtheow swears an oath of loyalty and support" that is passed down to Beowulf (Liuzza 83). Beowulf's lineage provokes the Danes' reclassification of his status as a stranger in Heorot. This is validated by access to the king, which "was crucially

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[5] *Wergild* is "a sum of money paid by a guilty party as satisfaction to the family of the person who was injured or killed" (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia).

important, given the central place he held in political, economic and legal administration" (Pollington 22). Hrothgar's kingly affirmation sheds Beowulf's status as stranger. And Beowulf becomes a rightful resident of Hrothgar's mead-hall.

Beowulf's self is in a state of liminality; he is no longer a stranger, but he is not yet a hero. When Beowulf claims he will cleanse Heorot of its monster, Grendel, Unferth—of the firm belief no other man "on this middle-earth should care for glory / under the heavens, more than himself"—questions Beowulf's boast (*Beowulf* 503-5). Unferth recalls that Beowulf was once "in a swimming contest on the open sea" with his childhood companion Breca (507). He goes on to suggest Beowulf risked his life for pride and a foolish boast and lost then. Now, Beowulf has arrived at a similar dangerous impasse. Beowulf, however, plans on asserting self, and his hero-dom, the same way he did in his swimming contest with Breca: defeating what is monstrous.

Like Beowulf, Grendel's assertion of self disrupts the cultural norms of Heorot. The daily "joyful din / loud in the hall, with the harp's sound, / [and] the clear song of the scop" reduce Grendel to a wretched state (*Beowulf* 88-9). For the "grim spirit" Grendel, the voices remind him of that which he is not: stranger, kinsman, human (102). Thus "that unholy creature / grim and ravenous […] took from their rest thirty thanes / […] to seek out his abode with his fill of slaughter" (121-5). Grendel, too, calls for a reclassification of binary thinking; the monster appears to "problematize the clash" of the stranger and kinsman "extremes" of Anglo-Saxon culture demonstrated in Beowulf's dual assertion of self (Cohen 6). Grendel's appearance necessitates the hero. He is a narrative tool that introduces potential hero status for the unknown yet known man who can overcome his supernatural existence and slay him.

Grendel's lineage grounds him in the realm of the Unthinkable. The Unthinkable is what lies beyond the boundaries of culture; it is a realm unbound by the importance Anglo-Saxons place in assertion of the self through boasting superior strength and lineage. As a monster, Grendel demands "a 'system' allowing polyphony, mixed response […], and resistance to integration" (Cohen 7). As "Caines cynne," or of Cain's kin, Grendel is associated with the extraneous. Grendel's lineage separates him from the "lordly people" who "lived in joy" (*Beowulf* 99).

Grendel's lineage reminds the Scyldings of their fear of kin-slaying, an Unthinkable action. The monster's body "literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy," "giving [it] life and an uncanny independence" in Thesis I of *Monster Theory* (Cohen 4). In the biblical story, Cain and Abel are the sons of Adam and Eve. The siblings brought offerings to their Lord, but Cain's offering was less favored than Abel's. Cain kills Abel, and God decrees Cain shall wander until he reaches the Land of Nod— where he settles and starts a family (Genesis 4:16). In his research into the Land of Nod's Hebrew etymology, Howard Jacobson discovered that the Hebrew root of Nod means "'to rest' and is commonly used [to mean the] 'rest' of sleep (and death)" (91). Jacobson observes that the connection between nod and rest is, more specifically, sleep (91)—such as when a person *nods* off. Heorot's "joyful din / loud in the hall" (*Beowulf* 88-9) disrupts the kin-slayer Grendel in the distant land of sleep, and the Unthinkable monster descends upon Heorot to remind man of his sins.

As an existence beyond the boundaries of the Thinkable, Grendel *others* him*self* from Heorot's culture. Compared to Grendel, Heorot's partying inhabitants "knew no sorrow / or human misery" (119-20). Grendel denies Hrothgar's thanes the Anglo-Saxon

"warrior's pursuit of glory" (Kundu 2). In his study of Anglo-Saxon war-culture, Pritha

Kundu discovered "the pagan Germanic warriors […] sought to win glory by doing great

deeds in battle" (3). Grendel attacks the heart of Anglo-Saxon culture, Heorot, under the

cover of night, stealing away thanes to the slaughter. The Spear-Danes, snatched and

killed in their sleep, are not offered a battle by which to win glory for their culture; they

instead are under siege by a monstrous *Other* who neglects the norms of war-culture.

James F. Doubleday argues the poem's language used following Grendel's

repeated invasions envision him "as the nocturnal king," who *rixode* or ruled over the

empty mead-hall and coopted the Anglo-Saxon culture of glory by battle (8). Liuzza's

translation of Grendel's nights alone in the mead-hall imply he has seized it through

military force:

> heardra hynoa;   Heorot eardode,
>
> sincfage sel   sweartum nihtum (*Beowulf* 166-7)
>
> [He occupied Heorot, the jewel-adorned hall, in the dark nights.]

Whereas Doubleday translates *eardode* as "inhabited," Liuzza's translation of *eardode* is

"occupy" (Doubleday 8). Because of the warlike qualities of Grendel's takeover,

Liuzza's translation better coincides with Grendel's perceived reign over Heorot.

Now Hrothgar's visiting kinsman, Beowulf takes Heorot back with the same

monstrous behavior Grendel gained it with: sneaking about in the night. Yet Beowulf's

boast places him at the boundaries of Anglo-Saxon culture, protecting it from monstrous

threats. In Thesis V of *Monster Theory*, "The Monster Polices the Borders of the

Possible," the monster prevents mobility past the social geography of culture. To travel

the exterior of culture is to risk attack by some monstrous border patrol or (worse) to

become monstrous oneself" (Cohen 12). The epic poem's narrative does not conclude

upon Grendel's death; it is Beowulf's duty to continue policing the boundaries of Anglo-

Saxon culture, protecting the community from vengeful mothers and gold-hoarding

dragons. Hrothgar proceeds to toast to Beowulf's name during the next night's festivities:

> Nu ic, Beowulf, þec,
>
> secg[a] betsta,   me for sunu wylle
>
> freogan on ferhþe;   heald forð tela
>
> niwe sibbe.   Ne bið þe [n]ænigre gad
>
> worolde wilna,   þe ic geweald hæbbe. (*Beowulf* 946-50)

["Now I will cherish you, Beowulf, best of men, like a son in my heart; hold well

henceforth your new kinship. You shall have no lack of worldly goods I can

bestow."]

> Þu þe self hafast
>
> dædum gefremed,   þæt þin [dom] lyfað
>
> awa to aldre. (*Beowulf* 953-5)

["Now by yourself you have done such deeds that your fame will endure always

and forever."]

Despite being strange and on the threshold of monstrosity, Beowulf's name is *now*

imbued with the glory of his battle-deed; he is a true kinsman and hero to Heorot.

Grendel's status as militant outsider similarly places him at the boundaries of

Anglo-Saxon culture, reminding men that they descend from and have potential for

monstrous deeds. Cain was banished to the Land of Nod for killing Abel, and Grendel as

kin of Cain serves as a reminder of this sin. In response to Unferth's suspicions about his

swimming competition turned monster hunt, Beowulf implies Unferth has committed the similar sin of fratricide:

> "No ic wiht fram þe
>
> swylcra searoniða secgan hyrde,
>
> billa brogan. Breca næfre git
>
> æt heaðolace, ne gehwæþer incer,
>
> swa deorlice, dæd gefremede
>
> fagum sweordum —no ic þæs [fela] gylpe—
>
> þeah ðu þinum broðrum to banan wurde." (*Beowulf* 581-9)
>
> ["I have never heard a word about any such contest concerning you, such sword-panic. In the play of battle Breca has never—nor you either—done a deed so bold and daring with his decorated blade—I would never boast of it!—though you became your brothers' killer."]

Unferth's name is forever tarnished by his trip across the boundary and encounter with his monstrous possibilities. Grendel mirrors the Anglo-Saxon norm of kin-killing. Stephen T. Asma says that "to be a monster is to be an omen" (13); likewise, according to Cohen, Grendel is a monster of prohibition, which calls "horrid attention to the borders that cannot—*must* not—be crossed" (Cohen 13). Since access to the king was important in Anglo-Saxon culture, "the level of proximity to the king was probably indicated publicly by [the] seating arrangements" within the mead-hall (Pollington 22). Unferth sits at a place of power and respect at Hrothgar's feet (*Beowulf* 500). The general consensus after Beowulf speaks, however, is no one wants to be an Unferth. Unferth's sinful deed associates him with Grendel's monstrosities.

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Initially intended to garner fame as a hero, Beowulf's assertion of self is an assertion of *Other*ness. "The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference" is Thesis IV of *Monster Theory*. The monster is "difference made flesh, come to dwell among us" and "functions as the dialectical *Other*" (Cohen 8). The self, or the self-consciousness of itself as difference, develops when the self is simultaneously "acknowledged as such by another self-conscious being," an *Other*, and recognizes this acknowledgement (Melchert 473). Similarly, Grendel's *Other*ness as a monster beyond the Thinkable reveals Beowulf's *Other*ness. Beowulf uses the battle with Grendel to prove himself as superior to Hrothgar's thus far ineffective thanes, like Unferth, saying,

> "No ic me an herewæsmun   hnagran talige
>
> guþgeweorca,   þonne Grendel hine;
>
> forþan ic hine sweorde   swebban nelle,
>
> aldre beneotan,   þeah ic eal mæge." (*Beowulf* 677-80)
>
> ["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."]

Beowulf will deviate from an Anglo-Saxon's typical tool of defense and use his bare fists to kill Grendel—because Grendel does not use a sword, neither will Beowulf. This newest boast implies Beowulf's strength is on par with the supernatural strength of "a fiend from hell" (101). Grendel fears for his life during their battle, discovering "that he had never met on middle-earth, / in any region of the world, another man / with a greater handgrip" (750-4). In setting himself apart from his kinsman through super heroic action, Beowulf becomes a hero, engendered by culture, *Other*, and monstrous. But Beowulf's

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monstrous hero status is enabled only through Grendel's heroic status as monster.

The binary relationship between the hero and culture is captured by Hegel's master-slave dialectic. The master-slave dialectic establishes a hierarchy positioning one person, the master, over another, the slave. Yet the dialectic requires mutual recognition of another's self as consciousness dependent upon the self. The hero, master, must depend upon culture, the slave, to recognize his hero status.

In the poem *Beowulf*, Beowulf is a master. He acts according to Nietzschean master morality, "in which personal excellence is primary" (Solomon and Higgins 109). Becoming "who they are" is the goal of the masters' personal "values, ideals, and practices" (109-10). The masters get what they want, whether good or bad for the community, "simply because [not getting what they want] falls short of [their] own aspirations and ideals" (110). Beowulf does not consider the consequences for him of killing the monstrous Grendel; he has set himself up to continue the role of monstrous hero through the later slaying of Grendel's mother and the dragon. Beowulf only thinks about the immediate reward of killing Grendel: the assertion of himself as hero. For slave morality, in contrast, "the idea of becoming who you are is not particularly appealing" (110). The slave sees himself as a victim who, "in a perverse yet readily comprehensible sense" values "not getting what [he] wants" (111). One would imagine Grendel ascribes to master morality; he kills because he wants to. But John Gardner's *Grendel* reimagines Grendel as a slave within the master-slave dialectic. Grendel is a slave to the culture that has engendered him. Grendel is the oppressed, and Beowulf—along with the Anglo-Saxon culture he boasts—is the oppressor.

The addition of Grendel's internal voice in Gardner's *Grendel* prompts the

modern reader to reevaluate Beowulf's status as hero. Grendel's use of the pronoun "I" transforms him into a reasoning, feeling, self-conscious being. Like Nietzsche's slave, Grendel sees himself as a victim of an uncaring world. Beyond the boundaries of the mead-hall, Grendel asks the sky,

> "Why can't these creatures discover a little dignity?" […] 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. […] I hate these brainless budding trees, these brattling birds. (Gardner 6)

Grendel shares the very human characteristics of the mead-hall's kinsman in all his unimpressed, obscene, and opinionated glory.

Despite his capacity for a human range of emotion, Grendel is an existence at the gates of difference both in Gardner's *Grendel* and the poem. In Thesis IV of *Monster Theory*, "The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference," the monster is "the incorporation of" the Unthinkable—"of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate" from within culture (Cohen 7). Grendel's voice reflects human, self-conscious culture. But Grendel's foreboding appearance denies an easy human association. Grendel is described as a "feond on helle," or fiend from hell, in *Beowulf* (100). Without further physical description, individual listeners/readers imagine the worst monster hell can spawn from its depths.

The Beowulf Poet further describes Grendel as an existence beyond the gates of culture by writing Grendel as "feond mancynnes," mankind's foe, and a "helle gast," or hellish spirit. Lars Malmberg argues such identification has a literary effect that polarizes "the opposing forces" of good and evil and makes "Grendel stand for evil and Beowulf

for good in the universal scheme of things" (243). Yet Gardner's Grendel immediately

rejects a devilish appearance entirely, saying, "Do not think my brains are squeezed shut,

like the ram's, by the roots of the horns" (6). Gardner thus dispels even the Beowulf

Poet's vague description; Grendel does not have horns like hell's spawn. Gardner's

Grendel remains physically indescribable. He is a "pointless, ridiculous monster" whose

arbitrary and free-floating form reveals "that difference is arbitrary," threatening "to

destroy not just individual members of a society, but the very cultural apparatus through

which individuality is constituted and allowed" (Gardner 6, Cohen 12). If Anglo-Saxon

mead-hall culture engendered a formless monster both in the poem and in Gardner's

Grendel, then what cultural fear or hope does Grendel represent?

Gardner's Grendel similarly asks for his raison d'etre, or the purpose of his

existence. "Why are we here": this is the question Grendel asks his mother, who forgoes

dissecting and pondering "the dusty mechanical bits of her miserable life's curse"

(Gardner 11). Breaking away, Grendel seeks the dragon's advice. The dragon's lecture[6]

culminates in a general assertion of the monster's purpose:

> 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 existence by which they learn to define themselves. […] You *are* mankind,
>
> or man's condition. (72-3)

A monster's purpose is to be slain for the sake of reaffirming the boundaries of culture

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[6] The dragon's following lecture is not in the poem, but it is Gardner's interpretation of
an aspect of Grendel's purpose as a monstrous character the poem invites. It is unclear if
Beowulf's original audience would have arrived at the dragon's conclusion.

and bestowing hero status upon the exemplary men who slay them. This purpose is inescapable, and the dragon's advice to Grendel is "to seek out gold and sit on it" (74). Grendel must wait for humans to catch up to, and eventually slay, him.

Gardner's *Grendel* concludes on the battle-deed between future hero eager to slay and monster waiting to be slain. Grendel's first impression of Beowulf is that, "as he spoke," he "seemed far away, as if, though polite, he were indifferent to all this—an outsider not only among the Danes but everywhere" (154). Beowulf's status as monstrous stranger pervades the poem like a Greek chorus. In an aforementioned passage, Hrothgar's thane says he has "never seen a greater earl on earth than" Beowulf (*Beowulf* 248). Unferth feels threatened by Beowulf's pursuit for glory, because no one "on this middle-earth should care for glory" more than himself (503-4). "Nowhere on middle-earth," Gardner's Grendel realizes, "have I encountered a grip like" Beowulf's (Gardner 168). The poem's Grendel feels a similar fear during his fight with Beowulf, for "he had never met on middle-earth, / in any region of the world, another man / with a greater handgrip" (*Beowulf* 750-4). Gardner's Grendel soon realizes why Beowulf appeared unlike any man on earth: "he was insane" (Gardner 162).

In Gardner's *Grendel*, Beowulf takes on a monstrous appearance during his fight with Grendel—a physical appearance that matches his monstrous, superheroic abilities in action in the poem. Beowulf has "terrible fiery wings," "flames slip out at the corners of his mouth," he hisses, and "he stretches his blinding white wings and breathes out fire" (169-72). Beowulf becomes the dragon that had warned Grendel, "In a billion billion billion years, everything will have come and gone several times, in various forms. Even I will be gone. A certain man will absurdly kill me" (70). Gardner's Beowulf is a visibly

monstrous hero. But the poem's Beowulf is also not merely a man. In the poem,

Beowulf's assertion of self is much like Ray Winstone's portrayal in Zemeckis's film as

he strives to add glory to his name. So who is Beowulf? "Most eager for fame" (*Beowulf*

3182), he is a monstrous hero whose difference was ironically revealed by his journey to

hero-dom.

III. REDCROSSE AS KNIGHT IN *THE FAERIE QUEENE*

"Ladies and Gentlemen! You've read about it in the papers! Now witness, before your very eyes, that most rare and tragic of nature's mistakes! I give you: the average man."

-Alan Moore, *Batman: The Killing Joke*

Beowulf's assertion of self as hero is rooted in an established lineage. His father Ecgtheow owed a debt to Hrothgar, allowing Beowulf to enter the mead-hall and eventually slay the monster Grendel. He proves his hero status again against Grendel's mother and a gold-hoarding dragon. Compared to this chapter's hero, Redcrosse, Beowulf begins his journey towards hero-dom with a name: Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow. Redcrosse begins his quest with a dream of knighthood and little awareness of self. It is no surprise his journey to becoming a hero is plagued by errancy.

The first book of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* centers on The Legend of the Knight of the Red Crosse. In his *Letter to Raleigh*, Spenser explains the history behind Redcrosse's adventure: the Faerie Queen holds her annual feast; a "tall clownish younge man" asks for a "boone," "that hee might haue the atchieument of any aduenture"; unable to refuse a wish during her feast, the Faerie Queen grants his wish; and Una arrives on a "white Asse" with adventure in tow (Hamilton 717). Redcrosse expresses his desire to challenge the dragon that holds Una's parents hostage. But his rustic appearance, along with the nap he takes on the floor of the Faerie Queen's hall, leaves much to be desired. Una issues him a test: if he wears the armor she brought with her well, then he will be her knight. The armor, "that is the armour of a Christian man" specified by *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians*, features a "bloudie" cross—a red cross

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(717). Una's test is based on appearances; in order to pass, the young man must look the part of a knight. Redcrosse must "seem" up to the task of achieving her adventure. Fortunately, his appearance is well liked by the lady, and the two plus a dwarf set off on the adventure detailed within the first book.

Unfortunately, the gentle knight immediately deviates from slaying dragons and saving royals to frolicking in foreboding caves. The promise of adventure nearer at hand drives Redcrosse to enter Errour's den, "full of fire and greedy hardiment" (FQ 1.1.14.1-3). Redcrosse willingly chases Errour's "endlesse traine" to prove himself as a true, monster-slaying hero. Errour, however, is a warning sign of Redcrosse's errancy: Redcrosse is the culture that engenders Errour. In this chapter, I suggest Redcrosse's murder of the monster is destruction of the villain without struggling with, and developing a conscious awareness of, what it represents for culture. He has yet to establish the boundaries of his cultural body before he slays the villain. The villain is a fragment of the hero: the hero's villainous self. The hero is the villain; the hero is the monster he must slay.

"Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide, / But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine, / Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine" is Errour's first description, depicting the fusion of the horrible and the feminine (FQ 1.1.14.6-9). When Redcrosse enters her den, he encounters her serpent half first. It is not the corruption of "womans shape" that is "most lothsom," "but" the latter association of the female with the monster that disgusts the first book's hero. The serpent becomes a woman, and its features, by relation, become monstrous.

Errour's monstrous form grants her the status of Greek myth. She is Echidna: half

woman, half snake. Pseudo-Apollodorus, Hesiod, and Pausanias cannot agree on which

gods birthed her, but her form remains constant in William Smith's *Dictionary of Greek

and Roman Biography and Mythology*: "half maiden and half serpent, with black eyes,

fearful and bloodthirsty" (3). "She was the destruction of man," birthing monsters such as

the Chimaera, Orthrus, a hundred-headed dragon, Scylla, Gorgon, and the eagle which

eternally ate Prometheus's liver (3). The place she calls home ranges from Scythia to a

cave in the country of Hylaea. The latter is where Heracles found her, consented to stay,

and fathered three children with her. Monsterhood and motherhood coexist in Errour's

body.

Why is a myth the first beast Redcrosse slays? The duality of Errour's body

disgusts, distracts, and dares to render the female form fantastical and beyond the scope

of man's influence. The erasure of myth grounds the feminine body in the realm of man.

This grounding enables Una's truth to shape Redcrosse's conscious identity. However,

before confronting myth, Redcrosse wanders into a multiplex forest.

The Wandering Wood makes an effective assault on Redcrosse's wayward nature.

Spenser's *Letter to Raleigh* strips experience from Redcrosse's repertoire; he is an

inexperienced knight in unfamiliar armor bound to err from his requested quest. "A

Gentle Knight," he yearns to "proue his puissance in battell braue / Vpon his foe (FQ

1.1.3.7-8). The chance to prove his might in battle by slaying the dragon is deterred by a

sudden storm. He seeks shelter in a "shadie groue not far away," which Una later reveals

to be the "wandring wood" (FQ 1.1.7.2, 1.1.13.6). Pine, cedar, oak, aspen: the Wandering

Wood's climate seems to support a large range of tree species. Distinguishing direction

amidst the delightful sight proves nearly impossible. When seeking to return to the

original quest's path, Redcrosse, Una, and Una's dwarf "cannot finde that path, which first was showne" (FQ 1.1.10.4). Instead, they stray "too and fro in wayes vnknowne" (FQ 1.1.10.5). The Wood's multiplicity throws thrilling twists and turns into Redcrosse's path towards adventure, leading him to Errour's den and into the embrace of the myth's "endlesse traine" (FQ 1.1.10.4).

The manifest nature of the Wood mirrored in Errour's "endlesse traine" contrasts with Una's singularity. The name "Una" means "one." Una is woman, truth, without brood—a feminine body in service to the advancement of masculine force. John M. Steadman says the Wood's "natural bent" suggests "the idea of deviation from the straight or orthodox faith" (23). The first book of *The Faerie Queene* details Redcrosse's journey from country boy to God's elect: Saint George, the patron saint of England. Una's quest provides the adventure that will lead her "faithfull knight" to the "house of Holinesse," where he will assume his new name (FQ 1.1.1-4). In the meantime, Una warns him against falling for the charms of nearby adventure offered in errancy:

> Least suddaine mischiefe ye too rash prouoke:
>
> The danger hid, the place vnknowne and wilde,
>
> Breedes dreadfull doubts: Oft fire is without smoke,
>
> And perill without show: therefore your stroke
>
> Sir knight with-hold, till further triall made. (FQ 1.1.12.1-5)

To venture into Errour's den is to commit a grave error. Already steeped in the "many paths" and "many turnings" of the Wood—which Steadman says stresses the "manifold nature of error" (31)—Redcrosse goes "forth vnto [Errour's] darksome hole" (FQ 1.1.14.1-3). The multiplicity of Errour, precipitated by the Wandering Wood, thus

threatens Redcrosse's adventure towards holiness.

Despite her aforementioned lack of success in dissuasion, Una's attempts to discourage errancy genders the *Other* and man's enemy as female. The *Other* is the opposite of the self; it manifests through difference. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen defines the monster as "an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place [signifying] something other than itself" (4). His fourth thesis, "The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference," reveals the monster as *Other*, "difference made flesh" (7). Hegel's formation of the *Other* lies in the self recognizing its difference from the *Other*. What lies outside of the self, separate from the self's conscious control, is the *Other*. As discussed in the introduction, the differences embodied by the monster tend to be revealed culturally, politically, economically, racially, and/or sexually.

The difference separating the self—Redcrosse—and the *Other*—Errour—is sex. Una is able to gender the *Other* as female, revealing difference, by likening Errour to the hated enemy of both God and man:

> This is the wandring wood, this *Errours den*,
>
> A monster vile, whom God and man does hate:
>
> Therefore I read beware. (FQ 1.1.13.6-8)

Both God and man hate Errour, half-serpent and half-woman. According to the biblical story of Adam and Eve, the snake is God's enemy. Hester Lees-Jeffries argues, "Errour's lair is at the heart of a parodic Eden," and Redcrosse and Una are Adam and Eve respectively (145). If that is the case, then Errour represents the Edenic serpent that tempts God's creations into sin: errancy. But Una notes Errour is also a woman: man's most hated enemy. Still at the start of his adventure, Redcrosse and Errour's difference is

marked by sex. Errour's sex is labeled as *Other,* placing her in direct opposition to Redcrosse. She must be slain in service to the self—imbuing the manly Redcrosse with the combat experience expected of a knight.

The duality of Errour's *Other*ed body demands reclassification. Cohen explores the monster's inability to fit into any culturally or socially constructed category in Thesis III of *Monster Theory*, "The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Chaos." The monster upsets binaries, demanding "a radical rethinking of boundary and normality" (6). Errour represents both humanity's enemy and masculinity's enemy. Unlike Una, who is unary, the feminine, Errour's binary hybridity complicates the division of the sexes. Errour is a female monster: the monstrous-feminine.

The monstrous-feminine is what makes a woman "shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (Creed 67). Barbara Creed argues the "concept of the monstrous-feminine, as constructed within/by a patriarchal and phallocentric ideology, is related intimately to the problem of sexual difference and castration" (67). Errour's difference is marked by her sex. She is a fusion of the powerful, vile, and dangerous snake and the sacred, attractive, and maternal woman that threatens manhood. The latter set of characteristics, from Redcrosse's point of view, corrupts the former. Out to slay a beast and gain knightly fame, Redcrosse instead faces a monster whose appearance defies expectation: "Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide, / But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine" (FQ 1.1.14.6-8). A monster is expected to be horrible, for it is a grotesque *Other* roaming outside of society's established boundaries. But Errour is also a she. Her appearance acts against Redcrosse's intentions; he must simultaneously protect the feminine but assert his masculine force on the monstrous. Her feminine body's control over the might of a

serpent distorts Redcrosse's adventure towards knighthood and makes her "lothsom," "filthie," and "foule."

Redcrosse's reaction to Errour is one of disgust. The culmination of Redcrosse's adventure will be the slaying of a dragon—a creature closely related to a snake. This young knight, seeking to prove his knightly prowess by rescuing a damsel's parents, is disgusted by Errour's cooptation of a dragon's might. The female form is contaminated by her mythic appearance. Redcrosse refuses to categorize her, choosing instead to separate woman from snake, female from myth, and woman from masculine power with his ineffective phallus: his "trenchand blade" (FQ 1.1.17.3).

The functions of the female reproductive system add to Errour's monstrous qualities. Una's warnings cause the female to be viewed as *Other*, difference, and the enemy, and Redcrosse views the female's adoption of masculine powers as a threat to male authority. However Errour's power, and by extension monsterhood, is also linked to her fertility. Marilyn Francus says a monster's maternal role exemplifies "the authority that women derive from their reproductive capacity, the patriarchal fear of that female power, and the responding strategy of demonization" (829). After he observes her corrupted feminine form, Redcrosse notices Errour breastfeeding her children:

> And as she lay vpon the durtie ground,
>
> Her huge long taile her den all ouerspred,
>
> Yet was in knots and many boughtes vpwound,
>
> Pointed with mortall sting. Of her there bred
>
> A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed,
>
> Sucking vpon her poisonous dugs, each one

Of sundry shapes, yet all ill fauored. (FQ 1.1.15.1-7)

Following conception, Francus argues the mother marginalizes "the male's sexual authority" as she "takes over the biological and nurturing processes" (831). Errour's progeny are misshapen and feed on poisonous teats. Francus asserts the fertile monster is monstrous because she is a bad nurturer—not because she reproduces often. Errour dares to inhabit the realm of myth whilst unable to perform the role of mother. Encountering her gives Redcrosse an opportunity to prove his patriarchal authority over monstrous motherhood.

Before Redcrosse reaffirms the patriarchy, he must brave Errour's monstrous pregnancies. Errour has already given birth upon Redcrosse's arrival at her den. In the midst of their brawl, she vomits:

Therewith she spewd out of her filthy maw

A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,

Full of great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw,

Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke […]

With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,

And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:

Her filthy parbreake all the place defiled has. (FQ 1.1.20.1-4, 1.1.20.7-9)

Errour's children crept into her mouth stanzas prior. Her children perceive her mouth as the safest place for retreat upon threat of death. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud suggests man lives in a house as a substitute for a mother's womb: it is "the first lodging, for which in all likelihood man still longs, and in which he was safe and felt at ease" (18). If Errour is half human, then her children might have retained this desire. Her children

escaped from Redcrosse by returning to their mother's womb. Errour's mouth as womb suggests her vomit is menstrual blood.

A simile compares Errour's expulsion of menstrual blood to the waste left behind in the Nile's natural ebb and flow. The Egyptian river's "fattie waves" pour "fertile slime" into the region, leaving "huge heapes of mudd" (FQ 1.1.21.3-6). Pliny the Elder describes the Nile, when used as a drink, as a "promoter of fecundity," or fertility. The Nile's waste births "Ten thousand kindes of creatures, partly male / And partly female of his fruitful seed" (FQ 1.1.21.7-8). Both the Nile and Errour vomit fertile lumps of mud, and the comparison reinforces Errour's mouth as a reproductive organ. Redcrosse genders the Egyptian river as male, diminishing Errour's power over the reproductive system: "old father Nilus"; "His fattie waves"; "his later spring"; "his fruitful spring" (FQ 1.1.21.1-8). But subtracting either females or males from the reproductive system results in "ugly monstrous shapes" (FQ 1.1.21.9).

Errour's premature menstruation signifies a miscarriage. Creed says bodily waste threatens the "whole and proper" image of a subject—in this case, the virgin female, Una (73-4). Poisonous, black, pungent lumps elicit disgust and loathing. Redcrosse damages Errour's birth canal—her throat—as he "[grypts] her gorge with so great paine" (FQ 1.1.19.7). The frogs and toads she spews lack eyes as a result of their premature birth. "Welnight choked with the deadly stinke" of Errour's miscarriage, Redcrosse feels his "forces faile" as he "can no longer fight" his battle for dominance over female power. The monstrous, feminine form seems to have triumphed. But a powerful mother is a combination possible only within myth, and Redcrosse—under the "fearefull" threat of "shame" more than the "certaine perill" he faces—"resolv'd in minde all suddenly to

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win" (FQ 1.1.24.1-4).

When Redcrosse slays Errour, he separates power from the mother—myth from the woman—in a show of "manly force":

> That from her body full of filthie sin
>
> He raft her hatefull head without remorse;
>
> A streame of cole black bloud forth gushed fro[m]; her corse. (FQ 1.1.24.7-9)

Errour's children cannibalize her corpse, promptly exploding from the sheer swollenness of their bellies. Redcrosse's first brief brush with errancy ends with a naïve reflection on the inability of the feminine form to sustain itself: "Now needeth him no lenger labour spend, / His foes haue slaine themselues, with whom he should contend" (FQ 1.1.26.8-9). Una, who knew of the Wood, the den, and his capacity for adding "faith unto [his] force," awaits him outside the late Errour's cave (FQ 1.1.19.3). It seems slaying Errour was his second test, for she exclaims,

> Well worthy be you of that Armory,
>
> Wherein ye haue great glory wonne this day,
>
> And proou'd your strength on a strong enimie,
>
> Your first aduenture: many such I pray,
>
> And henceforth euer wish, that like succeed it may. (FQ 1.1.27.5-9)

The slaying of Errour is an erasure of myth that serves to ground the feminine body in the realm of man and separate masculine power from the feminine form. This erasure places Una, the poem's representation of truth, within Redcrosse's reach—within the realm of man—as she at last acknowledges it is not only his appearance that is knightly. Her feminine body serves well in advancing his masculine force as he braves

multiplicity and duality. And it is with Una's help that he acquires the truth of his status as God's elect: Saint George, the patron saint of England. Unfortunately, Una's celebration is premature.

Cohen's first thesis in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* is "The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body." Monsters are engendered by culture. As stated in the introductory chapter: the material monster is a metaphor for a culture's hopes and fears, representing something other than what it is, that escapes before we can separate tenor—its meaning—from vehicle—its body. If Errour is a metaphor and her tenor is errancy, then is she not engendered by the culture of chivalric knighthood? Is the cultural body that engenders her not Redcrosse himself?

Ivan L. Schulze considers the Faerie Queene's feast, detailed in the *Letter to Raleigh*, an Elizabethan revision of Arthurian chivalric romances. Schulze argues the feast reflects the revival of chivalry within Elizabeth I's court. The motivating action of the poem, commonly "regarded as nothing more than the conventional story frame as it was employed by Boccaccio and Chaucer," is suffused with material from the poet's life (Schulze 158). In the case of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser's story is framed by its opening dedication to Elizabeth I.

The first book begins with a dedication to "the most high, mightie, and magnificent empresse renowned for pietie, vertve, and all gratiovs government Elizabeth" (Hamilton 27). Nigel Saul argues a medieval knight's code of ethics and martial abilities are "not so different in character from the heroic values and brave deeds celebrated in *Beowulf*" (Saul 12). Elizabeth's reign revitalized chivalry in all its piety and virtue. The main villain in the first book's opening Canto challenges the reestablishment of chivalric

conventions; Errour's errancy threatens to upend structure.

The fear of disorder in a turbulent time period, in which life and death was decided by the religion of the royal sitting on England's throne, lies beneath the surface of Elizabethan chivalry. Elizabeth I's reign from 1558 to 1603 followed her half-sister's, Bloody Mary. Mary I, a Catholic queen of England from 1553 to 1558, ordered the deaths of hundreds of Protestants following the death of Henry VIII and his only son, Edward VI. Elizabeth I's reign, as a Protestant queen, sought to persecute Catholics in turn. Errour's body is physical disorder, half-serpent half-woman, spawned from the 16th century's cultural fear of disorder. Redcrosse, a knight on the surface thanks to Una's appointed armor, seems to be Elizabethan chivalry personified. Redcrosse's body embodies the culture that engenders Errour out of the cultural fear of disorder.

Redcrosse's manly murder of the monster is destruction of the villain without cognitive struggle. Recall Thesis IV of Cohen's *Monster Theory*: "The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference." Redcrosse recognizes difference with Una's help; Una genders the *Other* as female sin. But cognitive awareness has no room in the visceral fight between Redcrosse and Errour. Redcrosse ultimately fails to cognitively recognize the *Other*'s self-consciousness. The self and the *Other* must "*recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* each other," fully aware they are being perceived beyond their control (Melchert 474).

It is important to recognize how Hegel's *Other* complicates *Monster Theory*'s basic tenet of engenderment. If the monster is *Other* distinct from the self, how can the *Other* be the creation of the self? In his introduction to the *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel writes to "know thyself" is "not to promote mere self-knowledge in respect of the

particular capacities, character, propensities, and foibles of the single self" (qtd. Berenson 77). To "know thyself" is to conduct introspection through the lens of experience with the *Other*.

The *Other* exists for the self as the self must be for the *Other*. "Being for the *Other*" is the step prior to recognition of the *Other*. Frances Berenson writes Hegel's conception of "self-consciousness, *its being*, depends on the *Other*," so as the *Other* perceives the self, so as the self really is. The development of self-consciousness is a mutual exchange; Redcrosse and Errour exist as individual selves for one another. As the dragon in John Gardner's *Grendel* tells Grendel to find a pile of gold and sit on it, so Errour exists within her cave as a monster to be slain. So Redcrosse exists as the errant knight who must slay the cornered myth.

Redcrosse's manly murder forgoes conscious recognition of Errour's self beyond her monstrously feminine body. Yet Errour acted as a mirror to Redcrosse's formation of knightly identity. She was the female to his male, monster to his human, villain to his hero, *Other* to his self. He perceives Errour's mirrored body within his control; he can, must, defeat her. The result is the simultaneous subjugation of feminine power to masculine power, and stunting of the growth of Redcrosse's self.

Redcrosse's failure to develop an awareness of Errour's tenor as errancy propagates further wandering. His disgust in the face of Errour's "lothsom, filthie, foule" body rejects conscious awareness. Errour is discarded waste, a "material (first)" without "figurative and metaphoric (second)" meaning (Morrison 8). Waste's definitions include "desolation, pointlessness, and uselessness, but also excess and surplus" (8). Susan Morrison argues that this duality, much like Errour's, has "been viewed as problematic,

void of meaning, and immoral" (8). Redcrosse is unwilling to view Errour otherwise. In the erasure of Echidna myth from the feminine form, Redcrosse discards the *Other*ed Errour's potential to trigger his development of self-consciousness.

The disorder within Redcrosse's stunted self, representing Elizabethan chivalry, compels his use of manly force. "Order can only be established," Morrison argues, "through a counteracting punishment, a kind of spiritual homeopathy, that washes clean the guilt of the transgressor" (20). Redcrosse seeks to restore order to his adventure, carrying out Errour's punishment, death, with his manly force. Morrison further argues it is up to the purview of culture to mark the boundaries between clean and unclean—the self and the *Other*. Taking out the garbage is a "rite of purification, the abandoning of the detritus of myself" (31). Redcrosse assumes he must reject his reflection's filth to reassure his cleanliness, his holiness.

Redcrosse's failure to properly confront the waste of his cultural body results in further errancy. After Redcrosse slays Errour, Archimago's vision of a promiscuous, sexually empowered Una visits the knight in his dreams. The false encounter prompts Redcrosse to abandon his adventure and Una entirely. His later wanderings include a trip to the House of Pride, a duel with both Sans Foy and Sans Joy, and imprisonment by the giant Orgoglio. Confronting Errour is Redcrosse's first, unconscious step towards self-consciousness and the formation of his true identity: Saint George, the patron saint of England. He must recognize Errour's waste as his own before he obtains holy ascension.

Redcrosse has yet to establish the boundaries of his cultural body when he slays the first canto's villain: Errour, error, errancy. The monster demarcates the Thinkable and the Unthinkable in Thesis V of *Monster Theory*, "The Monster Polices the Border of the

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Possible." The Echidna's physical duality illustrates this division. An aspiring knight must defeat Thinkable monsters—dragons, giants, and magicians—to gain renown. The Echidna occupies the Thinkable monster and the Unthinkable hybrid, and the potential fame gained from defeating Errour's snake half is distorted by the appearance of her female half. Redcrosse pursues the Unthinkable monster nevertheless; as Errour "sought backe to turne," Redcrosse "boldly kept [her] / From turning backe, and forced her to stay" (FQ 1.1.26-7). Elizabethan chivalry crosses past the boundary of the Thinkable monster, into unknown territory, and Redcrosse's adventure begins in errancy due to his error. But Redcrosse's error is a part of his aforementioned grander adventure towards cleanliness, holiness, and mastery of the self.

Hegel's master-slave dialectic establishes a hierarchical system of one person over another. The master's absolute freedom to dominate his slave is dependent "on the subservience of the latter" (Houlgate 22). The slave must become self-aware of his own status as slave before he/she can acknowledge the master as master. The slave then acquires individuality on his/her own, without the help of the master, realizing he/she made the master through his/her subservience. In turn, the master becomes subservient to the slave's individuality. The master cannot exist without the servant and vice-versa.

The villain is a fragment of the hero, the hero's villainous self. The master-slave dialectic necessitates good where there is bad, cleanliness in the face of uncleanliness, the Thinkable and the Unthinkable, and villains for heroes. The hero Redcrosse is allowed within courtly society to save Una's parents from death by dragon. He is a force of "good" exercising master morality through the use of manly force. Errour is a slave to Redcrosse's self's "good," acknowledging herself as separate from him; Errour retreats

from Redcrosse,

> For light she hated as the deadly bale,

> Ay wont in desert darknesse to remaine,

> Where plain none might her see, nor she see any plaine. (FQ 1.1.26.7-9)

She is a monster who must reside in the darkness, nurse her brood, and live to birth again until, much like Gardner's dragon, a hero arrives to slay her. Her identity as the monstrous feminine comes out of an awareness that where there is her darkness, there is Redcrosse's light. Errour's appearance unmasks the hero Redcrosse, revealing his errancy. And it is her death that will add to Redcrosse's knightly fame.

Thus the hero, Redcrosse, is his own villain, errancy; the hero is the monster he must slay. Errancy plagues Redcrosse's adventure in the form of sin and sans brothers because Redcrosse is his own worst enemy. Thesis II of *Monster Theory*, "The Monster Always Escapes," implies Redcrosse can never separate himself from his errancy— Redcrosse cannot exist without errancy and vice-versa. Only when he braves his fear of disorder will he erase the countless monsters in the wake of Errour's "endlesse traine" (FQ 1.1.10.4). An encounter with Despair brings Redcrosse's sins to the forefront of his consciousness, and his ensuing despair almost results in suicide. Our "tall clownish younge" knight seeks help at the House of Holiness in Canto 10. His status as God's elect is then revealed, and he sets off on one more adventure to slay his errancy once and for all: finally killing the dragon of Canto 1 fame.

IV. BATMAN AS WOLF IN *THE DARK KNIGHT* AND *THE KILLING JOKE*

"We aren't contractually tied down to rationality! There is no sanity clause! So

when you find yourself locked onto an unpleasant train of thought […] remember

there's always madness. Madness is the emergency exit."

-Alan Moore, *Batman: The Killing Joke*

Beowulf and Redcrosse brave the monstrous to attain and maintain hero status.

Each monster they fight begets another. Similarly, this chapter's hero, Batman, sees no

end to the criminals who threaten his culture. Unlike the heroes of legend, Batman

consciously understands killing the monstrous will not make him a hero. The potential

consequences of slaying monsters do not occur to Beowulf and Redcrosse. Their

monstrous actions undermine the heroes they envision themselves to be. But Batman's

awareness of his monstrous potential informs the actions he takes to maintain the mask,

or in this case cowl, of a hero.

In *The Dark Knight* and *Batman: The Killing Joke*, Bruce Wayne, a contributing

member of society, masquerades as *Batman* to fight crime: Gotham's monstrous

aggregations of mob bosses, street thugs, and indistinguishable goons. The hero fights to

uphold the established culture. The morally questionable nature of Gotham's culture

problematizes Batman's fight; crime runs rampant and Batman's appearance reinvents

Gotham's typical mob villain. Thus the Joker is born—a villain who offers an alternative

to donning a mask at the first sign of injustice. Monstrous acts appear to be the only way

for Batman to finally defeat his villainous reflection. This chapter reveals Batman as a

monster on the cusp of cultural rejection: a sheep unaware it is a wolf in disguise. If

Batman is to defeat the villain, then he must accept his monstrous possibilities, enter the

realm of the Unthinkable, and become a villain himself.

What draws filmmakers, moviegoers, comic book writers, and avid comic fans alike to Batman's form of vigilante justice time-and-time again? Batman, a character within the DC comic book universe, has appeared on the big screen nine times. The film *The Dark Knight* (2008) in particular, pitting Batman against the Joker, brought in 1.7 billion dollars—a near 1.1 billion dollar increase from its prequel *Batman Begins* (2005) depicting Batman's training under Ra's Al Ghul and subsequent fight against the Scarecrow. Why are viewers more strongly attracted to the struggle between bat and clown than between bat and straw man?

The Batverse's rogue gallery of villains exceeds 150, but moviegoers poured out in droves to witness one in particular. The verdict is clear: Batman and the Joker are inseparable—"an unstoppable force and an immovable object."[7] Popularity polls of DC villains often list the Joker in the top three—if not number one. As one poll put it, "You can't have Batman without the Joker" (Schedeen). So why is the Joker capable of pushing Batman towards the boundary demarcating the Thinkable and the Un? He is Batman's *Other* half: the unkillable clown; the other side of Harvey Dent's coin; the big, bad, misunderstood monster who would not know what to do with Batman's identity even if he found out. The following paragraphs will explore the monsterhood of Batman, Gotham's hero, and the Joker, Gotham's villain, as they battle to become the master of Gotham's culture.

An examination of Gotham is essential to evaluating the moral boundaries of its

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[7] The Joker describes the relationship between himself and Batman as "an unstoppable force" meeting "an immovable object" during their final confrontation in *The Dark Knight*.

culture. Siobhan Fitzgerald argues Gotham is the arena "in which action takes place"; Fitzgerald highlights Gotham as "a vital character" that renders the people, places, and events within conceivable to the reader (70). The city "perpetuates [Batman's] disguise and makes [his] transformation possible" (71). Thesis I of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: A Reading Culture*, "The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body," argues "the monstrous body is pure culture," signifying "something other than itself" (4). A culture of injustice and subsequent revenge run rampant in Gotham's crime-ridden streets. Its people, criminals and law-abiding citizens, are a result of said culture. And its culture engenders its monsters.

Even in its earliest imaginings, Gotham is a city overrun by chaos. The cinematography of Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989) "takes us down a long tracking shot of disruptive anarchy in the street" (Debona 55). The sets are apocalyptic, conveying mob madness—in which the populace is "doing as they like," "bawling, hustling and smashing" (55). Amidst the anarchy, a family—the Waynes—"has sought the wellspring of culture: the theater" (55). Cue the criminal, broken pearl necklace, and the traumatized Bruce Wayne as two spectrums of culture clash—issuing in the Batverse's typical, endless battle between good and evil.

The Dark Knight's Gotham sees little improvement from its depiction in *Batman* and *Batman Begins*. In *Batman Begins*, Bruce's parents built a subway system with Wayne Enterprises—the Waynes' company—at its center in the hopes of making the lives of Gotham's poorer citizens easier. In *The Dark Knight*, this subway is now dilapidated, marked with graffiti, wear, and tear. The Narrows, separated from the center of the city by bridges over a channel, now houses the poor. The concrete jungle is stained

brown, roofs peeling off and narrow streets packed tight with electric wires and clotheslines. What once represented hope and progress has fallen into neglect.

Similarly derelict, the location of *Batman: The Killing Joke's* climactic joke is an abandoned amusement park the Joker himself describes as "garish, ugly," and a communal toilet for the homeless (Moore et al. 2008: 6). Arkham Asylum, home to Gotham's super criminals, likewise suffers disregard. The psychiatric hospital, located north of Gotham, is featured within *Batman: The Killing Joke*. Whether heavily policed, in a state of destitution, or both, Arkham Asylum serves only as a temporary buffer to lower the sheer number of foes Batman faces on a daily basis. The criminal pool replenishes because Batman never kills and the criminals always manage to escape the clutches of rehabilitation. *Batman: The Killing Joke* begins with the Joker's escape from room number 0801, leaving Batman with two options: 1) send him back; 2) kill him for good. But if he sends the Joker back, then the Joker will merely escape again.

The city's law enforcement, the Gotham City Police Department, try their best to keep the crumbling streets clean of crime. "Two prominent public administrators" exist in *The Dark Knight*: Harvey Dent and James Gordon (Mastracci 371). *The Dark Knight's* Harvey Dent, pre-villain, serves as Gotham's new, idealistic District Attorney, and Police "Commissioner Gordon […] provides the space and justification for Batman's crime fighting efforts" (371). Commissioner Gordon is aware of the GCPD's inability to clean up the city without Batman. Harvey Dent and James Gordon are slaves who ascribe to slave morality: what is beneficial or advantageous to culture and/or society. Criminals, like the mob boss Carmine Falcone, are slaves striving for master morality: what is beneficial or advantageous to the individual. The mob bosses and their affiliates that arise

from Carmine Falcone's institutionalization in *Batman Begins* include Salvatore Maroni, the Chechen, Lau, and Gambol. They also fall short in their efforts to push Gotham's moral boundaries, fearing the Batman who hangs over their heads. Bruce Wayne may be one of Gotham's many slaves, but his will to power manifests in his alter ego, Batman: the master of Gotham's offspring.

Gotham is a city of dominate-or-be-dominated, and as Talia says in *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), "Innocent is a strong word to throw around Gotham." But through Batman's vigilantism—driven by his parents' violent deaths—Gotham's citizens have a hero to protect good and submit bad or evil to the law of the land. Batman's pursuit of his noble virtue, justice, without considering what's socially acceptable of a billionaire, playboy philanthropist makes him a master. Because he continuously prevents Gotham from imploding, Batman's everyday actions coincide with what Gotham's slave morality believes is good. In the conclusion to *The Dark Knight Rises*, Batman has a statue erected in his honor: a symbol of the master hero who imposed his justice, also the people's will to power, in countless hopeless situations.

Yet Batman is the wolf in Bruce Wayne's sheep skin, exacting vigilante justice in service to slave morality's good. But good cannot exist without bad; the paradox ensures strict demarcation between the Thinkable and the Unthinkable. Where there is the epitome of good in Batman's master morality, there is the manifestation of bad in the Joker's. Not a fan of upholding the herd's morality, the Joker trails behind Batman like a shadow—seeking to unmask his fellow wolf.

At the end of *Batman Begins*, Batman assures then-Lieutenant Gordon Gotham will return to normal. Gordon asks, "What about escalation?" If a man wears a mask and

jumps from rooftops, then a criminal leaves joker cards behind to claim his crimes.[8] The

Joker has "a taste for the theatrics," like Batman. In his seventh monster thesis, Cohen

asks, "Do monsters really exist? Surely they must, for if they did not, how could we?"

(20). Where there is a slave's good, there must be a self-interested master's good—

waiting to assert its will to power—lurking in the shadows. The people's will to power

for "good" must fight head-to-head against evil's will to power. It is the Batman versus

the Joker—master against master. The Joker is the monstrous *Other*, tempting Gotham's

citizens—and Batman himself—with his own master morality: "some men just wanna

watch the world burn."[9]

The character of Batman is a superhero. His power and penchant for justice stems

neither from alien ancestry nor surprise spider bites. Bruce Wayne assumed the cowl of

Batman after "years of intentional effort and painful transformation" (Morris 263). He

cultivated his "human qualities to their maximum extent" through rigorous training to

become "the perfect specimen, mentally and physically, for one purpose": fighting crime

(263). Superheroes "speak to our nature, as well as to both our aspirations and our fears"

(Loeb and Morris 16). Whilst Batman inspires "good" in the otherwise dismal setting of

Gotham—he gives rise to a number of Batman impersonators that appear in *The Dark*

Knight—this superhero also feeds off fear.

Batman's costume is designed to "strike fear into the hearts of criminals" (Morris

253). His contemporary colors of choice are shades of blue, gray, and/or black. Marco

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[8] Commissioner Gordon answers his question, "What about escalation," with, "*We* start carrying semiautomatics, *they* buy automatics […] *we* start wearing kevlar, *they* buy armor-piercing rounds" before he compares the Joker's and Batman's theatrics.
[9] This is Alfred Pennyworth's foreboding conclusion regarding the Joker's attacks on a district attorney, a commissioner, and a judge in *The Dark Knight* (2008).

Arnaudo rejects the typical reason authors cite for masking their superheroes; more than protecting the civilian identity of the superheroes, costumes prompt "the metamorphosis of a normal human into a supernatural being endowed with symbolic visual markers" (20). The costume itself is closely linked to the power of the superhero—who must constantly prove he is worthy of wearing it. Batman's cowl "elegantly articulates" associations such as "night, fear, [and] the supernatural," corresponding to his primary modes of operation: "stealth, concealment, and surprise" (Bongco 106).

The opening panels of *Batman: The Killing Joke* establish the comic within the continuous serial narratives that form the Batverse, denoting cyclicality of (super)heroic action. Panel composition refers to how the illustrator's "choice and organization of panels function to advance the story" (Bongco 63). The opening panels are fixed, arranged three by three. The story moves quickly, aided by an absence of balloons. Balloons convey narrative—including character speech and thought. Without balloons, the reader moves from moment-to-moment continuously. Each moment within the opening panels is dedicated to capturing Batman's gait towards Arkham Asylum (see Figure 1).

The scene is a familiar one: Batman arrives in the Batmobile, skipping introductions with the stationed police force; Commissioner Gordon and his fellow officer await Batman's arrival with a hot drink. Batman's authority needs no establishment as Moore draws on the viewers' knowledge of his heroic acts ranging from the *Detective Comics #27* (1939) to *Batman: the Animated Series* (1992-5) to *The Lego Batman Movie* (2017). Batman, a mere shadow passing by the panels, leaving only the hem of his cloak behind, and his vigilante justice have put countless supervillains behind

Figure 1. *Batman: The Killing Joke***'s Opening Panels.** The absence of balloons suggests the reader is familiar with the scene entailed**.**

the asylum's bars. The reason for his visit to the asylum is no surprise, but the hero's routine ends with Batman's thoughts: "There were these two guys in a lunatic asylum…" (Moore et al. 2008: 3). The familiarity of the opening panels precipitate Gotham's daily dose of criminal activity, denoting a cyclicality of catch and release Batman must break if he intends to stop the Joker for good.

Because he is a superhero who enforces justice in Gotham, the character of Batman is a criminal monster: "in his 1939 origin story, we learned that Batman was prompted to devote his life to fighting crime by the murder of his parents," but "as a costumed crime-fighter, he [is] a vigilante" (Skoble 31). Vigilantism, "insofar as heroes place themselves above the law and resolve conflicts with violence," is a criminal act (Arnaudo 71). A primary conflict in *Batman Begins* is between Batman and the GCPD. When he first dons his cowl, Batman busts Carmine Falcone's drug ring. The GCPD's Commissioner, Gillian Loeb, shows his appreciation by ordering his officers to get the "vigilante" who "takes the law into their [sic] own hands" off the streets. As previously discussed, Gotham has a criminal hiding around at least 150 corners. In Gotham, laws, politicians, and legal systems tend to "protect the wicked" (Skoble 33). Aeon J. Skoble asks, "Why should well-meaning social structures be allowed to stand in the way of what is objectively right" (33)? Batman breaks the rules, pushing the boundaries of the Thinkable, in the name of—vigilante—justice.

Arnaudo observes "Thou Shalt Not Kill" is the boundary Batman never crosses. Arnaudo deems the boundary a

> fundamental component of the superhero code of ethics. [Superheroes] may never
>
> kill, for any reason or under any circumstances, not even for legitimate defense,

by failure to rescue, or "for the greater good." (78)

Murder is a crime worse than vigilantism: this is objectively right. "The label of monster […] is usually reserved for a person whose actions have placed him outside the range of humanity" (Asma 205); to kill another, self-conscious being is to commit a monstrous act. It is the erasure of the *Other*, who you are not, and is subsequently an erasure of the self. Humanity is tied to recognition of the self as human, morally bound by *Others*. Batman's refusal to kill assures us his humanity is bound by slave morality. But Stephen T. Asma reminds us we are all "only so many steps away from the extreme cases of monstrous killers" (208). Is Batman's "objective" vigilantism subject to error? Gotham's citizenry and the reader/viewer—the fictitious and the real audience—are the watchers forced to reconcile the criminal nature of Batman with his good intentions, judging his potential for the monstrous.

When searching for Bruce Wayne in Mila Bongco's index in *Reading Comics*, the reader is instructed to "see Batman" (238). Batman supersedes Bruce Wayne's identity as an orphaned billionaire. Batman is Bruce Wayne's alter ego: the assertion of his will to power. According to Sigmund Freud, the Ego is a product of culture:

> The Ego (the "I") emerges slowly in the postuterine life of the baby and forms a node of conscious awareness, a locus of self-identity. Later, the toddler internalizes the values and mores of the external society, regulating its own behavior by external conscience. (qtd. in Asma 209)

The Ego develops according to the expectations of the society surrounding the self. *The Dark Knight*'s Bruce Wayne flaunts affluence at every opportunity—he is never seen without an expensive car or Russian prima ballerinas. Inheritor of his family's fortune,

stockpiled through the multinational conglomerate Wayne Enterprises, Bruce helicopters into his own charity banquet. Bruce Wayne performs Gotham's expectations of high society.

Tom Morris posits that "there has been a gradual, surprising transformation such that the core identity [of Bruce Wayne] may have become that of Batman, and the secondary, alternative identity for special purposes is that of Bruce Wayne" (263). Bruce Wayne is the cowl Batman wears because the identity of Bruce Wayne is the Ego most appropriate to address the "mores of […] external society" (Asma 209). In *Batman Begins*, however, Bruce justifies the subjugation of his identity to Batman's:

> People need dramatic examples to shake them out of apathy, and I can't do that as
> Bruce Wayne. As a man, I'm flesh and blood—I can be ignored, I can be
> destroyed, but as a symbol [...] as a symbol, I can be incorruptible, I can be
> everlasting. Something elemental. Something terrifying.

Batman, the criminal, monstrous wolf with the moral high ground, wears the disguise of the conspicuously inconspicuous sheep, Bruce Wayne. The Joker embodies the alternative; the Joker is the Id—the "selfish, instinctual, amoral aspect of the self," the "it" (Asma 209), the wolf—unleashed.

The character of the Joker is a supervillain. Peter Coogan defines "a supervillain as 'a villain who is super, that is, someone who commits villainous or evil acts and does so in a way superior to ordinary criminals or at a magnified level,' as manifest in the villain's mission, powers, and identity" (qtd. in Phillips and Strobl 85). Desperate times call for desperate measures as the threats supervillains pose exceed "the capabilities and constraints of traditional law enforcement mechanisms" (85). The existence of

supervillains necessitates superheroes, and the existence of superheroes necessitates supervillains; Batman needs the Joker, and the Joker needs Batman.

Whereas Batman's origin story remains transfixed around the singular narrative of dead parents and billionaire orphan, the Joker's past is a multiplicity. Steve Englehart begins his investigation of the Joker's identity with the joker playing card. The joker card was originally added—twice—to the standard deck in the 1860s, because the game euchre needed a fifth jack (Englehart xii). Other games adopted the two new joker cards into their own rules. The joker card "was always outside the common reality, and [in] that it had no fixed meaning […] the joker card seems to have had a loose grasp on identity in its genes" (Englehart xii). Like his namesake card, the Joker "has no connection to any categories he might have inhabited last time, or will inhabit next time" as games continue to alter his meaning (xii-iii). For the Joker, the past, present, and future is multiple choice.

In *The Dark Knight*, the Joker's origin story changes three times. Batman initially shows interest in the Joker's origins. Batman goes to great lengths to piece together the Joker's presumed fingerprint, but the narrative's ensuing chaos at Commissioner Loeb's funeral procession derails further investigation into the Joker's past. The viewer must rely then on the Joker himself to reveal the person behind his painted mask.

The Joker's "ever-shifting origin stories […] always start with the same line: 'Wanna know how I got these scars?'" (Garneau 43). The first story is told to the mob boss Gambol:

> You wanna know how I got these scars? My father was a drinker and a fiend. And one night, he goes off crazier than usual. Mommy gets the kitchen knife to defend herself. […] So, me watching, he takes the knife to her, laughing while he does it.

He turns to me and he says: "Why so serious?" He comes at me with the knife.

"Why so serious?" He sticks the blade in my mouth. "Let's put a smile on that

face."

The Joker promptly kills Gambol and lives to tell his story two more times. He tells

Rachel Dawes, Harvey Dent's girlfriend, a tall tale of self-mutilation to comfort his

insecure wife. Batman does not let him follow up his famous line a third time during their

final confrontation, rejecting the Joker's personhood. The Joker is thus unable to ground

himself in the realm of the Thinkable. In revealing no one is behind the mask, the Joker

instead proves himself mutable, monster, Unthinkable.

Like John Gardner's Grendel, the Joker is a misunderstood monster, but his "main

goal is to make Batman 'the best that [he] can be'" (Englehart xxi). A fundamental

characteristic of Batman's vigilante justice is his ability to control said justice. He works

with an established system to bring about change in the community. The Joker chooses to

craft his crimes on society's exterior—where his will to power is unrestricted. Bill

Finger, Robert "Bob" Kane, and Jerry Robinson, creators of the Joker in 1940, "intended

him to die after his first and only appearance […] in his first debut issue of *Batman* #1"

(Englehart xii). Batman refuses to acknowledge the Joker as a necessary evil if he intends

to "practice extra-legal force" in the name of good (Goodrum 231). The Joker is the

escalation required to test the superhero Batman's mettle. If Gotham can be saved, then

Gotham's citizens will join in rejecting the Joker's alternative to the doom and gloom of

Thinkable reality: going loony.

Ryan Litsey argues the Joker is Nietzsche's Superman. That is not to say the

Joker is an alien from Krypton. Nietzsche's Superman is "driven by his will to power

towards the goal of self-overcoming and constant action that is transformative" (180). "Man," or personhood, "is something to be overcome" (180). The Superman achieves mastery of the self by using his will to power to overcome the self's "man"-ness: cultural and societal norms, or the Thinkable. In some ways, the Joker is an alien. He calls for a "reevaluation of values" by not measuring his "actions against our moral system or code," acting instead in the interest of bettering himself (184-5, 181). The Joker, the misunderstood, conscious wolf, *other*s an identity within the culture that *other*ed him. But in Batman he sees good's monstrous possibilities. The Joker attempts to reveal these possibilities through a gauntlet that challenges the boundaries of Batman's, and culture's, morality.

The first book of Job centers on the rich and pious Job as one who undergoes a villain's gauntlet. The Lord tells his angels of Job's faith, for "there is no one on earth as faithful and good as he" (Job 1:8). Satan asks whether the intensity of Job's worship is correlated to the Lord's blessings of health and wealth. Job will surely curse He who strips him of his status. The Lord allows Satan to test the limits of Job's faith, in which Job must continue to reject the inclinations of evil. *The Dark Knight* and *Batman: The Killing Joke* feature similar gauntlets intended to test the legitimacy of Batman's hero-dom; Gotham's engendered monster of good must uphold goodness in the face of the Joker's evil. A battle for Gotham's soul ensues with Batman on one side and the Joker on the other. The following paragraphs will examine the villain's gauntlet through the lens of Thesis VI of Cohen's *Monster Theory*, tracing Gotham's boundary of the Thinkable and tracking to what extent Batman crosses it.

The monstrous repels and attracts in Thesis VI of Cohen's *Monster Theory*: "Fear

of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire." Those citizens of culture practicing slave morality cannot engage in socially forbidden practices. In contrast, the monster enjoys freedom unbound by altruism, "beyond the limits of the Thinkable, a place that is doubly dangerous: simultaneously 'exorbitant' and 'quite close'" (Cohen 20). Slaves live vicariously through the abject monster's acts, engaging with escapist delights without the threat of becoming the monster themselves up to the point that they will mimic the monster's behavior. They will not accept responsibility for the monster's *Other*ness. The villain's gauntlet tests to what extent the community will fulfill its fantasies and embrace its monstrous tendencies.

Batman, to the citizens' escapist delight, faces three challenges as part of the villain's gauntlet in *The Dark Knight*: the potential corruption of the slave, slave morality's re-categorization of good, and the acceptance of monsterhood to protect good. The potential corruption of the slave begins with six men in clown masks robbing a bank. One by one they kill each other. When Grumpy asks Happy where Dopey went, Happy answers, "Boss told me when the job was done, I should take him out. One less share, right?"[10] Grumpy says, "Funny, he told me something similar."

Criminals, who already lie on the fringes of good in the community of Gotham's citizens, are bad, lacking good, and nearly monstrous to slave morality. Contact with the Joker, the narrative's monstrous supervillain, allows the criminal to pursue his desire— money—and use his will to power to obtain it; the slave achieves temporary master morality with each self-serving kill in the name of his own satisfaction.

The Joker starts his reign of terror by tempting the community's run-of-the-mill

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[10] According to the subtitles, Grumpy, Chuckles, Happy, Dopey, Driver, and Bozo are the names of the clowns in *The Dark Knight*.

criminal, acutely aware of how easy it is to bring the fringes of the community closer to the boundary of the Thinkable. He brings them closer—but not over it. The Joker, disguised as Bozo, is the only clown to survive the shootout and make off with the money. In Hegel's master-slave dialectic, the master is dependent on the slave's self-awareness as slave—toiling for the master's satisfaction—in the slave's death for the master.

Like the Joker, Batman inspires people within Gotham's community to embrace their will to power. One of Gotham's citizens becomes a Batman copycat, totes around makeshift armor and guns, and busts Scarecrow's—*Batman Begins*'s villain's—drug deal. Setting the Batmobile to "intimidate," Batman rescues his copycat and captures Scarecrow. He warns the civilian, "Don't let me find you out here again," only to be confronted with the slave's question: "What gives you the right? What's the difference between you and me?" Who made Batman their culture's manifestation of moral goodness? Like the Joker's criminals, Batman's copycats engage in his master morality without fully taking on his role and his rules.

Harvey Dent, Gotham's District Attorney and "White Knight," claims, "All of us who stood by and let scum take control of our city" made Batman their monstrous hero, noting Batman's role as master is not "considered an honor [but] a public service." Batman's good has "shown Gotham […] the true colors" of their criminals. Gotham's slave morality, which labeled Batman as good in *Batman Begins*, now questions how far he is willing to go to protect the established culture.

In a video submitted to Gotham's news network, the Joker demands Batman unmask and turn himself in. The Joker interrogates Brian Douglas, Batman's copycat.

When asked why he dresses like Batman, Brian answers, "Because he's a symbol that we don't have to be afraid of scum like you." The Joker begs to differ, responding with, "So you think Batman's made Gotham a better place? You see, this is how crazy Batman's made Gotham." The citizen's unbeatable will to power—Batman—inspires them to run around in capes. The Joker insists this idea, to the community, should be "crazy." Both the Joker and Batman are "crazy" monsters luring slaves closer to crossing the boundary of the Thinkable.

When Batman and the Joker meet masked to painted face, the Joker reveals Batman's *Other*ness. When asked why he wants to murder Batman, the Joker cackles, "I don't wanna kill you! What would I do without you? […] You complete me." The Joker is Batman's, and by relation the culture's, Id: the uninhibited part of the self. Batman attempts to distance himself from the monster by claiming the Joker is "just garbage who kills for money"; he draws a line separating the good masters from the evil monsters. This prompts the Joker to blur the boundaries between noble master and monster:

> Don't talk like one of them. You're not. Even if you'd like to be. To [the people of Gotham], you're just a freak, like me. They need you right now, but when they don't, they'll cast you out like a leper. You see, their morals, their code, it's a bad joke. […] They're only as good as the world allows them to be.

The community's perception of Batman as master and monster shifts after the Joker's recent string of crimes.

The Joker's killing of the copycat causes the community to perceive an atmosphere of *Other*ness around Batman, calling for a re-categorization of slave morality's good. Gotham's culture demands their master turn himself in to stop the

Joker's chaos. The master must play martyr for their good the moment his monsterhood jeopardizes the community's well-being. Gotham made Batman good. Gotham made the Joker bad. Yet Gotham re-categorized Batman's master morality as bad the moment the Joker arrived and complicated binary thinking. After saving Harvey Dent at the cost of Rachel Dawes's life,[11] Bruce Wayne asks himself, "Did I bring this on her? I was meant to inspire good, not madness, not death." If the master's master morality is bad, then the slave's morality that empowers him is, too. If the slave's morality is bad, then the community is filled with monsters. The Joker's master morality has blurred the lines between heroes and villains, the Thinkable and the Unthinkable, people and monsters.

The Joker tests Gotham's newest propensity for evil with a twist on the Prisoner's Dilemma[12]: will you sacrifice another's life to save your own? Two ferries float in Gotham's bay. One ferry carries civilians while the other carries convicted criminals. The Joker sends each ferry a detonator for a bomb on the other ferry. If one group turns the key before midnight, then they save themselves by blowing up the other ferry. If neither turns the key before midnight, then the Joker blows both up. Should criminals or innocents be sacrificed for the greater good?

Criminals and innocents now both lie close to the Thinkable's boundary. But Batman is not alone as he confronts the Joker once more. Midnight strikes, and neither ferry explodes. Batman asks the Joker, "What are you trying to prove? That deep down,

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[11] Harvey Dent and Rachel Dawes were rigged to explosives in separate locations. The Joker gives Batman a choice between saving Dent or Dawes. Batman chooses to go to where Dawes is located, but he finds Harvey instead. The Joker, aware of how his reflection thinks, fools Batman into losing the woman he loves.

[12] The Prisoner's Dilemma "presents a situation in which two players acting to their own advantage do not do as well together as two players whose actions oppose their individual interests" (Shaw and Miller 29).

everyone's as ugly as you? You're alone." Gotham has proved that while their good may

be self-serving, it is not monstrous. And Batman proves once again his master morality is

inspired by the people's slave morality.

The Joker recognizes his failure to alter Batman's Ego, concluding, "This is what

happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object. […] I think you and I

are destined to do this forever." But the Joker would not "risk losing the battle for

Gotham's soul in a fistfight" with Batman; Gotham's White Knight Harvey Dent has

become Two-Face,[13] because "madness, as you know, is like gravity. All it takes is a

little push."[14]

While Batman was looking for the Joker, the Joker was tempting Harvey Dent

with the pros of monsterhood: fewer rules and more results. Dent wanted revenge against

whoever worked with the Joker to kidnap Rachel Dawes. The Joker inspires him to

overcome his "man"-ness, reasoning,

> "I'm a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it. You
>
> know? I just do things. The mob has plans. The cops have plans. Gordon's got
>
> plans. You know, they're schemers. Schemers trying to control their little
>
> worlds."

According to the Joker, the community is controlling Dent with its slave morality,

dictating what is good and bad at its own whim. The Joker, in his view, is not a

"schemer" like Batman. The Joker has achieved master morality through following his

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[13] Batman may have rescued Harvey Dent from exploding, but Rachel Dawes held onto
Harvey's coin. As a result, the double-sided coin was left burnt on one side and pristine
on the other. Dent's coin mirrors the nickname he had as Gotham's District Attorney:
Two-Face.
[14] These are the Joker's last lines in *The Dark Knight*.

own good. He is an "agent of chaos"—and "the thing about chaos? It's fair." To Dent, who just lost the woman he loved, the Joker's good does not sound so bad.

Dent becomes a Janus figure, a physical demarcation of the Thinkable and the Unthinkable. In Roman mythology, Janus is the god of doorways and archways. He is usually depicted as two faces looking away from each other. Janus also represents the middle ground between two opposing forces or concepts. The left side of Harvey Dent's face left irreversibly burnt when Batman rescued him emphasizes this image. Two-Face walks the boundary between the hero's slave morality-inspired master morality and the monster's master morality. Concluding that what is good and bad is arbitrary to the community, Dent embraces the chaos of chance;[15] a flip of a coin determines who lives and who dies.

Batman stops Dent from taking revenge against Commissioner Gordon,[16] but Dent dies a monstrous villain. Commissioner Gordon is convinced the Joker has won; the Joker "took the best of us and tore him down. People will lose hope." Batman made Gotham believe in Dent's good. If they find out Dent became half-sheep and half-wolf, a physical representation of the Ego and the Id, they would lose hope in fighting off future monsters. The master, Gotham's disguised wolf, takes the fall as originally intended, "because [he's] whatever Gotham needs [him] to be." Thus "the Joker creates a situation in which Batman is forced to break his one rule—not to kill—and as such to undermine his position as a hero" (Goodrum 235). The hero's acceptance of his monsterhood is

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[15] Harvey Dent later tells Batman, "You thought we could be decent men in an indecent time. You were wrong. The world is cruel. And the only morality in a cruel world is chance. Unbiased. Unprejudiced. Fair."

[16] Officers within the GCPD conspired with the Joker to kidnap Rachel Dawes. Harvey Dent blames Commissioner Gordon for the "evil" within his ranks that led to Rachel's death.

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necessary to protect slave morality's established good. Batman upholds his own moral code while simultaneously seeming to commit the act of murder necessary to solidify Gotham's belief in Dent. Commissioner Gordon's words, referring to Batman, appear just before the credits roll: "He's the hero Gotham deserves, but not the one it needs right now."

Whereas Batman faces three challenges as part of the villain's gauntlet in *The Dark Knight*, Batman only faces two challenges in *Batman: The Killing Joke*: the potential corruption of the slave and the cyclicality of the masters' monstrosities. *The Dark Knight* grappled with the potential for Gotham's citizens to commit evil acts, but *Batman: The Killing Joke* seeks to expose that Batman is closer to the culture's ills than he thinks. Barbara Gordon, gunned down in her home panels prior, tells Batman the Joker is "taking it to the limit this time" (Moore et al. 2008: 18). She reveals Commissioner Gordon is the comic's headliner—"top of the bill"—in the battle between hero and villain (Moore et al. 2008: 18). The villain's previous twist on the Prisoner's Dilemma in *The Dark Knight* is personalized. And if Gordon rejects slave morality, then the Joker proves his point: symbols of good are one bad day away from doing bad.

Thesis VI of *Monster Theory* dictates the monster's appearance awakens the populace to the pleasures of the *personal* body, "to the simple and fleeting joys of being frightened, or frightening" (Cohen 17). The potential corruption of Gordon as slave takes place at Gotham's amusement park—recently under new, clownish management. Gotham's citizens can temporarily engage with monstrous *Others* at the amusement park; it is a temporary place inspiring disorder, but liberation lies right outside its fence.

Cohen argues times of carnival, "an exciting or riotous mixture of something,"

"temporally marginalize the monstrous, but at the same time allow it a safe realm of expression and play" (OED, Cohen 17). The Joker has gathered fat ladies and Siamese twins, entertainers marginalized from the community, to hop on his merry bandwagon of madness. Gordon is forced to engage in their carnival play—a double entendre for engaging with the monstrous and putting on a show for the hero. The police commissioner, stripped naked and dragged across the park grounds, asks if the entire experience is all a dream. The Joker denies Gordon's, the slave's, detachment from the monstrous *Other*. If the slave wishes to engage in escapist fantasies through the monster, then he must be prepared to do "what any sane man in [such] appalling circumstances would do": go mad (Moore et al. 2008: 20).

Before the Joker's transition from slave to master morality, he was a sane man like Gordon. *Batman: The Killing Joke* supplies him an origin story through flashback scenes peppered throughout the narrative. These flashbacks are primarily colored sepia and are distinct from the vibrant, cool palette within the narrative's present day panels. Although the Joker remains unnamed, he experienced a home-life not outside the imagination: a pregnant wife, bills to pay, and people to please. The Joker was an aspiring comedian who dreamt of getting "enough money to get set up in a decent neighborhood" (Moore et al. 2008: 8). His past betrays a slave's obedience to the established rules of society.

The Joker's wife Jeannie reassures him by prioritizing love over status: "Honey, don't worry. Not about any of it. *I* still love you, y'know? Job or no job. You're good in the sack and you know how to make me laugh" (Moore et al. 2008: 8). Color invades the flashback's last panel, and the reader returns from sanity to the Joker's reflection in a

Laughing Clown machine (see Figure 2). The Joker need only "put a penny in the slot" for a laugh (Moore et al. 2008: 8). His position mirrors that of the previous panel, where he is a reflection in the kitchen cabinet. Jeannie adopts the position of the clown, smiling wide for cheap jokes. She comforted poverty and disrespect with love. Such are, from the Joker's perspective, the appalling circumstances that limit man.

The abject monster denies limits, enabling instead "the formation of all kinds of identities" (Cohen 19). Moore and Bolland detail the Joker's origin story whilst the Joker denies a scripted past, saying, "If I'm going have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice!" (Moore et al. 2008: 39). It is rational to assume "criminals are products of their experiences" (Phillips and Strobl 93). But the Joker denies the limitations of experience. The identities he inspires are partial and contiguous; "the Joker actually *thrives* on supposedly irreconcilable characterizations" (Garneau 33).

The Joker offers Gordon the same escape from society's unwritten sanity clause that is "contractually" tying Gordon "down to rationality" (Moore et al. 2008: 23). So when Gordon finds himself "locked onto an unpleasant train of thought, heading towards the places in [his] past where the screaming is unbearable," Gordon must remember "madness is the emergency exit"—he can "just step outside [the Thinkable], and close the door" (Moore et al. 2008: 21). Gordon promptly rides the Ghost Train[17] through a door with a joker-like face painted on it. The monster has dragged him over the line of the Thinkable.

The Joker intends to sway Gordon towards his blurred line of thinking with fear. He sings a tune persuading Gordon to go "loony" when "every headline screams despair,

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[17] The name of the ride the Joker forces Commissioner Jim Gordon to take at the amusement park in *Batman: The Killing Joke*.
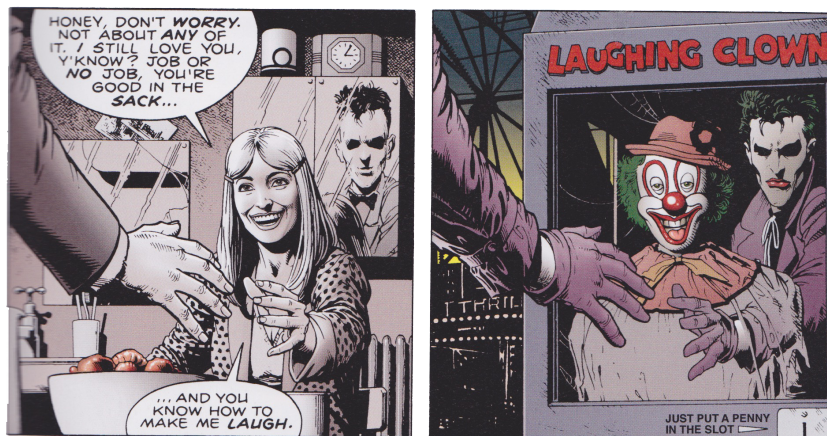
Figure 2. Past and Present Joker in *Batman: The Killing Joke*. The first panel is a reflection of the second, suggesting the laughing clown is the Joker's late wife, Jeannie.

when all is rape, starvation, war and life is vile" (Moore et al. 2008: 24). Overcoming

"man"-ness is easy for the Nietzschean Superman the Joker; he stops caring. While

delivering his inspirational lyrics, the Joker gives Gordon a "dose of reality": nude,

bloody pictures of his daughter Barbara flash on the screens lining the Ghost Train ride

(Moore et al. 2008: 28). Believing Barbara is dead, Gordon resigns to silent despondence.

The Joker gives him some time to "think his situation over" and "reflect upon life, and all

its random injustice" (Moore et al. 2008: 28). Gotham and Batman's justice allowed the

Joker to escape death and death sentences and harm Barbara. Slave morality faces

possible corruption as the clown reveals its uselessness in protecting good whilst under

pressure. The monstrous act of murder appears to be the only way for Batman to finally

defeat his villainous reflection.

Even whilst under a pressure that threatens to unmask the monstrous potential of

slave morality's good, Batman will never kill the Joker. Batman initially visits Arkham

Asylum to talk to the Joker about their future. Following a tradition of 68 years of catch

and release, Moore imbues Batman's opening monologue with a tone of finality:

> I've been thinking lately. […] About what's going to happen to us, in the end.
>
> We're going to kill each other, aren't we? Perhaps you'll kill me. Perhaps I'll kill
>
> you. Perhaps sooner. Perhaps later. (Moore et al. 2008: 4)

The speech is echoed when he saves Gordon and confronts the Joker at the comic's end;

Batman argues this is their last chance to work together. The Joker "needn't be out there

on the edge any more," waiting for future *Batman* writers to finalize their suicide pact

(Moore et al. 2008: 44). The tortured Gordon still believes in lawful justice. Slave

morality's good experienced the Unthinkable and survived.

The comic's ending shows the fruits of the Joker's will to power: a return to the comic book's first panel. The panels' transition is action-to-action, panning down to the same rain puddle that opened the narrative (see Figure 3). Thus Moore and Bolland imply the cyclicality of the masters' monstrosities will continue; the Joker will be captured, the Joker will escape, Batman will catch him, rinse and repeat. It is Unthinkable that one will end up killing the other, effectively ending Gotham's escapist fantasy of superhero versus supervillain—and therein lies the joke.

To what extent did Batman cross the boundary of the Thinkable and embrace his status as monstrous wolf? *The Dark Knight*'s conclusion depicts a martyr who embraces his monsterhood to protect culture. *Batman: The Killing Joke* questions the validity of slave morality, pulling culture from the brink of the Unthinkable with the words of the culture's chosen representative of goodness. Batman is the "alter ego" of Gotham; his heroic deeds along the boundary of culture cannot be discussed without reference to Gotham and its citizens. The villain's gauntlet tests not only Batman's propensity for good but also the slave morality of Gotham's citizens. The moment Gotham loses its Dents and Gordons, Batman's good is unmasked for what it is: the monstrous madness of a man who had one bad day—cue the criminal, broken pearl necklace, and the traumatized billionaire boy.
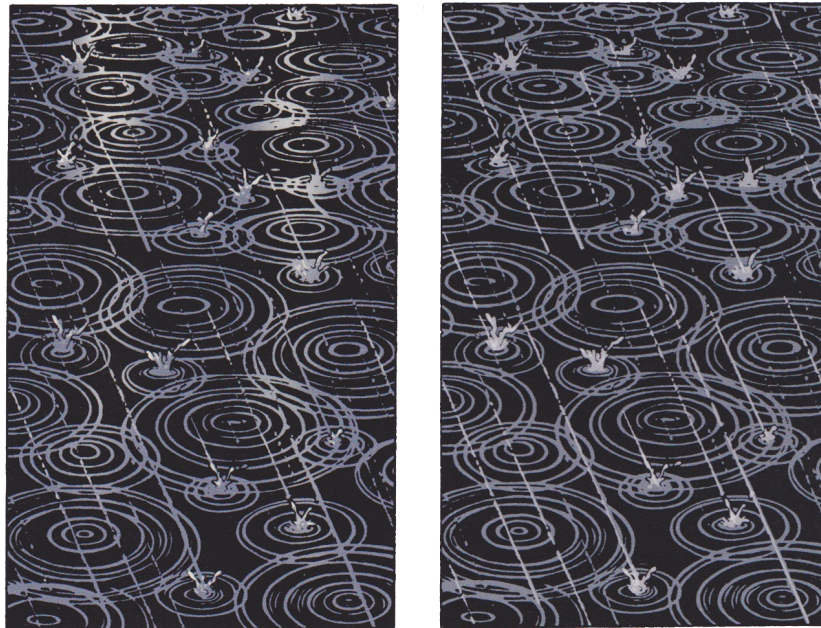
Figure 3. The Opening and Closing Panels of *Batman: The Killing Joke*. The panels' repetition suggests the narrative will continue on ad infinitum.

V. CONCLUSION

"See, there were these two guys in a lunatic asylum…and one night, one night

they decide they don't like living in an asylum any more. They decide they're

going to escape!"

-Alan Moore, *Batman: The Killing Joke*

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's seventh and final thesis of *Monster Theory: Reading*

Culture, "The Monster Stands at the Threshold…of Becoming," asks that we

acknowledge monsters are our children. Whether pushed to the boundaries of the Spear-

Danes' territory like Grendel or hidden behind a high-tech bat costume like Batman, the

monstrous emerges from culture. Whether slain or labeled as villains, they always return

with "not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our

place" but the possibility of engaging in "a discourse all the more sacred as it arises

from" beyond the Thinkable boundaries of culture (Cohen 20). Culture must reevaluate

its slave morality, that which discerns good as good for all and bad as good for one. The

monster's master morality, serving the self for the purpose of excellence of self, at times

aligns with the culture's good. But good cannot exist without bad; cue the binaries of

stranger and kinsman, knight and monster, hero and villain that appear within *Beowulf*,

Grendel, Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene, The Dark Knight*, and *Batman: The Killing Joke*.

In the following paragraphs, I return to Cohen's seven theses, comparing the

monsters of Beowulf, Grendel, Redcrosse, Errour, Batman, and the Joker. After

presenting the exemplars of each thesis, I examine the culture's perceived bad monster as

test to prove the good monster as hero. The result is the cultural *other*ing of the hero, and

the surprising conclusion that heroes are monsters perpetually struggling against a culture

that is seeking to unmask their monsterhood.

Monsters are engendered by culture in Thesis I of *Monster Theory*: "The Monster's Body Is a Cultural Body." Signifying "something *other* than itself," the material monster is a metaphor for a particular cultural moment of time, feeling, and place (Cohen 4). In the introduction and chapter one, I discussed Grendel's body as vehicle and kin-killing as tenor. But Anglo-Saxon culture also engendered Beowulf.

Beowulf is the son of Ecgtheow; he descends from one of Hrothgar's kinsman. The mead-hall Heorot, meaning hart, lies at the *heart* of Anglo-Saxon culture. Beowulf's desire to slay monsters and gain fame derives from mead-hall customs. According to Stephen Pollington, men denied access to the mead-hall's mead "were not social beings in the fullest sense—they were outcasts, the flotsam and jetsam of military conquest" (32). Beowulf's assertion of a heroic self results from an institutionalized fear of being expunged from the mead-hall and losing access to "badges of worth and merit which gave meaning to" a warrior's "acts of courage" (32).

Similarly, Bruce Wayne wears his cowl in a reaction to Gotham's crime culture. Bruce's penchant for justice derives from childhood trauma; a mugger gunned down his parents. Crazy is commonplace after Batman's appearance. In *Batman: The Killing Joke*, the sign on the front desk of Arkham Asylum reads, "You don't have to be crazy to work here—but it helps!" (Moore et al. 2008: 2). Batman never kills, and the villains evolve psychotic tendencies. Gotham's culture requires Batman's superheroic deeds to demarcate good and evil. But Bruce also needs Batman's demonstrations of good. Rachel Dawes writes a letter to Bruce following her death in *The Dark Knight*. She insinuates the day will never come when Bruce, as a member of Gotham's culture, will "no longer need

Batman." Beowulf and Batman are engendered by their cultures to do good in service to the self—whether it be the self's hero status or the self's reassurance that hope can exist in hopeless situations.

Thesis II of *Monster Theory,* "The Monster Always Escapes," implies heroes and villains are destined to clash forever. The monster's engendered "body is both corporal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift" (Cohen 5). The monster may be chased to the boundaries of culture, or even slain, but it always returns. Both Errour and the Joker return in different forms to challenge Redcrosse and Batman throughout their journeys to hero-dom.

Errour returns in the form of Redcrosse's further errancy. Errour's first form is half-woman half-snake. She thus challenges both Redcrosse's conception of ideal woman—in Una's singularity—and parent-stealing dragons killed for fame. Disgusted by the corruption of his ideals in Errour's duality, Redcrosse kills her without conscious awareness of her tenor: errancy. Errancy arises again in his encounters with Duessa, the giant Orgoglio, and a trip into despair courtesy of Despair. Redcrosse cannot truly banish the monster until he recognizes his true quest: becoming the patron saint of England.

The Joker returns in assorted forms throughout several Joker renditions. But he retains his signature smile and penchant for anarchy in the 1960s *Batman* television series, Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989), the comic *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on a Serious Earth* (1989), the video game *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009), and more recently in the film *Suicide Squad* (2016). *Gotham*, a TV series focusing on Jim Gordon's career at the GCPD before Batman rises, features a joker-like character in Jerome Valeska. Paul Cicero, Jerome's father, tells Jerome he will be "a curse upon Gotham. Children will

wake from sleep screaming at the thought of you. Your legacy will be death and madness." Despite dying within the show, Jerome's contagious laughter while committing "murderous escapades [has] left a deep impression on Gotham"; the camera zooms out, and Gotham laughs with him. *Batman: The Killing Joke*'s reflected opening and concluding panels similarly imply Batman and the Joker are due to clash in the future. Errour and the Joker return again and again because the culture, Redcrosse and Gotham, requires reminders of the persistence of evil.

Monster Theory's third thesis, "The Monster Is the Harbinger of Category Crisis," explores the monster's inability to fit into cultural and social categories. Cohen argues "the monster always escapes because it refuses easy categorization" (6). Its form refuses to participate in a culture's traditional binaries and invites onlookers to perceive the world differently.

Errour's hybridity asks Redcrosse to refuse errancy. Her "endlesse traine" mimics the multiplicity of the woods surrounding her cave and distracts in its error (FQ 1.1.10.4). Redcrosse is disgusted by her feminine half and deigns it his duty as a knight to separate power from myth—myth from woman. He fails to perceive the potential for feminine power, and his perception of the female form remains—in his view—pure. Unfortunately, this causes Redcrosse to reject Una at the slightest hint of her impurity.

In *Beowulf*, Grendel's form reminds the Spear-Danes they have potential for the monstrous. Grendel is a descendant of the kin-killer Cain. God banished Cain and his progeny to the boundaries of culture for Cain's sin. Unferth shares the same sin as this monstrous stranger, yet he retains a position of power and influence at Hrothgar's feet in Heorot as a trusted kinsman. Beowulf makes note of this troubling duality. Grendel's

appearance smashes the distinction between monstrous stranger and trusted kinsman by highlighting Unferth's monstrous potential. Errour and Grendel complicate established categories, revealing the slave's monstrosity.

The monster exists beyond the boundary of the Thinkable in *Monster Theory*'s fourth thesis: "The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference." To some degree, the six monsters discussed throughout this thesis are *other*ed whether by heroic deeds or the culture they serve. But John Gardner's *Grendel* best comments on the arbitrary difference between monster and participants in culture.

Grendel features the same-name monster's reaction to the scop, or oral poet, of Hrothgar's mead-hall. Grendel calls the scop a Shaper, because "he reshapes the world. […] So his name implies. He stares strange-eyed at the mindless world and turns dry sticks to gold" (Gardner 49). Grendel thinks the Shaper's "vision of goodness […] may yet improve men's minds, bring peace to the miserable Danes" (53). Legends of heroes and their battle-deeds may progressively change what Anglo-Saxon culture views as Thinkable and Unthinkable. Although not implicit within *Beowulf*, Beowulf's supernatural abilities are accepted by culture due to his performance of legendary battle-deeds. Familiarity with the monstrous deeds of Frisians and Beowulf may cause perceptions of difference to shift.

Thesis V of *Monster Theory*, "The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible," details the monster's ability to simultaneously invite and warn against exploration past the boundary of culture. The monster prevents mobility outside the norms of culture. But the boundary is undeniably thin. So it is conceivable that, by performing heroic deeds, Beowulf—who stands as a border patrol against the monstrous—risks becoming

monstrous himself.

Beowulf's supernatural strength separates him from the typical thane. His desire

for a seat in Hrothgar's mead-hall sets him upon Grendel, kin of Cain. The poem reveals

Grendel is unkillable by man's normal means:

þone synscaðan

ænig ofer eorþan   irenna cyst,

guðbilla nan   gretan nolde;

ac he sigewæpnum   forsworen hæfde,

ecga gehwylcre. (*Beowulf* 800-5)

[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.]

Luckily, Beowulf is a man unlike any other on middle-earth. He asserts his status as hero

through a monstrous show of strength: killing Grendel with his bare hands. In policing

the boundaries of the Thinkable, Beowulf reveals his monstrous characteristics.

The monster inspires escapist fantasies in *Monster Theory*'s sixth thesis: "Fear of

the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire." The monster is simultaneously evil and envied

for neglecting the culture's slave morality whilst pursuing its master morality. "The

linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a

temporary egress from [the] constraint" of the slave's good within Gotham's crime

culture (17). The criminal monster acts out "on all the taboo fantasies that the rest of us

have learned to control" (Asma 212).

The heroic vigilante, Batman, inspires the slave into abandoning culture due to

fear of the Unthinkable. Batman's actions during *Batman Begins* prompts a string of

copycats to take up his cowl. Like Batman, they make attempts to end Gotham's cycle of violence with more violence. In *The Dark Knight*, unlike Batman, they confront criminals using guns. Denying the danger inherent with refusing to kill, the copycats do not take responsibility for distributing justice in Batman's place. After a copycat is killed, Gotham's citizens quickly turn on Batman. He is no longer a "clearly delimited and permanently liminal space" where they can safely engage in the fantasy of vigilantism (Cohen 20).

The villainous criminal, the Joker, uses fear of the Thinkable to provoke the slave into abandoning culture. The consequences of crossing the boundary of the thinkable are mitigated by the villain's appearance as a fool. Orrin E. Klapp argues fools oppose "the hero by exaggerated evil traits," their resulting deeds ending in "failure and fiasco rather than success" (58). In *Batman: The Killing* Joke, the Joker attempts to drag Commissioner Gordon over the line of the Thinkable. He sings, "Man's so pu-uu-uny, and the universe so big..!" (Moore et al. 2008: 24). The slave is reminded that within culture they are bound by slave morality. The Joker expects the fear of "life and all its random injustice" will drive Gordon mad (Moore et. al 2008: 28). Batman and the Joker, heroic vigilante and villainous criminal, allow Gotham to engage with Unthinkable "fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion" (Cohen 17).

In *The Dark Knight* and *Batman: The Killing* Joke, the Joker tested Batman's propensity for good with a villain's gauntlet. In *Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight*'s prequel, then-Lieutenant Gordon warns Batman about the escalation of evil against good; if the police "start carrying semiautomatics, [criminals will] buy automatics […] *we* start wearing kevlar, *they* buy armor-piercing rounds." Batman's appearance is in response to

the injustice of his parents' murder. The Joker's appearance is in response to Batman's super-heroism; a hero in a cowl appears and culture engenders a clown to test his master morality. At *The Dark Knight*'s conclusion, Batman is *other*ed by his pursuit for good, unmasked as monstrous master to the culture he serves.

Gardner's *Grendel* depicts a monster conscious of his raison d'etre, or the purpose of his existence. Gardner's Grendel is aware the monster appears to test the hero. In his encounter with Unferth, Grendel laughably laments,

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! (Gardner 84)

The hero slays the monster because monster-slaying grants hero status. The hero must continue slaying monsters to retain his hero status. When Beowulf slays him, Grendel wonders if he feels joy in his fall. He desires to fall, "and though [he] might fight it with all [his] will" he knows "in advance that [he] can't win" (173). The monster is destined to sit on a pile of gold and wait for the hero to *other* him*self* by striving for a status "beyond what's possible" (88). Grendel unmasks Beowulf's hero-dom so that Beowulf may champion Anglo-Saxon culture.

Errour is the first test in Redcrosse's journey towards awareness of his true identity. The desire for order in Elizabethan chivalry directly conflicts with Errour's hybridity. Redcrosse is the cultural body that engenders Errour to test his ability to reestablish order. Errour's monstrous feminine form initially gives her the advantage. The narrator laments, "God helpe the man so wrapt in Errours endlesse traine" (FQ 1.1.18.9). And so God does by revealing Redcrosse's status as elect in Canto 10, saving Redcrosse

from his errancy. Errour unmasks Redcrosse's errancy for the sake of his growth into Saint George, the patron saint of England.

Grendel, Errour, and the Joker are heroic monsters serving culture by challenging its potential for both good and bad. *Batman: The Killing Joke's* closing joke is about two guys in a lunatic asylum who, one night, decide to escape. "Just across a narrow gap" they see the freedom of a cityscape, representing culture. The first man asserts his will to power and "jumps right across with no problem" (Moore et al. 2008: 45). He attempts to comfort his friend's fear of falling, and the joke continues as follows:

> [The first man] says, "Hey! I have my flashlight with me! I'll shine it across the gap between the buildings. You can walk along the beam and join me!" B-but the second guy just shakes his head. He suh-says…he says "Wh-what do you think I am? Crazy? You'd turn it off when I was half way across! HA HA HA HA HA! (Moore et al. 2008: 45-6)

The second man, the villain, denies the flimsy distinctions between good and bad— Thinkable and Unthinkable. While the hero escapes monsterhood, his compatriot cannot trust culture will not abandon him, *other* him, at the death of a copycat, the flickering of a flashlight, or the moment it suits slave morality. The monster is labeled bad, evil, and villainous, retreating beyond culture where he can control his fate. And it is there that this wolf lies in wait, gobbling up children and falling to hunters.

What are the implications of unmasking heroes as monsters fortunate enough to find a place amidst culture? If the hero is monstrous and the monstrous heroic, then how does this affect our values? As stated in my introduction, I hope the reader will use fictive spaces as realms for moral exploration. Readers can use literature as an escape into

fantastic stories to reconsider the arbitrary nature of Us versus Them.

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