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**Where the Wild Things Are:
An Investigation of Monstrosity**

by

Adele-France Jourdan

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Philosophy

Carleton University
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“Where the Wild Things Are: An Investigation of Monstrosity”

submitted by Adèle-France Jourdan
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

The central focus of this thesis is a phenomenologically- and psychoanalytically-driven consideration of monsters as social constructs used to establish and challenge the stability of socio-cultural norms that define the parameters of ‘appropriate’ human being. Drawing on the theories of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, David Gilmore, and Andrew Ng, the first chapter outlines the monster’s role in both constructing and deconstructing the principles that inform the (Lacanian) Symbolic order of distinct cultures. The second chapter introduces the literary monster, Grendel—as represented in *Beowulf* and in John Gardner's modern retelling, *Grendel*—in order to provide a concrete illustration of the results of the first chapter. Finally, the third chapter turns to Nabokov’s character in *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert. Using the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, Simone de Beauvoir, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I interpret Humbert as representative of the darker side of the Symbolic order's alterity-negating and freedom-denying engagement with the other.

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Introduction: Meet the Monster

History is fraught with distinct groups of people fighting and killing one another for one key reason: difference. The specific nature of the difference is almost arbitrary as long as there is a difference of which to speak: different religion, skin colour, sexual orientation, economic class, culture, ways of eating, ways of talking, dressing, thinking; the list goes on to the most seemingly superfluous differences over which people still kill, yell, ostracize, beat and exclude. This fighting is a physical manifestation of a fairly simple concept: us versus them. As a reliable rule of practice (if not one without exception), people like what they know, dislike what they do not know and, even more intensely, fear—and therefore hate—what they *cannot* know or understand. While some cultures maintain a peaceful relationship with their others that is characterized by mutual respect and sometimes even curiosity, most find difference to be the prime soil for strife, conflict and violence. People label their diverse foes as brutes, barbarians and monsters—with any term that serves to debase their others and demonstrate their disgusting and reprehensible ways of being.

Historically, individuals who deviate from established norms, practices and expectations of both physical and mental functioning have been persecuted, excluded, rejected, abused and mocked for their difference. Western hegemony has repeatedly transformed “women (*She*) and nonwhites (*Them!*) [. . .] into monsters [. . .] to validate specific alignments of masculinity and whiteness” (Cohen 15). Whether the bearded lady is ‘accepted’ into society as a source of wild entertainment in a freak show or whether the black man is used as a slave, the dominant stratum of society exerts its power over the monstrously different and discards them or objectifies them for its own agenda.

In one very real sense, society *creates* the being that it ostracizes: there is no naturally born monster. The political dictator, the child killer, the serial rapist: these cruel or evil people are just that, cruel and evil, but they are not *monstrous* outside of their society's conceptual construction. Society establishes and safeguards its self-defining and discriminate borders by the creative, yet dangerous, invention of monsters. In protecting its stability by the removal of threatening others, society uses the monster as a scapegoat to prop up the human community itself. Society isolates and eliminates the aliens it has charged with its own internal ills: "[t]his sacrificial strategy furnishes communities with a binding identity, that is, with the basic sense of who is included (us) and who is excluded (them)" (Kearney 26). Society is constructed at the expense of the other.

Before elaborating on the violent potential of difference, I wish to note that, while difference serves as a philosophical basis for hostility, greed is a practical catalyst for physical manifestations of hostility such as war. It is a fairly universal phenomenon that established groups of people do not want to share assets—be they food sources, money or shelter (to illustrate this, all one has to do is consider the conservative U.S.'s distrust of national health care which threatens to share the nation's wealth with 'undeserving' immigrants or more aptly, 'aliens'). Thus, one of the key reasons nations go to war is to safeguard their resources from the encroaching presence of others. While the practical ground for war is greed, national or political leaders certainly validate their offensive actions by establishing their enemies' monstrosity or abjectness. Countries wage war to protect their economic interests, but unite their soldiers by saying that they are fighting against 'monsters.' The communally chosen other is ostracized as a sort of scapegoat, a

practice that has its roots in pagan sacrificial rituals and mythology. Drawing on Rene Girard's discussion of scapegoating, Kearney suggests that modern societies are still guilty of this practice. Every society is informed with "rivalry for scarce resources, periodically resolved by making common cause against an agreed 'enemy' [. . .] often in the name of 'national security'" (Kearney 38). These strategic modes of persecution locate the internal or external enemy as an evil adversary that destabilizes the dominant society by "contaminating the body politic, corrupting the unsuspecting youth, eroding the economy, sabotaging peace and destroying the general moral fabric of society" (Kearney 38). Social rhetoric defends the victimization of one people by the use of the label 'monster' that denies personhood and agency: "[t]his violent [nomenclature] erects a self-validating, Hegelian master/slave dialectic that naturalizes the subjugation of one cultural body by another by writing the body excluded from personhood and agency as in every way different, monstrous" (Cohen 11).

Communities use the term 'monster' and its conceptual correlates to deny the possibility that they share anything with those who choose to commit atrocious acts. We establish significantly deviant individuals (Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin) as monsters so as to remove them from the realm of human being and prevent the threat they pose to our perceived human rationality and moral stability. Such individuals are of a uniquely evil crust and share nothing with 'us.' They are monstrous. Labeling such people 'inhuman' conveniently safeguards our constructed notion of humans as rational, logical, sane and caring, characteristics that are alas everyday undermined. So as to evade the inevitable observation that human society is not necessarily any of these things and is fundamentally unstable, 'monstrous' individuals are forcefully evicted from the newly

rendered safe category of rational human being. These deviant beings are certainly different, but they terrify us because we in fact recognize ourselves in them. When this intimate stranger undermines the known, we set him apart in “fear and trembling” as a monster (Kearney 3).

Throughout social, political and literary history the monster has denoted myriad beings who share one thing in common: their threatening difference. Some might say that battles fought over difference are rooted in hatred; however, this assessment overlooks the nature of hatred, an emotion that typically grows from fear. Even today, we live in the wake of our Enlightenment forefathers who associated the good, moral and trustworthy with the known and the rational. That which exceeds reason and knowledge (namely the monster) is bad, immoral and untrustworthy, all features of something that should be feared, for it threatens the rational and logical ground that supports and protects us. Monsters are manifestations of the unknown that “occupy the frontier zone where reason falters and fantasies flourish” (3). We do not like to admit that we do not fully know ourselves, so we instead locate the monster as the unknown being: “the figure of the stranger [. . .] defines our own identity by the very idea that it is the Other, not we, who is unknown” (Kearney i). Safely externalized qua monster, the self’s or society’s otherness no longer presents an internal threat to stability.

What is hatred, then, but that emotion felt towards the fear-inducing source that threatens the stability of the borders that define the rational, moral and predictable quality of the established social order? What is so frightening about the monster is that it successfully exceeds the bounds of this order, thereby proving its constructedness and permeability. The monster is the manifestation of our fear and hence hatred of difference

and the unknown. It is the symbolic and fictitious being that we create so as to put a label on that which is feared and hated for it threatens the illusion of rationality that supports our strong and impenetrable world—however small or big one understands that world to be. Once labeled as an aberrant and evil being, the monster can be validly extricated from or killed by society, which must protect its—physical or metaphorical—borders of self-identity from such threat.

Having established a preliminary sketch of monstrosity, I now address the structure of my *monstrous* investigation. My first chapter is a specific investigation into monster theory, wherein I define the monster as any deviant being that deconstructs the Symbolic order (to use a Lacanian term) of a specific group, culture or nation. Using three main ‘monster theorists’ (Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, David Gilmore and Andrew Ng), I discuss how the monster exceeds the rational and ordered categories of the Lacanian Symbolic order, frustrating the binary either/or logic that characterizes its knowledge. Whether the monster exceeds physical or moral normalcy, he undermines the safe borders of social order that define ‘acceptable’ human behaviour. However, the monster also plays a role in the construction of the Symbolic order, as societies create the monster as a scapegoat over and against whom they can define their stable and egocentric being. I conclude by discussing absolute alterity and immanence in an effort to define whether the monster’s fearsomeness comes from an intimate place, or comes from a place that is absolutely other. I will analyze this question from both a phenomenological and a psychoanalytic framework and come to the conclusion that the monster is fearsome for a mixture of both reasons: it is an intimate stranger.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that, by ‘monster,’ I do not mean to refer to creatures or beasts that share nothing in common with humans or are ‘monstrous’ perversions of or deviations from strictly animal being (take for instance a twenty foot rat with razor-sharp teeth, the wings of a chicken and the legs of an alligator). The above example of perverted animal being certainly destabilizes metaphysical categories of knowledge (frustrating what a rat is *meant* to look like); however, the destabilization of human categories is only one aspect of monstrous being for which I will argue. For the purposes of my investigation into the monster’s pervasive and fundamental threat, I refer to aberrant beings that dangerously resemble humans and thereby jeopardize the stability of established parameters or boundaries of human being. While not all monster theorists define the monster’s threat with reference to the Symbolic order (as does Ng) or agree that monstrous being must necessarily share a resemblance with human being, there is a common thread that identifies monstrous being as deviating from some set of established and normalized ways of being or categories of knowledge given a specific social or cultural context. Although critics certainly provide differing accounts of the monster’s exact role in cultural being (the monstrous boogie-men that live beneath children’s beds or in the dark depths of their closets, brain-eating zombies in horror thrillers, or historical examples of psychopathic mass murderers or violent dictators), I have not encountered any account of monstrosity that identifies monsters as belonging to a natural kind (namely a group of beings that has not been artificially constructed but exists from natural causes alone).

Chapter Two focuses on the literary monster: Grendel of the Old English poem *Beowulf* and of John Gardner’s modern re-telling, *Grendel*. Grendel is both the absolute

other against whom society defines itself and the intimate stranger that facilitates the construction of social identity. He both constructs and deconstructs the Symbolic order of the text's heroic society. Blurring boundaries between human and monster in the Old English text and warning of the dangerous consequences of overstepping the boundaries of nihilistic philosophy in the modern fable, Grendel is a perfect manifestation of monstrous being.

Simone de Beauvoir writes that “[o]nly I can create the tie that unites me to the other” ([b] 93). Because of this, normalized members of society orient the relationship with the monster. Thus in Chapter Three, I determine how the Symbolic order creates the monster so as to establish its own supremacy and, in so doing, commits an evil act by denying the freedom of the other as well as the self; I argue that any system that limits the other's ambiguous being necessarily limits that of the self as well. In order to elucidate this point, I provide a short phenomenological history of alterity as it accounts for the necessity of the other in grounding one's freedom and pure self-consciousness. I begin with a discussion of Hegelian mutual recognition and the lord and bondsman, and then consider Levinas' critique of totalizing egologies that negate alterity and eliminate individual freedom. I then address Sartre and de Beauvoir's assessment of existential responsibility and freedom. Exemplifying de Beauvoir's understanding of evil as denying individual ambiguity, I make reference to Humbert Humbert, the pedophilic protagonist of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, as a metaphoric manifestation of society's evil denial of individual subjectivity or ambiguity. I conclude with Merleau-Ponty and embodied consciousness, establishing that only by rendering the delineation between self

and other more porous and ambiguous will we deconstruct the Symbolic order's use of the term 'monster' as a means of restricting individual freedom and subjectivity.

In illustrating the use of the label 'monster,' I determine that monstrous being does not exist naturally—as a natural kind—but is rather a construction that is rooted in individual or societal (mis)treatment of others. Whether an enemy's monstrosity is established so as to sustain national unity and peaceful (read submissive) cohesion, difference is constructed and the monster threatens to reveal the roots of its own creation: "it threatens to reveal that difference originates in process, rather than in fact (and that 'fact' is subject to constant reconstruction and change)" (Cohen 15). The monster's ability to exceed the Symbolic order is a positive element of its being. The abject periphery where monsters dwell may "be imagined as the visible edge of the hermeneutic circle itself" (Cohen 7). Because of its removal from this narrow path, the monster offers an escape to explore new spirals, new and interconnected methods of perceiving the world (Cohen 7). Not only does the monster superficially defy categorization, but it also deconstructs the very analytic logic by which dominant modes of human being function. The monster is created by the social order so as to support its narrow borders. However, the monster develops a life of its own by deconstructing or blurring its creator's constructed categories of knowledge, and successfully exceeds the freedom-denying grasp of totalizing egologies to reveal the existential freedom that defines each individual.

Chapter One: Recipe for Monstrosity

In this chapter I discuss the social monster as a being that threatens subjectivity by deconstructing the Lacanian Symbolic order that encompasses cultural, political, linguistic, sexual and other codes of being.¹ In striving to delimit the monster's nature as a social creation, I integrate the 'monster' theory of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and David Gilmore in an attempt to identify the reciprocal relationship between monstrous and social being. I begin with a general outline of what I interpret to be monstrous being and then move to a discussion of the monster's 'excessive' relationship with the Symbolic order. After following Andrew Ng's lead in locating the monster as a harbinger of the Real, I discuss how the monster exceeds the Symbolic order or social order by frustrating attempts at categorization and defying the limits of acceptable human being. I then argue that, while monsters seem to deconstruct the Symbolic order, the use of the term 'monster' ensures that this deconstructive threat is circumvented and that the monster's deviance is used instead to construct the Symbolic order. Thus, in the second section, I discuss how society establishes what is properly human over and against monstrous being, thereby constructing the Symbolic order. I conclude by engaging both a phenomenological account of the absolute other and a psychoanalytic account of the doppelganger in claiming that the monster's fearsomeness is driven by his unknowable absolute otherness and by his known familiarity as an intimate stranger. As a being that

¹ While aware of the specific psychoanalytic definition of the Lacanian Symbolic order, for the purposes of my investigation into the nature of the monster's fearsomeness, I interpret the Symbolic order as a social order that constructs social identity (and thus the identity of its 'proper' members) via a set of established meanings and principles that exclude alterity in the face of sameness. Following Andrew Ng's lead, I then locate the monster as a threat that destabilizes the Symbolic order, as it reveals the contingent and artificial nature of the principles that constitute social identity.

both exceeds the Symbolic order and constructs it at the same time (as we use monstrous being as a means by which to define what is appropriately human), I identify the monster as an uncanny other that polices the borders of human being and is used to warn or forebode of potential dangers that threaten the seemingly impermeable boundaries of human being.

In order to address social monstrosity, I turn to a psychoanalytic reading that defines the monster as the excess being of the Symbolic order that frustrates categorization. Hegemonic and dominant ways of being demonize what they consider “to be ‘excessive’ characteristics of alterity” (Kearney 41). Society has an established range of deviation from normativity that allows for acceptable or familiar difference. If society considers a certain individual excessively deviant in its unintelligibility or disfigured being, it identifies the individual as a monster and rejects it from the social order. As monsters are created by human society, deviant or excessive beings do not always act with malicious intent. The unsettling physical appearance of the monster certainly exceeds notions of the normativized body (and concomitant rationality), thereby revealing the vulnerability of our embodied being, but certain monsters are threatening despite themselves, as they do not necessarily intend to endanger the self. The egocentric intention of the society that perceives the strange other as a monstrous threat is more important than the intent of the stranger himself. Physically deformed individuals do not necessarily intend to undermine established notions of the body, yet they are labeled as monstrous because their concomitant difference and similarity with normativized being reveal certain anomalies and rifts within our determined concepts of mind and body that threaten constructed ontologies of being. Related to the social construction of

monstrosity is Noel Carroll's assertion that it is the audience's emotional response to the monster of modern horror narratives that defines monstrosity rather than the specific malice of the deviant being itself (Gilmore 8). Regardless of the monster's motivation, it is social intent that locates the monster as a horrific threat to one's being (while the monster *may* have the intention to threaten one's being, what I suggest is that, even if he does not desire to do so, society will *necessarily* perceive his very existence as a threat in and of itself).

The monster's deviance from the range of known behaviour is perceived as a threat to reason and knowledge as defined by the Symbolic order. We like being able to knowingly grasp being and to organize our knowledge into distinct, hierarchical categories. Elaborating on his understanding of the monster as a resistant other that embodies difference and breaks down categories, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes that the monster "resists any classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition, demanding instead a 'system' allowing polyphony, mixed response (difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction), and resistance to integration" (7). The monster not only defies physical or moral categorization but also denounces the very logic by which human rationality functions, namely by the binary either/or. Aberrant or deviant beings that defy knowledge or categorization are ostracized by society as monsters, for they threaten the impenetrability and stability of the rational ground upon which we define ourselves. Monsters highlight the fact that we have created this picture of normalcy and that, as a creation, normativized being is vulnerable to deconstruction.

But surely there are certain types of difference that pose no threat to our stability. There are certain types of strange people that exist just within the margins of the

Symbolic order. What specific feature of the monster's difference inspires fear? To pose the question in a different way, who are our monsters? Monsters are those beings whose excessive difference relegates them to the truly abject, marginal and peripheral boundary of the Symbolic order. I will suggest in this chapter that the monster deconstructs the Symbolic order and returns us to the Lacanian Real, wherein our subjectivity is revealed as being founded on a Void. The individual fears the groundlessness of being's pure presence (a groundlessness that—in phenomenological and existentialist thought—also establishes freedom) and locates its being in the Symbolic order. De Beauvoir, for instance, writes that, “as soon as we are thrown into the world, we immediately wish to escape from the contingency and the gratuitousness of pure presence” ([b] 129). We rely on others to found the necessity of our existence and to provide us with the means to establish our projects and meaning.

Andrew Ng defines the monster as the harbinger of the Real—a Lacanian term that refers to the Void of being—that exceeds and threatens the stability of the Symbolic order, i.e. of “the set of rules and language that comprise the socio-cultural order in its largest sense” (Roof 10). The “Symbolic order permeates and encompasses every aspect of what is designated ‘reality’” (Ng 6) and contributes to the self's psychic development and the generation of social organization. As a being that frustrates or evades the boundaries of the pervasive Symbolic order, the monster is a surplus that indicates the Real, or the Void, that ‘grounds’ our being. The Void is an “‘empty space’ which defies signification, and which the Symbolic cannot integrate. It is a ‘surplus’ outside the Symbolic, a ‘black hole’ which threatens to engulf and negate the Symbolic fantasy”

(Cohen 189). Monsters reveal the fantastical and synthetic nature of Symbolic reality, thereby reintegrating the subject into the Real, or “its original locus in the ‘Void’” (Ng 6).

Whether the monster exists undetected within the system and thus attacks from within, or whether he seemingly attacks from without, he attempts to collapse the fantastical means by which social reality has been established. As I have argued that the monster—and his threatening fearsomeness—is a manifestation of social anxiety regarding the stability of its borders, when I refer to the monster intentionally attacking social order or attempting to destabilize normalized being, I refer to what society perceives the monster to be doing. The monster “problematise[s] the notion of ‘reality’ constructed as the ‘Symbolic order’—an ideological construction which largely dictates the way society and culture operate” (Ng 1). The monster exceeds constructed reality and returns being to the Void of the Real. Ng explains that, for Slavoj Žižek, “there are two forms of ‘reality’: one is a construction of the Symbolic mechanism (variously represented as culture, gender, sexuality, and ideology), and the other is that which is outside the Symbolic mechanism,” namely the Real, which still encompasses constructed reality” (7). Because the Real subsists in its non-symbolised state, it “returns in the guise of spectral apparitions [that give] body to that which escapes (the symbolically structured) reality” (Žižek 21). Thus, the monster as specter indicates that which the fantasy of reality intends to hide: the Real. The monster as abject being reveals the Real and thus exceeds reality. It deconstructs the fantasy that Symbolic reality is a stable and impenetrable body. Drawing on Freud and Lacan’s psychoanalytic thought, Ng defines trauma as “the disappearance of the Symbolic and the resurfacing of its excess—the Real (7). The monster is the traumatic experience of surplus that exceeds constructed reality

and defies the Symbolic mechanism, thereby revealing the Real. The monster in this sense is “*an intermediary figure between the self and its collapse into trauma*” (Ng 8).

One of the ways by which the monster exceeds the Symbolic order is by exceeding categorization. The third thesis of Cohen’s monster theory speaks to this defiance of identification: “The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis” (5). The monster deconstructs the Symbolic order by defying categorization as an unidentifiable “form suspended between forms” (Cohen 6). The monster has accumulated many definitions in its polymorphous state through historical, social and literary criticism. It has at times been the significantly deformed human, the invented half-man half-beast, the sexually confused hermaphrodite or homosexual, or the amoral serial killer or rapist. One of the main criteria of the monster, however, is that it exceeds what is acceptably human. We define the monster in light of what we want the human to look like: “[h]umanness, then, with all its connotations, is the yardstick to distinguish the monster. The need to maintain ‘humanness’ as normative necessarily relegates threatening entities to an ‘other’” (Ng 5). While humans are associated with known and complete being, monsters are unknown, if not unknowable for their defiance of knowledge-seeking endeavours that strive for straightforward categorization or identification. For Lorenzo Lorenzi monsters are fearsome and demonic beings that personify irrationality, ambivalence and unpredictability (Lorenzi 21). Another way to capture the monster’s defiance of human boundaries of knowledge or being is to say that the monster “signal[s] borderline experiences of uncontainable excess, reminding the ego that it is never wholly sovereign” (Kearney 3). Not only does the monster exceed categories of knowledge, but the monster exceeds what is taken by definition to be human.

Defining the monster's evasion of categorization and blurring of boundaries, Noel Carroll writes that, in horror narratives, the monster is characterized by fusion. The monster's aberrant physicality

transgress[es] categorical distinctions such as inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine, and so on [, . . .] unit[ing] attributes held to be categorically distinct and/or at odds in the cultural scheme of things in unambiguously one, spatio-temporally discrete entity. (43)

The monster combines that which *should* be separate into one body (although sometimes this body cannot even be identified as one). Further elaborating on the monster's evasion of categorization, Gilmore writes that Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* (1966) grounds the monster's fearsome deviance in its interstitial being, namely its embodied conflation of disparate elements from categories of being that are normally distinct. In thus collapsing cognitive boundaries, the monster deconstructs the foundation of social order (18).

Referring to the creation of monsters, Rosemary Jackson proposes that monsters and demons are not created *ex nihilo*, but rather through the recombination of fragments from empirical reality (1981, 6) (quoted in Gilmore 15). It is important to clarify that, by monster, Jackson does not intend human individuals, such as hunchbacks, paraplegics or conjoined twins, who deviate from physical standards of normalcy. Instead, she means monsters that incorporate distinct aspects from different disparate bodies (take for example Jeff Goldblum's part-man/part-fly character in *The Fly*). This argument is reminiscent of Freud's discussion of dreams as combining various elements from experiential perception into one conglomerate dream image or structure (Gilmore 16). The monster as horrific fusion "is produced by a process of superimposition [. . .] of distinct types of beings into a grotesque and bizarre composite" (Gilmore 17). Cohen

agrees that the monster is not created from scratch but is rather constructed piecemeal by the creative restructuring of fragments of actual experience. Once assembled as a newly polymorphous being, the monster can “then claim autonomous existence in consciousness (Cohen 1996, 11)” (quoted in Gilmore 21). These observations about monstrous creation mirror the creative process that is evident in any artistic or imaginative endeavour, such as painting, writing and myth-making. Like all imaginative constructs, the monster is a manifestation of human experience and consciousness, thereby highlighting its anthropomorphic identity.

David Gilmore writes that “[p]eople everywhere use ‘monster’ glibly to describe whatever they find loathsome, terrifying, or dangerous, so we should be specific” (6). He characterizes the monster by means of its combination of various human and animal features: “[m]ost often [monsters] are grotesque hybrids, recombinations uniting animal and human features or mixing animal species in lurid ways” (Gilmore 6). To further illustrate the nature of the monster as hybrid being, Gilmore refers to Claude Kappler who also characterizes monsters by their “unnatural asymmetry of parts, substitution of anatomical organs by unnatural forms, and *mélange* or recombination of human, animal, and plant life into impossible composite organisms” (Gilmore 7-8). He moreover explains that in the Middle Ages and Renaissance the monster was “whatever combined various naturally occurring flora and fauna into weird combinations, whether in the imagination or as a mistake of nature, especially those so-called prodigies that united the animal with the human” (Gilmore 8). By defining the monster as one that confuses physical boundaries (and intellectual ones as well), the monster reveals the vulnerability of human being; “monsters expose the radical permeability and artificiality of all our

classificatory boundaries, highlighting the arbitrariness and fragility of culture” (Gilmore 19).

Elaborating on the monster’s differently embodied consciousness, Margrit Shildrick explains that the modern monster reveals our vulnerability, not to any specific source, but to the general porous and insecure nature of our and others’ being. As mentioned in the Introduction, the Enlightenment identified the good with the rational, dividing mind from body and privileging the former as a source of creative meaning. That which threatened the invulnerability of reason and presented a body that blurred mind-body dualism was perceived to be immoral and threatening; any external, physical abnormality was thought to embody an internal mental deformity as well. For Shildrick, monsters are conjoined twins, dwarves, paraplegics, namely deformed beings that belie the stability of the body as a fortified defense and manifestation of closed and secured normativized being. While such deformities are disturbing, their deconstructive effect may be seen in a more productive light in that the norms they belie may be misguided and need reorientation to accept the differently embodied. The use of the term ‘monster,’ however, disallows for the restructuring of social limits and rejects the deformed as inhuman.

Cohen suggests that the monster’s ability to evade and undermine human categories of definition “has coursed through the monster’s blood” since its alterity frustrated Aristotle’s (and later philosophers’) attempt to locate the monstrous races in an organized and clear epistemological system (6). Throughout history, the laws of science (or the Symbolic order itself) have been too narrow, uniform and precise to include the monster, whose “very existence is a rebuke to boundary and enclosure” (Cohen 7). The

Symbolic order constructs bodies and defines those that deviate from that construction as monstrous: the Symbolic gaze “prescribes certain significances to particular bodies and behaviours, rendering [deviant ones] monstrous” (Ng 2). The Symbolic gaze seizes the physically deformed with greatest ease and immediately codes them as monstrous for failing to abide by the Symbolic narrative (2). Earlier, I raised the possibility that there must be certain physically or mentally deviant individuals who are not identified as monsters and are instead included within the realm of ‘proper’ human being. The same question may be asked of those who are encompassed by the Symbolic gaze: are there any deviant individuals who are viewed with a beneficent gaze? Given certain cultural and social contexts, there are surely some individuals who are accepted within a Symbolic gaze that is wide and beneficent enough to encompass those who are ‘reasonably’ different. However, the monster is that being that is so significantly deviant that it is defined as a body that defies the law of the Symbolic order and its all-encompassing and -signifying gaze.

Because monsters frustrate categorical structures of knowledge, they deconstruct both physical and cognitive structures; “[b]y smashing distinctions, monsters offer a threat to the [. . .] assumption that such distinctions can be drawn in the first place” (Michael Uebel 1996, 266) (quoted in Gilmore 19). While the repercussions of Uebel’s conclusion may be extreme, monsters surely require us to at least question the certain and necessary validity of the either/or bifurcating structure that, according to Barbara Johnson, defines the “very logic of meaning” (quoted in Cohen 7). Monsters threaten the very logic by which human rationality is *supposed* to function. Turning to the structure

of myth, Kearney cites Levi-Strauss as defining the creation of the monster as a product of binary thinking. Sacrificial monster rituals are a

fundamental expression of an unconscious 'savage mind' bent on dividing up the world into a series of binary oppositions: culture and nature, edible and inedible, cooked and raw, marriagable and non marriagable [sic], vertical and horizontal, good and evil. (34)

The notion that these ritual practices are 'savage' is somewhat amusing as they are still very much utilized in today's philosophically and technologically 'advanced' society, as evident in the demonization of atheists, terrorists and illegal aliens that threaten national and social stability.

Following Rene Girard's lead in his analysis of mythology, Kearney defines the monstrous as the being that exists as the "expression of indifferentiation and chaos" (Kearney 44-5). Elaborating on this binary division, Timothy Beal writes in *Religion and Its Monsters* that the monster discloses the instability of the sacred that is "caught in endless, irreducible tensions between order and chaos, orientation and disorientation, self and other, foundation and abyss" (quoted in Kearney 34). While I disagree that monsters are necessarily related to the sacred, I agree with Beal that the experience of them certainly disrupts the safe binaries of "order and chaos, orientation and disorientation, self and other, foundation and abyss." The latter coupling is specifically important when one takes into consideration Ng's notion that the monster is guilty of deconstructing the fantasy of reality and revealing the subject's foundation on a Void, in the Lacanian Real.

However, while it seems that the monster deconstructs the Symbolic order, the creation of the different 'monster' serves to eliminate difference within the social order. By creating a monster (and thereby validating its removal from society), one ensures sameness within society. The very perception of difference as a threat paradoxically

threatens to erase difference. The creation of the political-cultural monster as an embodiment of threatening alterity ensures the erasure of “difference in the world of its creators” and defends sameness (Cohen 11). Rene Girard writes that “[d]espite what is said around us persecutors are never obsessed with difference but rather by its unutterable contrary, the lack of difference” (Girard 22). The monster is used as a cultural apparatus by which individuality is negated.

Although Ng suggests that the contemporary monster evades or deconstructs the Symbolic order, its label qua monster nullifies this deconstruction. Ng maintains that, while the traditional monster is typically vanquished by the victorious Symbolic order that has seized the deviant being with its relentless gaze, the contemporary monster either evades the gaze or superficially surrenders to it so as to enact and then continue its deviant behaviour from within the Symbolic order:

[a]s long as the monster remains out of sight, it is outside Symbolic limitations and positioned as a ‘surplus’ [. . . T]he contemporary monster succeeds in evading the regimentation of Symbolic policing (gazing) while effectively manipulating this gaze to suit its perverse ends. (Ng 12-3)

However, qua monster, he never evades the gaze.

Ng writes that there are two ways to represent the relationship between monstrosity and the Symbolic order. The first states that the monster is a powerful “threat that openly transgresses and subverts the Symbolic. In this instance, one adopted by many traditional monster narratives, the monster is either finally destroyed, or, on a more benign note, rehabilitated and reintegrated into society” (Ng 16). The monster is an obvious external threat to the Symbolic order because it destabilizes (by highlighting) the constructedness of normativized notions of corporeality, rationality, or morality. Society relegates such deviant being to the realm of the monstrous in an attempt to reestablish a

sense of security to the Symbolic order. We deny the monster's humanity for, if the monster were human, his deviance could seriously sacrifice the stability of the Symbolic order. However, since the monster is not human, it shares nothing with the Symbolic order and we can return to our oblivious acceptance of the Symbolic order's stability.

Ng's second monster is one who "has learned to manipulate the Symbolic and has become assimilated into society, where it clandestinely carries out its atrocious acts" (Ng 16). This monster elusively defies re-signification as it is hidden within the Symbolic order. While I previously suggested that the monster never evades the Symbolic order's pervasive gaze, Ng's second representation of the relationship between the monster and the Symbolic order depicts an undetectable monster that is 'normally' embodied and deceptively appears to abide by the Symbolic order's dictums, only to then deconstruct its artificial structures from within. In this scenario, we do not notice any potential threat to the Symbolic order until after the monster has already acted, at which point we label such a deviant being monstrous so as to remove him from having any similarity with the actual safety of the Symbolic order.

While it seems that monsters (especially those within the Symbolic order) successfully deconstruct constructed reality, the Symbolic order actually emerges as the victor in the encounter with monstrous being. Once apprehended these deviant beings are called monsters, so as to safeguard social being against 'inhuman' breaches of security. If monsters are different (namely they are inhuman atrocities) then they cannot actually threaten the stability of the Symbolic order because they come from without it. Society labels these threatening beings monsters so as to justify their permanent removal from the Symbolic order and to thereby establish the order's invulnerability to deconstruction.

While Ng writes that some monster narratives re-signify “the monster so that it remains a positive challenge against a rigid and homogenizing Symbolic regime,” more often than not the Symbolic order prevents the deconstruction of its established, albeit potentially injurious, coding (14-16). The dominant existence of the Symbolic order over and against monsters suggests that this tactic of securing conformity and uniformity within the human community by denying the uncanny other a place within it has been successful.

In our rejection of the monster, we secure the borders of the Symbolic order. Despite its rejection, however, the monster is universally popular (both temporally and geographically) because its polymorphic constitution simultaneously attempts to deconstruct and *construct* the Symbolic order that rejects it. While the monster’s popularity may seem counterintuitive (as individuals fear monsters), we also strangely desire this fear (take for instance cultural obsession with monster films such as *Godzilla*, *Frankenstein*, or *Dracula*). Society desires monstrous guards to patrol and safeguard the self-defined boundaries of the Symbolic order, prohibiting any dangerous over-stepping of its borders by curious humans. And, according to Gilmore, individuals desire monsters that enable them to vicariously experience the set of id desires that society frowns upon (take for example the indulgence in excessive violence, rage, or sexual acts). Individual desire for monstrosity, however, is limited to fictional monstrosity, wherein we know that we can close the book we are reading or can turn off the film that we are watching and return to a safe and secure environment that is protected from any ‘monstrous’ breaches. Individuals desire monsters that can be safely removed; however,

they fear those that wander too close and threaten to penetrate boundaries of normalized human being.

Elucidating individual or social desire for monstrosity, Cohen writes that we desire the monster because it “Policies the Borders of the Possible” (12). As the scary manifestation of abject limits of knowledge, the monster warns “against exploration of its uncertain demesnes” (Cohen 12). The monster suggests that the safety that the Symbolic order presents to the individual that stays within its domestic borders is preferable than testing its boundaries and thereby risking “attack by some monstrous border patrol or (worse) to become monstrous oneself” (Cohen 12). The symbolic monster prevents curious motility outside the Symbolic order’s hermeneutic circle and ensures that the boundaries of the Symbolic order cannot be crossed: in fact, it calls “horrid attention to the [cultural] borders that cannot—*must* not—be crossed” (Cohen 13). We enforce sexual, cognitive and gender constructs by destroying the transgressive monster.

Thus far, I have alluded to the monster as a social creation: “culture [. . .] produces, camouflages, marginalizes and resists it” (Ng 1). As cultural products, monsters themselves provide us with the necessary means for dissecting and understanding them, even if they defy normal categorization and definition. According to John O’Neill, monsters “still serve as the ultimate incorporation of our anxieties—about history, about identity, about our very humanity” (Cohen xii). The basic monster narrative projects the responsibility for social upheaval onto the other and reestablishes group cohesion by exiling this commonly chosen enemy as a monster (Kearney 43).

Cohen addresses contemporary fascination with the non-human and excessive monster in his book *Monster Theory*, wherein he defines the monster as a

commodification of the fear that characterizes late twentieth century American culture. Americans' fascination with monsters is a "fixation that is born of the twin desire to name that which is difficult to apprehend and to domesticate (and therefore disempower) that which threatens" (Cohen viii). As a cultural creation (wherein culture includes temporal, geographic, bodily, and technological features), the monster is used to delimit and police the borders of the very society that has invented these monstrous guards (Cohen ix). The monster's specific excess reveals cultural anxieties and should be read in terms of the socio-cultural and literary-historical contexts that generate them: monsters embody certain ideological crises "so that such anxieties can be 'controlled', examined, understood, and subsequently, 'resolved'" (Ng 5). The monster is a cultural servant used to abet social doubts. It is important to note here that Cohen stresses the fact that monsters are socially generated and created: they do not exist naturally. Because the monster contributes to the construction of human culture, it is possible also to limn the contours of culture by its encounter with the monster.

Let us consider one specific monstrous police guard: the creation of Victor Frankenstein. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley warns of the repercussions of a human—specifically a male—attempting to defy nature and to create life without God. It is interesting that modern adaptations of this Gothic text apply the creator's name (Victor Frankenstein) to the monster. In a sense, modernity calls the creator himself a monster, perhaps because of his monstrous overstepping of human boundaries of knowledge and creation (although much of this misnomenclature is rooted in a simple unfamiliarity with the Gothic text itself). The text is named the *Modern Prometheus* signaling Victor's audacious science. Shelley created this monster, Frankenstein's progeny, in order to

foretell the negative consequences of contemporary scientific endeavours in the electric regeneration of life, a process that overwhelmed conservative expectations of science's place in God's realm. Frankenstein's hideous creation is the monstrous policeman that guards the boundaries of human knowledge within the Symbolic order of Shelley's time. In terms of the monster deconstructing the Symbolic order, I do not believe that this happens in the text. Frankenstein's creation is the manifestation of one type of monster—one that, like the guard of the underworld, warns of the ill consequences of overstepping human boundaries of creation and knowledge. The monster in this text is not only signaled by his physical deformity and grotesque appearance, but also by his initial inability to communicate in the language of the Symbolic order (note that in twentieth century adaptations of the text, the monster is totally denied the ability to speak, while he learns to speak in his adult life in Shelley's novel). *Frankenstein* warns society not to move outside its epistemological boundaries.

As a police guard, the monster "Dwells at the Gates of Difference" (Cohen 7). The monster creates the human community and defends its boundaries by assuming the role of deviant being that human society rejects and thereby uses to protect its sameness. Cohen writes that "[t]he exaggeration of cultural difference into monstrous aberration is familiar enough" (7). Various groups of people have done this in order to justify whatever brutal treatment they wish to exhibit. Monsters unite communities against a commonly chosen enemy. This being is called a scapegoat and is communally attacked and ostracized so as to establish harmony and cohesion within the social or cultural group that is in danger of destabilization. Societies scapegoat others as monstrous beings so as to solidify bonds or to purge experienced guilt or angst. As mentioned in the introduction

to this chapter, in order to defend humanity, we have to eliminate the monstrous (which is defined as deviant being that exceeds human ranges of acceptable behaviour and features): “[t]o be fully human is to disavow the strange space that the inhuman, the monstrous, occupies within every speaking subject” (Cohen 4). In the process of scapegoating, we simplify our human being by burdening the chosen scapegoat with the ‘alien’ and ‘other’ features we dislike about ourselves: “we often project onto others those unconscious fears from which we recoil in ourselves. [. . .] We refuse to acknowledge ourselves-as-others” (Kearney 5).

The scapegoat is chosen based on perceived differences. As Gilmore writes, “[p]ostmodern research, mainly in Western literature and art, emphasizes the demonization of the ‘Other’ in the image of the monster as a political device for scapegoating those whom the rules of society deem impure or unworthy—the transgressors and deviants” (14). The familiar being that abides by established norms of embodied being (both physical normalcy and mental rationality) poses no threat to either our norms or subjectivity. However, the being that looks different, speaks a foreign language, or dresses strangely stands out in his or her difference. As an unfamiliar and unknown being, he evokes feelings of suspicion and distrust. Because of his difference he poses a threat to our social being (the unknown is not to be trusted) especially if he already threatens established norms of being. Anthony Storr writes that people blame the scapegoat for any social disaster and regard it as wholly evil (160). As mentioned in the Introduction, the identity of the human community is bound by means of what is included (us) and what is rejected (them, or monsters).

Scapegoating is not only a social practice but can also be seen in early Judeo-Christian scripture as a recurring religious ritual: the “people of God remain holy by casting from their midst what is unholy, thus propitiating the Lord and removing all traces of evil from their community” (Kearney 27-8). This mythology presumes that it takes an ethical step away from using pagan rites of human blood sacrifice. Instead, the goat is often used as the symbolic manifestation of evil: “the goat is the animal figure which stands—and stands in—for evil” (Kearney 27-8). The various beings that are *scapegoated* maintain both human and animal elements, highlighting the role of the monster as a being that crosses boundaries and defies categorization: “[s]uch inhuman features cannot, for all that, mask the fact that the demons are also at least *half-human* in appearance,” thereby substantiating the notion that we are our own monsters (Kearney 29). The Judaeo-Christian revelation, however, “did not [. . .] prevent repeated reversals throughout history” (Kearney 28). Namely, the tradition of human sacrifice still remains despite a momentary evolution in ritualistic practices. Kearney identifies the following beings as those that are ostracized as others. In the Holy Roman Empire, the following beings were considered to be “undesirable” and were portrayed with goatish and thus demonic or monstrous features:

heretics (Arius and the Simoniacs): *infidels* (Mahomet and Averroes); *sodomites* (skewered by furry goatish devils): *transsexuals* (in the Pisa and San Gimignano portraits of hell Lucifer is depicted with *both* the horns, beard and hairy chest of a goatman *and* a vagina expelling hideous offspring): *seducers* (phallic-horned he-goats): *temptresses* (usually serpentine bodies with the face of Eve, as in Ucello’s Original Sin in the Convent of Santa Maria novella in Florence); and *Jews* (portrayed as membranous goat-bat fiends ‘who hate daylight and love shadows’). (29)

Again, the demonic beings are hybrid creatures, both animal and anthropological, that typically conjoin features of the human head with animal or reptilian characteristics (Kearney 30-1).

Belying the assertion that Judaeo-Christian mythology surpassed human sacrifice, Kearney refers to various instances of human objectification. He writes that, “it is not surprising to witness examples of surrogate demonic creatures serving as sacrificial scapegoats in *real life*—both then and subsequently” (31). Heretics, witches, and Jews were all persecuted and tortured, for instance, in the name of the Inquisition. In order for the Church and its tenets to promulgate ideals of purity, deviant and dangerous beings were expelled: “[f]or the Church to stay pure it needed to expel those deemed impure” (Kearney 31). Kearney explains that in times of great chaos and corruption during religious reigns (such as the Medici reign in Italy or the religious wars in Europe), the Church resorted to scapegoating any sinner, rendering the list of possible others devastatingly generous. As suggested above, this religious practice of scapegoating by no means ended with the increasing secularization of nation-states. Even today we divert attention from internal conflicts by choosing a common enemy, or ‘scapegoat.’

Contravening the suggestion that early modernity relinquished human sacrifice, Rene Girard makes reference to myths of that period and explains that they are themselves means of scapegoating. Girard shows that scapegoating is not only practiced in “myths of cultic sacrifice but also in such diverse areas as politics, law, literature and ethnology” (Kearney 37). The editor to the beginning of Kearney’s text on monstrous alterity writes that “strangers, gods and monsters do not merely reside in myths or fantasies but constitute a central part of our cultural unconscious” (i). Defending the very

real practice of scapegoating human groups and individuals, Kearney explains how group solidarity is established or founded upon the collective choice of an alien or stranger who is burdened with all the aggression, guilt and violence that had previously characterized the behaviour of internal members towards one another. In other words, social stability and unity is grounded upon the ritual sacrifice and persecution of a chosen stranger who is then made monstrous and malignant (37). Gilmore explains how the scapegoat is chosen by its perceived threat to subvert the political and social stability of the dominant strata of a specific social order. The monster is created by the dominant impulse or need to “denigrate those who are different, be they the lower classes, foreigners, or marginalized deviant groups” (Gilmore 14). Scapegoating is still practiced today, but with much more complex and surreptitious means.

Myths, according to Girard, are accounts (perhaps exaggerated in some ways) of actual violence: “[a]ll myths are rooted in real acts of violence” (quoted in Kearney 43). Differing from structural anthropologists such as Levi-Strauss and Dumezil, Girard disagrees that myths are only structures of the mind that manifest unconscious desires to persecute. Instead they refer to real “events of historical victimization. They are less matters of fantasy than of flesh and blood” (quoted in Kearney 43). He explains that it cannot possibly be the case that myths of sacrificial mythology are solely the result of poetic imagination and invention; while myths surely embody the mentality of persecution in their structure, they also embody its reality. As mentioned earlier in reference to the fused monster, myth is a similarly monstrous fusion or conglomeration of various *actual* instances of violence. Girard berates his colleagues for never questioning the myth as a problematic structure: in defending the myth’s fictional quality,

anthropologists establish an airtight alibi that abstractly denies the reality of violence in mythology (quoted in Kearney 45).

Identifying specific historical scapegoats, Kearney makes reference to the rejected offspring of Cain and suggests that his

genealogical descendents [. . . have] become the colonial enemies of the conquering British empire, both overseas (Africa, Asia and the Americas) and closer to home in Ireland, where the ‘natives’ were caricatured as simian-like, mindless savages: the *degens* serving as dialectical foil to the *gens* (English gentlemen). (38)

Scapegoating is again evident when, under the guise of providing the curious English court with information about the Irish, English commentators characterized the Irish as base so as to validate the invasion of Ireland. Cohen seconds this when he quotes Giraldus Cambrensis: “It is indeed a most filthy race, a race sunk in vice, a race more ignorant than all other nations of the first principles of faith” (10). As another demonized group, the Saracens were ‘monstrified,’ labeled as monsters so as to rhetorically ground the admissibility of the West’s annexation of the East (Cohen 8).

As mentioned in the Introduction, Western hegemony has repeatedly ostracized individuals that deviate from the homogeneous white, male populace. According to Cohen, “[f]rom the classical period into the twentieth century, race has been almost as powerful a catalyst to the creation of monsters as culture, gender, and sexuality” (10). The monster as a being that protects borders also protects sexual categories: “[t]he monster embodies those sexual practices that must not be committed, or that may be committed only through the body of the monster” (Cohen 14). Societies characterize a deviant being (or culture or group) as monstrous so as to naturalize the subjugation of

that being and ensuing denial of its personhood and agency (after all, it has no personhood: it's a monster).

Unwilling to deal with the implications of social and cultural doubts, society creates monsters as beings upon which anxieties are projected and eliminated. In this way the monsters become social scapegoats, “embodied as abjectly and horrifyingly other, which must be confronted and destroyed” (Ng 1). While the monster threatens to deconstruct social order, he has not yet managed to do so because we creatively label the monster so as to warn of his deviance from what we continually protect as the stable norms of society or of the Symbolic order. Because of the monster’s discursive role in founding human being, Cohen’s final thesis defines the monster as the threshold of becoming. In the Conclusion, I will address how the creation of monstrosity limits freedom and defines uniformity. We need to embrace the deconstructed monster and heed its warning against the stringent constructs of the Symbolic order.

Having defined the monster as a perceived but unsuccessful threat to social order, let us address the root of the monster’s fearsomeness. While the monster is socially created so as to establish stability and cohesion within historical societies and cultures, monstrous being also deconstructs subjectivity as constructed by the Symbolic order, destabilizing notions of gender, sexual orientation, family values, law, and various other institutions that the Symbolic order has created to divert attention from the Void which is the fundamental basis of one’s being. But does it do so from without or from within? In the Introduction, I suggested that the Symbolic order fears difference because it threatens the stability of the known. It approaches the other—who exceeds the borders of the Symbolic order—as an absolute other that needs to be negated (incorporated into the

same) or objectified (as a monstrous other).² Alterity-negating systems respond to the absolute other with misguided fear and trepidation, misinterpreting absolute alterity as absolute unintelligibility and excluding those whose difference is perceived to be particularly threatening as monsters. Comfortable with welcoming the familiar other as alter ego into the totality's embrace, traditional egologies reject extreme difference as monstrous.

I began this investigation into monstrosity with the assumption that people dislike what they do not know, but fear and hate what they cannot know. Perhaps that is what grounds our fear of the monster: its complete unintelligibility, its absolute frustration of any attempt to identify and embrace it through knowledge-seeking endeavours. So then the monster is the absolute other that lives in the unknowable and unidentifiable darkness beneath the bed or in the shadowy depths of the closet? If the monster loses its intelligibility and remains in the dark, it loses its status as other. If one considers the relationship between self and other, there can be no absolute other because such a term lacks meaning. There must be some sort of an intelligible relationship between self and other for either term to have any meaning. For two beings to be different from one another the two entities must in some way maintain a type of relationship. While two beings can be very different (they speak different languages, wear different clothes, eat different foods, enjoy different leisure activities), there is still a shared similar 'language'

² In my attempt to locate the monster's fearsomeness, I draw on two theoretical frameworks—phenomenology and psychoanalysis—questioning whether the monster is the phenomenological absolute other or the psychoanalytic uncanny doppelganger. My use of the term, 'absolute' other, is specific to Levinasian absolute alterity that I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three when I identify Levinas' understanding of alterity-negating egologies with a model for what I will claim to be totalizing Symbolic orders.

of comparison that provides a means for this difference to be established (I do not use the word 'language' to specify any particular tongue—English, Japanese, or German, for instance—but rather to refer to a shared system of meaning, i.e. elements of a Symbolic order). While the two beings' characteristics may be totally distinct or disparate, there is still a mutual relationship that has (or at least purports to have) enough knowledge of the other to establish its difference. There is no monster that comes from without the Symbolic order in a meaningful way, because that being would be absolutely other in such a way that would deny any intelligible relationship with and threat to the Symbolic order.

Thus, while the monster may be a fearsome and divergent being, it can never be completely unintelligible to the society or individual with which it is being compared because absolute difference precludes the possibility of any basis for comparison with its supposed counterpart. To assume that the monster is a familiar being is to overstate its similarity, but to say that it evades all comprehension renders it meaningless. Although there is certainly a fear about that which is utterly incomprehensible, this being cannot truly be feared. One wastes one's time, so to say, to fear this being, because it utterly undermines intelligibility. When something is completely or absolutely unknowable, one cannot begin to divine how one should or could be afraid of it. Already saying that something is unintelligible presumes some sort of knowledge, namely that the being cannot be known. Thus, the monster is not that being that is utterly unknowable.

Rejecting the possibility that the monster is totally unintelligible qua absolute other, I turn to a quotation from Ng: “[the monster] is defined *against* the human—as either somewhat similar, or totally other” (5). The degree of deviation from human being

locates or orients monstrous being. While mythological sea monsters, for instance, are neither similar nor unintelligible (because we have ourselves created them), monsters as amoral or physically deformed humans are similar to us. It is certainly true that the sea monsters may share some affective states with human beings—namely, they are agents acting with malicious intent and a threatening agenda. However, their depiction often lacks further similarities with humans such as similar embodiment, the ability to speak, and a more prominent phenomenal self-consciousness. Given the literary descriptions of these creatures, there is not enough textual evidence to suggest that they share enough agency with human being to constitute a sufficient connection between ‘sea monster’ being and human being. Instead, in my account, monsters are fellow human beings who have been purposefully removed from the Symbolic order for, in their similarity, they have jeopardized the stability of the social order that we have created as a means for establishing our subjectivity. Thus the monster is similar to those within the Symbolic order.

Earlier, I suggested that to say that the monster is familiar is to overstate its similarity but, for psychoanalysis, the monster is indeed quite familiar, as it is the manifestation of repressed self-knowledge. The other presents a threat to the self as the return of its own repressed doppelganger. The other is threatening to the self in psychoanalysis because it is within the self and deconstructs the psyche from within. It is the uncanny encounter with the self’s doppelganger. While Ng suggests that monsters seemingly present an external threat to the Symbolic order, the monster is intricately linked to the psychological unconscious and social ideology. While traditional monsters may have come from a supernatural external source, modern monsters are rooted in the

human psyche as repressed self-knowledge. As the return of the repressed that haunts and destabilizes individual or social being by revealing what we have tried to ignore, the monster is a fearsome being. Ng suggests that the monster never strays far as a threat, because it is intimately bound with the society that has created it and which it also surreptitiously undermines. As an intimate other, the monster is “sometimes even within us” (Ng 4), revealing the all too human potential for monstrous being. Because the monster is so intricately bound with the human (serving both to construct and deconstruct human culture), the presence of the monster suggests that human ‘nature’ or order is not as stable as society may have hoped. The monster’s dialectical role in providing a means against which society can establish itself suggests that, as we feared, the accepted notion of human “may not, after all, be stable and coherent” (Ng 5). The monster destabilizes the various ideals by which we have established the parameters of human being and reveals such being as porous.

Psychoanalysis objectifies and limits the other to a being that is always dangerously deviant, or monstrous. Instead of seeing the other as another consciousness distinct from the self, psychoanalysis sees the other as a problematized manifestation of the self’s projection of rejected and abject self-knowledge. The other is an abject mirror image of the self. While I do not want to say that the other should be seen completely as the projection of the abject elements of the self (for this would certainly eliminate the independent existence of the other—if the other exists at all in this supremacy of the self), I do think that deviant others present a threat because they mirror disfigured elements of the self. The self recognizes itself in the misshapen visage of the other and, in recognizing its own distorted face, is frightened by its similarity with this monster. The

monster's aberrant being is fearsome because of its deep-seeded similarity with the self on a psychoanalytic account of the monstrous other as an uncanny doppelganger. If the physical or moral monster is a mirror image of ourselves that reveals its similarity to us, then the true monster is the stranger lying in each one of us, a stranger of which we lack any certain knowledge and hence fear and repress. Inside each of us lurks the uncanny potential for physical deformity, mental irrationality and moral abomination that is manifested in the monstrous other.

Freud was the first psychologist to use the term, 'uncanny,' to refer to the other as a rejected 'doppelganger' (or double of the self). The self projects its disowned self-knowledge onto the other and then ostracizes and banishes the other. When the self encounters this being, the experience is uncanny, a term which refers to what is both *Das Heimlich* (familiar and at home) and *Das Unheimlich* (unfamiliar and thereby distressing) at the same time. While Freud initially writes that the uncanny refers to that which "arouses fear in general" (123), he then notes a surprising meaning of *Heimlich* — "withdrawn from knowledge, unconscious [or] 'locked away'" (129)—and determines that "Heimlich thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*" (134). Thus *Unheimlich* is not simply the antonym of *Heimlich* but develops a unique meaning, referring to an unsettling "species of the familiar (das Heimliche, 'the homely')" (134). The encounter with the doppelganger is both familiar and unfamiliar because it is the manifestation of rejected (unfamiliar) *self*-knowledge (familiar). Freud seems to negate the other's independent being, viewing alterity only in its problematized or pathological guise, namely as the doppelganger.

While Freud's peer, Otto Rank, interprets the uncanny as coming into contact with the "home" (or *Heimlich*) from an external and totally distinct other-world, for Freud, the uncanny has a more profound meaning: "Freud sees no suggestion of radical transcendence here, only traces of repressed unconscious trauma" (Kearney 35). Kearney makes the connection between the monster and the uncanny, suggesting that not only is the monster the return of reason's eternal repressed but that, on a psychoanalytic account of alterity, the other is the repressed stranger within the self. Timothy Beal seconds this interpretation when he writes that

[t]he *unheimlich* [uncanny] encounter with the monstrous is a revelation not of the wholly other but of a repressed otherness within the self. The monster, as personification of the *unheimlich*, stands for that which has broken out of the subterranean basement or the locked closet where it has been hidden and largely forgotten. (quoted in Kearney 35)

Kristeva further develops Freud's notion of the doppelganger when she writes that we are strangers to ourselves. For Kristeva, the other is again the embodiment of rejected elements of the self, a being which, in her interpretation, is a stranger unto itself. The elimination of the other is specifically evident in psychoanalysis and its supremacy of the self (perhaps because psychoanalysis is the study of the self's or the ego's psyche). If the other is a manifestation of the self's rejected self-knowledge, the other qua other ceases to exist: it is the self. If, for Kristeva, we are strangers to ourselves, then, again, the other—the stranger—is actually the self. Put plainly, the other is an extension—albeit an unfamiliar and threatening extension—of the self.

For Kristeva and Freud, the other presents a threat to the self because it is within the self and deconstructs the self from an interior position that is unknown to itself. It is the repressed that comes back to haunt. As an uncanny doppelganger, however, the

monster can also play a positive role in expiating the self of its shamesome impulses.

For Gilmore, a psychoanalytic approach to monstrosity is essential to his study

[i]ndeed, since Freud's time, we have come to know the monster of the imagination as not simply a political metaphor, but also a projection of some repressed part of the self. [. . . T]he monster of the mind is always the familiar self disguised as the alien Other. (16)

If one reads the monster psychoanalytically, the monster is the manifestation of individual desires and impulses of the id. While we cannot actually express these primal instincts (that incorporate Freud's aggressive instinct), we live them vicariously through the created monster. In this sense, the monster is a literal monster of the mind because it is an embodiment of the human psyche. Projecting the monster allows us to experience our desire for aggression through a safely removed, external source. From a permanently abjected space that is removed from the egocentric Symbolic order, the monster manifests aggressive, dominant and transgressive behaviour. By watching or reading the monster, the audience vicariously experiences and fulfills these sick fantasies of desire while not actually deviating from normativity. The pleasure one attains from this escapist position is only rendered horrific if the monster exceeds his liminal space and permeates the Symbolic order, thereby "deconstruct[ing] the thin walls of category and culture" (Cohen 17). In order to ensure that this does not happen, the monster must come from a sufficiently removed and exotic land, wherein exotic peoples allow members within the Symbolic order to explore gender, sexual, and social boundaries (Cohen 18). It is strange to think that we can 'safely' externalize the monster as it is, by nature, excessive and is also the manifestation of our own perverse desires.

Gilmore reiterates the notion that we desire the (safely removed or fictional) monster because it allows for the externalization of frowned-upon desires. After asking

what defines the monster's badness, Gilmore arrives at a succinct and comprehensive definition: "the monster is a metaphor for all that must be repudiated by the human spirit. It embodies [. . .] all that which defeats, destroys, draws back, undermines, subverts the human project—that is, the id" (12). Monsters break the rules and are the manifestation of our deepest desires that we do not even admit to ourselves. Because monsters are excessive beings that respect no boundaries or limits, violently engulfing being, "monsters are also the spirit that says 'yes'—to all that is forbidden," and that allows us to vicariously say yes as well (Gilmore 12).

The monster is a source of expiation and propitiation for the aspects of the self that it is somehow ashamed of and wishes to remove from its own being. Gilmore explains that not only is the monster that being that says yes to the forbidden by denying law and by succumbing to the urges of the id, but the monster also allows the Symbolic order to project or transfer all undesirable features of itself "into the body of the monster, performing a wish-fulfillment drama of its own" (18). If the monster is to successfully expiate the individual of his or her id impulses, it must do so from a secured and abject boundary that is removed as a threat to human being. However, as a manifestation of one's id, the monster's abject being simultaneously attracts and repulses the individual. Because of this ensuing alliance between self and monsters "[a]s projections of inner conflicts, these terrible images reflect both repressed desire and their opposites: guilt, awe, and dread in which the person feels both violent repudiation and a desperate empathy, as the monster inhabiting the dark dream inspires both terror and identification" (Gilmore 18).

Defined as an abject being, characterized by its ambiguous motivation of primal fear and attraction, the monster is close to the heart of what Kristeva calls 'abjection':

[t]here looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, fascinates desire, which, nonetheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. . . . But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflinchingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself. (1)

By defining the monster as an abject other, human society defines and reinforces its identities (personal, national, cultural, economic, sexual, psychological, universal, particular) over and against the monster: the monster is a dual being that is perceived to exist outside the margins of the intelligible, but that also lurks dangerously close to the human society it forms (Cohen 20).

The monster is thought to be either completely unknowable as an absolute other or totally similar in its manifestation of the self qua stranger on a psychoanalytic account. However, as I suggested earlier, these two categorizations are extreme. The monster cannot be absolutely other (for that would preclude any knowledge of the monster and would negate the possibility of its otherness qua *other*), nor can the monster be totally similar, as that overstates the degree of familiarity with the self, denying the monster's very real difference. In order to rid ourselves of this phantasmagoric (or sometimes all too real) monster, we must embrace an account of intersubjective being. Kearney suggests that the only way to kill the monster once and for all is to eliminate both absolute alterity and immanence. The absolute other presents a problem because we cannot know what threat lurks within its frightening unknowability. For Kearney, this

extreme embodiment of the supremacy of the other gives us no way to differentiate between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ others. He instead suggests a way of interbeing that would evade problems of absolute alterity or absolute immanence by accepting the stranger within. We must “chart a course between the extremes of tautology and heterology. For in this way philosophy might help us to discover the other in our self and our self in the other—without abjuring either” (Kearney 10).

Kearney asserts that his approach is not to “return to Master Narratives of totality or closure” that negate difference but to allow for “some hermeneutic stitching and weaving” between self and other that breaches an abrasive schism (10). If monsters become too other, they are unrecognizable and, if they become too immanent, they merge with the self. We need to learn to see oneself-as-another: “[b]etween the *logos* of the One and the anti-*logos* of the Other, falls the *dia-logos* of oneself-as-another” (Kearney 18). He explains that if we are able to accomplish this, we will not live in the darkness of the monster. Despite the apparent benefits of Kearney’s notion of interbeing, one must be wary of what group guides this discursive alterity. Both self and other must independently contribute to their intersubjective being for, if only one party executes Kearney’s dialectical hermeneutics, any possibility for interbeing is negated and we find ourselves again in the mire of the *logos* of the same.

Chapter Two: Monsters Illustrated: An Intimate Look

In this chapter, I address a specific literary monster to exemplify the various traits of monstrous being that I discussed in Chapter One. I have chosen Grendel, whose role in the Old English epic, *Beowulf* and in John Gardner's modern novel, *Grendel*, exemplifies the monster in all his polymorphic glory. Grendel is a gigantic, hirsute, fang-toothed, and profoundly strong monster who both constructs, deconstructs and polices the Symbolic order. My choice of a literary work to elucidate a socio-ethical term is guided by the fact that monstrosity is grounded in a specific culture at a specific period of time. Because the monster is defined by a specific culture, as well as certain subcultures within that culture, a being that is called a monster in one may not be considered monstrous or even deviant in a distinct culture inasmuch as each group has constructed an individual Symbolic order (keeping in mind that each culture's Symbolic order may still be context-sensitive and constructed in relation to or opposition to neighbouring cultures and groups). In the respective texts I have chosen, the constructed societies are fixed. The literary realm allows the author free reign to mimic the social development and creation of the monster. Because the reader is given only one society and one monster, it is simpler to analyze the actions of this character as monstrous without taking into consideration why such a character or being would not be considered monstrous in distinct cultures or societies.

Before turning to Grendel, let me briefly reintroduce the various guises in which the monster appears. Some monsters are created to police the boundaries set by the Symbolic order. Such monsters serve as portents of what will happen if the subjects of the Symbolic order dare to test the boundaries of cultural, societal, and gender

constructions. Other monsters are rather created as deviant beings that deconstruct the Symbolic order (from either an internal or external position) by defying its identification and logic. Then, there are monsters that, in policing the borders of the Symbolic order, construct this order. As monsters are beings that by nature exceed established categorization, it is quite difficult to give such a being a categorical definition. Monsters do not always do what they are told to do; in fact, that is a necessary aspect of their being. Thus some monsters will be police guards, some will be deconstructive entities, and some are both.

In this chapter, I first address how Grendel constructs the Symbolic order. In the epic poem, he reinforces the Symbolic order of the heroic society of ninth century Nordic culture. In the modern novel, Grendel is described as the brute existent against which the men of Hrothgar's meadhall define themselves. I then turn to how the monster can also deconstruct the Symbolic order. As mentioned in Chapter One, the monster can be read as deconstructing the Symbolic order even though the author may intend him to establish it. In both texts, Grendel and Beowulf—the hero—are described in similar language that at times makes it difficult to distinguish between the two. This language highlights my theory that the monster is fearsome because of his similarity. While Grendel is created to establish the Symbolic order (by securing the stability of the heroic code), he also serves to undermine the Symbolic order, because he ironically shares a deep consanguinity with the hero himself. If the monster holds this type of ontologically-defining status, he is quite threatening because he can deconstruct the very constructions by which society defines itself.

I then discuss how Grendel polices the boundaries of the Symbolic order, warning of what happens when one exceeds its boundaries. While Grendel is not used to police the borders of the heroic society of *Beowulf*, in the modern text, Gardner creates him as a harbinger of contemporary Sartrean (and nihilistic) existentialism, a philosophy Gardner claimed to hate for its lack of faith. Thus, Grendel is created as the embodiment of what happens when one truly embraces what Gardner conceives to be nihilistic philosophy such as existentialism.

In this scenario, humanity is defined over and against the monster qua absolute other. I mentioned in the Introduction and first chapter of this investigation that monsters provide a means of cohesion for a community. If the members of a community can scapegoat one strange member and together ostracize that individual, the community is thus equipped with a source of unity: they all reject together that aberrant and deviant individual. However, the apparent stability of this human community is fundamentally precarious. Ng and Kearney alike suggest that the monster reveals an element of the human that is actually monstrous. If the monster serves to establish human being, the two share a relationship. Ng writes that the literary or social manifestation of the monster does not “resolve the anxieties experienced: the monster cannot be destroyed because *it is within the self*” (5). The hero’s engagement with Grendel blurs boundaries of human and animal. While Grendel is seemingly absolutely different, he is also very similar. In his role in constructing society, Grendel is both the absolute other and intimate stranger: “Grendel’s uncanniness allows us, on the one hand, to fear him, and on the other hand, to fear we might be him” (Sandner 167).

Because of the relationship between self and monster, the distinction between us and them is deconstructed: “[o]ne common feature in the contemporary monster narrative [. . .] is that the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is no longer viable” (Ng 17). Once one understands that the Symbolic order defines itself by its construction and creation of the ‘monster,’ one realizes that us and them do not exist as independent entities because the ‘them’ is created by the ‘us’ so as to define itself while rejecting unwanted or reprehensible aspects of its own being. This is certainly the case in *Grendel* as the human community is defined by the monsters they kill; thus the humans (us) and monsters (them) are revealed as one and the same.

I begin my discussion of Grendel’s monstrosity with the dark depiction of his being as illustrated in both works. Typically, lack of knowledge is associated with darkness (think of Plato’s cave) and *enlightenment* is associated with light. In Chapter One, I discussed how the monster is an unknown being that defies reason. Grendel’s association with the dark substantiates his role as unknown as he emerges from the dark shadows as a “night prowler [who] / came shrithing through the shadows” (*Beowulf* 702-3). Earlier in the poem, he is also referred to as the “dark death-shadow [that] / lurked in ambush; he prowled the misty moors / at the dead of night” (*Beowulf* 159-61). In *Grendel*, he is immediately introduced as a “shadow-shooter” (Gardner 7). He describes his mere as being “under the ground . . . where no light breaks but the red of my fires and nothing stirs but the flickering shadows on my wet rock walls” (Gardner 8-9). Grendel’s tenebrous moor is a manifestation of his dark and unknown being.

The Symbolic order characterizes the monster as a non-being against which it defines itself. As early as Plato’s *The Sophist*, the other is defined as always relative to

the self, but is at the same time located as non-being: “(since) the other is different from that in which it shares, being other than what-is, it is most clear and necessary that what-is-not is” (quoted in Kearney 15). Following this general approach to alterity and applying it to demonic being, Augustine much later

declar[ed] that whatever is has been created by God and is therefore good, which means that the demonic is logically consigned to the *non-being* of evil. [. . .] More often than not, the demonic would continue to blur such boundaries until *what* is became contaminated with *what-is-not*. (Kearney 31)

Like ostracized others and demons, monsters are in this sense defined as non-beings too. Edward Irving explains that heroes (or societies) are defined negatively by the characteristics they *do not* possess: “[t]he poet may use negative terms to state or amplify his conception of what a true hero should be[.] . . . He may mention what a true hero is not or does not do” (2). Take for instance the following passage from *Beowulf*, wherein Beowulf’s generosity is secured via an example of a fellow warrior’s greed. We are told of Heremod that:

God had endowed him
with strength and power above all other men,
and had sustained him. For all that, his heart
was filled with savage blood-lust. He never gave
gifts to the Danes, to gain glory. He lived joyless,
agony racked him; he was an affliction
to his people. (*Beowulf* 1718-24)

The poet provides an example of a greedy antihero to exemplify Beowulf’s generosity. While Beowulf’s heroism is not in this case secured in contradistinction to negative monstrous being, the process of negative identification is similar to the model of establishing essential being (heroism) against inessential non-being (non-heroism). Just as the hero is characterized negatively so, by extension, is society. The monster represents everything that society is not, and therefore society can be constructed and

secured in contradistinction to negative being. The monster can also be associated with the Nothing, that liminal space that exists outside the Symbolic order in the realm of the Real.

The language of the Symbolic order denies the monster, further establishing his role as outcast. While Grendel is denied the ability to speak in both works, his initial inability to communicate with the humans of *Grendel* is of specific interest given the reader's easy comprehension of his first-person narrative. Ng writes that "the monster is conventionally excluded from the language which has otherwise determined it" (2). Grendel's role as monstrous non-being is further exemplified in that he lacks an identity. Due to his inability to communicate, Grendel lacks a robust personal identity. Although rebellious, Grendel yearns for communication, something he is incapable of attaining: he is a "monologist malgré lui, an individual who desperately wishes for dialogue but for whom this wish is always frustrated" (McWilliams 29). Take for example his first interaction with humans when he is stuck in a tree. He attempts to speak with them but is unable to form words: "I tried to speak. My mouth moved, but nothing would come out" (Gardner 26). This inability to speak is indicative of his essential inability to communicate with humans. Grendel is insecure about his identity because "[p]ersonal identity, as Bakhtin has explained, is always worked out in a social context; through dialogue with others ... we engage in a continuing dialogue about our identity and the meaning of our experience" (McWilliams 29). Bakhtin believes that language is a social construction and that, in order to achieve a meaningful personal identity, one must participate in this social construction and allow an outside individual to help objectively define one's identity. Because of the humans' censorious behaviour, Grendel "is trapped

in one-way communication, where others have a right to impose their meaning on him but where he has no chance for an effective response” (McWilliams 29-30). He only develops an identity and voice once he accepts his role as monster in human society. Referring to the creation of his identity, he explains that, after his visit with the dragon, “I had *become* something, as if born again. I had hung between possibilities before, between the cold truths I knew and the heart-sucking conjuring tricks of the Shaper; now that was passed: I was Grendel, Ruiner of Meadhalls, Wrecker of Kings!” (Gardner 80).

Language constructs and incarnates deviant being as monstrous. The Symbolic order linguistically creates the monster by so naming it.³ Language creates and coerces the monster to “occupy the position of a monster because it is the only language he knows—the language of his masters who pronounce his monstrosity” (Ng 3). Monsters are eloquent in the sense that they are fluent in the language that has created them qua monster (Brooks quoted in Ng 3). The monster is created by the Symbolic order not only by ostracizing the monster outside its borders but also by using certain language to describe him. If the monster adopts this language, he has solidified for himself his monstrosity. Ng explains that “[e]ntry into the Symbolic is also an initiation into language; through language, one comes to know and consequently master, reality” (9). Language functions by “substituting absence for presence: it can embody and engender (no)things” (Ng 9). As such, it embodies and engenders the non-being of monstrosity.

The language used in the Old English poem certainly exemplifies how the monster is depicted as non-being. It posits Beowulf as essential being and Grendel as

³ The linguistic creation of monsters is an instance of the relationship between language and being. By equipping being with a name, one grants previously undisclosed being meaning. As Heidgger writes, “language is the house of being” (and, in this case, it is the house of monstrous being) (217).

inessential non-being. As Shannon Hengen explains, “the essential narrative design pits the forces of creation, construction, or salvation against those of destruction” (171).

Hengen argues that the poet’s diction embodies the fight between hero and monster as that between creation and destruction, being against non-being, and meaningful existence versus nihilism. To emphasize this argument, Hengen explains the alliteration of the Old English verb, “bēon,” or “to be,” with the hero’s name, “Beowulf.” She then presents the alliteration between the word “nis,” or “is not,” with the “n” of Grendel’s name. Many of the n-alliterating lines are connected to the monster’s name, Gre-n-del, and are associated with the negation of “bēon.”

Take, for example, these words or phrases: “bēodgenēatas” (*Beowulf* 343: “companions at the bench”); “bēaga bryttan” (*Beowulf* 352: “ring-giver”); “brego Beorht-Dena” (*Beowulf* 427: “Lord of the mighty Danes”); and “beorht bēacen Godes” (*Beowulf* 570: “God’s bright beacon”) (Hengen 172). These positive images that are related to the hero begin with the “b” that is associated with “bēon,” which implies “to be,” or existence. Now consider the following examples of a negation of existence: “nīpende niht” (*Beowulf* 548: “darkening into night”); “niceras” (*Beowulf* 574: “sea-beasts”); “nydwracu nīpgrīm / nihtbealwa māest” (*Beowulf* 193-94: “evil events in the night— / was too overwhelming, loathsome, and long-lasting”); and “nymeð nydbāde / nāenegum arað” (*Beowulf* 598: “So he spares none but takes his toll”) (Hengen 172). These words, which are related to the monster, begin with the “n” that is associated with “nis,” or “is not,” as well as with Grendel.

The following is an example of the interaction between the hero and the monster: “burston banlōcan. / Bēowulfe wearð / guðhrēð gyfep” (*Beowulf* 818-19: “the muscles

were bursting. Glory in battle / was given to Beowulf”) (Hengen 173). With the dominance of the “b” alliterated words, it is evident that the poet asserts the dominance of existence and meaning, as symbolized by the hero, over meaninglessness or that which is not, as symbolized by the monster. In analyzing the text of *Beowulf*, Hengen finds that the “morphemes beginning with b in Old English outnumber by three to one those beginning with n” (171). Such a lexical “philosophical coloring . . . may suggest an existential viewpoint in which ultimate value is placed on life as opposed to its starkest contrast” (Hengen 173).

In his role as non-being that supports the essential being of human society, the monster constructs the Symbolic order, or enables it to operate, as suggested in Chapter One. Because of this relationship, the monster (i.e., the Other) and the hero (i.e., the dominant culture) are inextricably bound to one another: “the constitution of the subject [exists] in the field of the Other” (Lacan 208). As a hero, Beowulf is defined by the other and is thus drawn toward him. In order to reinforce his status as hero, Beowulf must approach the boundary between monster and hero and silence the monster, his double. Thus, Beowulf, in an effort to be fully human, needs to disavow the monstrous by battling him and eliminating his power.

I mentioned earlier that the hero and the monster are locked in an interdependent relationship:

far from completely ‘disavowing’ or pushing away the stranger, engagements with the monstrous, with the demonic, are moments when the stranger and the hero are, quite literally, drawn towards each other. These moments are best understood as alliances, as relationships of consanguinity. (Koppelman 4)

In identifying the monster, the hero is himself respectively defined. Because of this codependence, the monster becomes an intricate part of the hero’s identity, entering into

a strange and intimate alliance with him. Cohen writes that “the categories ‘human’ and ‘monster’ are coincident, mutually constitutive, monstrously hybrid” (xi). Gilmore elaborates on this point, explaining that, according to Joseph Campbell, “the existence of monsters calls forth heroes who must perform the same function the world over, that of clearing the field for humanity” (11). The hero qua killer of monsters secures his identity in battle. Beowulf’s “encounter with the monster results in an apparent securing of identity” (Koppelman 7). However, because the hero and monster’s identities are codependent, their encounter leaves them with fundamentally unstable identities.

This notion is exemplified in both works, wherein the heroic society establishes itself by the removal of the monster. Beowulf and his fellow warriors exemplify their bravery and courage (crucial features of the hero) by vanquishing the monster. The hero (who can stand in as a symbol for society) establishes his identity via the existence of the monster. Without a monster (or a scapegoat according to Kearney and Girard) there would be nothing by which the hero or Symbolic order could establish itself and secure communal solidarity. The humans define themselves in relation to Grendel: “[y]ou stimulate them! . . . You drive them to poetry, science, religion, all that makes them what they are for as long as they last. You are, so to speak, the brute existent by which they learn to define themselves. The exile, captivity, death they shrink from” (Gardner 73). As mentioned earlier, if one understands the dominant culture as defining the other (i.e., the humans defining the monster), one must also accept that in this process the humans in turn define themselves qua ‘non-monster’ and essential being.

Because the monster and hero (human) are coincident, the strong delineation between the two is negated. In constructing social order, Grendel also deconstructs the

categories of the Symbolic order by blurring boundaries between human and monster. This is first established in *Beowulf* where Grendel is described as descended from Cain. Irving writes that, “despite all his inhuman and monstrous attributes, it is ultimately Grendel’s human ancestry that makes him the kind of monster he is [. . . —] the frantic destroyer of the society he was once symbolically driven from in his ancestor Cain” (Irving 22). Grendel is forever banned from human society because murder and fratricide run through his blood:

[T]his cursed creature
lived in a monster’s lair for a time
after the Creator had condemned him
as one of the seed of Cain[.] . . .
In [Cain] all evil-doers find their origin,
Monsters and elves and spiteful spirits of the dead,
Also the giants who grappled with God
For a long while; the lord gave them their deserts. (*Beowulf* 101-14)

As Irving suggests, beyond Grendel’s monstrous traits, he is burdened by his human ancestry, one that grounds Grendel and Beowulf’s consanguinity for they are both descendants of Adam.

In *Grendel*, the connection with Cain is also evident. Grendel is the cursed brother in the “ancient feud between two brothers which split all the world between darkness and light [. . . He is the] terrible race God cursed” (Gardner 51). Although there is no specific reference in either *Beowulf* or *Grendel* to Beowulf’s being a direct descendant of Abel,⁴ it seems that Beowulf is accepted simply because he is not an offspring of Cain. There is certainly evidence in the poem that he has been graced by God. The king of the Danes, Hrothgar, suggests this when he thanks Beowulf for having

⁴ This is perhaps because the Bible does not definitively account for Abel’s having produced any offspring.

saved his kingdom from Grendel: “May the Almighty grant you / good fortune, as He has always done before!” (*Beowulf* 955-56). This, together with Beowulf’s status as Grendel’s foe, allows for the suggestion that Beowulf enjoys God’s grace. In *Grendel*, Beowulf is further portrayed as related to Grendel for he refers to the monster as his “brother.” In telling Grendel that life is constantly regenerative, he states “where the water was rigid there will be fish, and men will survive on their flesh till spring. It’s coming, my brother” (Gardner 170). Grendel again establishes their consanguinity when he describes their encounter as follows: “I scream, facing him, grotesquely shaking hands—dear long-lost brother” (Gardner 168-69). Thus, the hero and monster share blood in the sense that they are descendants of brothers.

To further illustrate the monster’s consanguinity with human being, one may consider the passage in which Grendel arrives at Heorot. Rather than describing Grendel as monstrous, the poet ironically refers to him as human. In Grendel’s approach towards Heorot, he is transformed into an absurd form of a thane: “[t]hen the joyless warrior / journeyed to Heorot” (*Beowulf* 719-20). Grendel is later referred to as the ironic king ruling Heorot: “Thus Grendel ruled, resisted justice, / one against all, until the best of halls / stood deserted” (*Beowulf* 144-46). Because he is presented as human rather than as monster, these descriptions, however ironic they may be, portray Grendel as both thane and king. In his approach towards his fatal encounter with Beowulf, Grendel is similarly described as an honourable guest of Heorot: “this night was not the first / on which he had so honoured Hrothgar’s home” (*Beowulf* 717-18). Grendel is thus shown to blur the boundary between monster and human.

The division between hero and monster is again indistinct in the battle between Beowulf and Grendel, wherein the language used purposely confounds the distinction between the two. The following quotation, depicting the battle, suggests that the two adversaries are in fact interchangeable: “Beowulf held him fast, / he who was the strongest of all men / ever to have seen the light of life on earth” (788-90). Although one automatically interprets the latter part of this quotation as referring to Beowulf, it is possible to interpret the “he” as referring to Grendel, as it immediately follows the “him,” namely Grendel, Beowulf is holding fast. Important to note in this passage is that the ambiguous language is not simply a result of meaning being lost in translation; the vague nature of the pronoun “he” is in fact evident in the original Old English text as well.

The Old English poem itself interweaves Grendel’s and Beowulf’s being. As O’Keefe notes, “ágláeca” is used to refer to monsters, such as the dragon and Grendel, as well as to heroes, such as Sigemund and Beowulf. O’Keefe explains that, in what remains of the standard Old English edition of the poem, Friedrich Klaeber’s

solution to the problem of one word’s describing two sets of characters is to gloss ágláeca as ‘wretch, monster, demon, fiend’ when it refers to Grendel and the dragon and as ‘warrior, hero’ when it refers to Beowulf and Sigemund. Building such a distinction into the glossing of the word completely ignores the possibility that the poet has deliberately chosen to use the same word to describe two sets of characters. (484-85)

In using a word that ambiguously refers to both monstrous and heroic being, the poet merges the two in a strange and uncanny couple.

Besides blurring boundaries between man and beast, Gardner’s narrative also blurs boundaries between monstrous character and human reader. Because *Grendel* is a first-person narrative, “the reader too, becomes a ‘surplus’ figure—that which remains unsymbolisable in the text but is nevertheless implied through an act of reading. In this

sense, the reader can be considered an *implicit* monster” (Ng 13). By the reader’s comprehension of the monster’s language, the reader is implicit in the narrator’s monstrosity as well. This sympathetic blurring makes Grendel easier to identify with—as he is part human. He “claims our fear and hatred on the one side and our pity at his wretchedness on the other” (Sandner 166). In addition to being portrayed at times as human, Grendel’s sympathetic nature is further emphasized in *Grendel* by his capacity for language. Although the thanes of the text cannot understand Grendel (or at least cannot do so with ease and fluency) the reader can understand every word that Grendel shares with us, thereby allowing us to temporarily enjoy what it is like to exist outside the—or at least a—Symbolic order. And in the temporary enjoyment of life outside a Symbolic order, the reader becomes seduced by Grendel’s charm, exemplifying how the monster blurs categories of both fear and desire. As Helen Ellis and Warren Ober discuss, Gardner transforms the “monstrous offspring of Cain whose fierce but dim presence looms over the first half of *Beowulf*, into a character so complex, fascinating, and even lovable that readers and critics alike are in danger of being seduced into an uncritical acceptance of his point of view and values” (Ellis and Ober 46).

In addition to blurring physical boundaries of human and monstrous being, Grendel confuses moral categories as well. In defining monstrous being, Gilmore not only looks to the monster’s deviant physicality that obscures boundaries between human and animal being, but he also makes reference to monsters’ deconstruction of moral categories: monsters are not monstrous solely “because of their ugliness and unfamiliarity, but also because they challenge the moral and cosmological order of the universe” (19). While the reader is far more aware of the monster’s rational capacity in

Grendel than in *Beowulf*, where Grendel is portrayed to a lesser extent as a sentient being, Grendel still blurs moral categories in the Old English epic. The poet actually allows for the reader's sympathy towards Grendel. As Andy Orchard suggests, Grendel has been wronged in some sense: "by focusing on a figure apparently 'wronged' by *Beowulf*, the poet again shows his characteristic sympathy for the victims, and allows his audience a fresh perspective on the mighty deeds they witness" (187). The key feeling of empathy is associated with the monster's role as prey. Orchard further states, "[g]iven Grendel's central role as a man-eating monster, it seems extraordinary that the *Beowulf*-poet should choose to depict him as a character with a point of view, one that is capable of evoking sympathy, at precisely this key moment in the battle, when the predator becomes prey" (192). The sense of sympathy is specifically evident in Gardner's text when dying Grendel calls for his mother: "[c]old, sharp outlines, everything around me: distinct, detached as dead men. I understand. 'Mama!' I bellow. 'Mama, Mama! I'm dying!' But her love is history" (Gardner 172-73). Because of the element of humanity within Grendel's character and the codependence of the definition of hero and monster, we easily recognize ourselves in him.

The battle between *Beowulf* and Grendel is characterized as pathetic. In Grendel's frantic need for his mother, the reader encounters a childish and powerless side of Grendel that evokes sympathy, which is perhaps validated when one realizes the indefatigable power of *Beowulf*: the *Beowulf*-poet himself admits that "never in his life did [Grendel] find hall-wardens / more greatly to his detriment" (718-19). Although the poet seems to suggest that Grendel has finally found his match in *Beowulf*, the struggle

between the two is hardly a struggle at all as Beowulf effortlessly sends Grendel fleeing to his home bleeding to death. Grendel is desperate to flee but is unable to do so:

[Grendel] was seized with terror.
But, for all that, he was unable to break away. . . .
The evil giant was desperate to escape,
if indeed he could, and head for his lair
in the fens; he could feel his fingers cracking
in his adversary's grip; that was a bitter journey
that Grendel made to the ring-hall Heorot. (*Beowulf* 753-65)

Thus Grendel deconstructs both physical and moral categories. Not only is he written as interchangeable with the human hero, but he also elicits sympathy from the reader, an emotion that is usually not felt for categorically treacherous and spiteful monsters.

Despite Grendel's rebellious role against established human categories, he also constructs them as a Symbolic police guard. As mentioned in Chapter One, the monster is also the expression of contemporary worries and anxieties about pertinent problems and conflicts within the society of the author. The *Grendel* monster is the manifestation of Gardner's worries about contemporary interest in Sartre's perceived nihilistic philosophy. Gardner believed Sartrean existentialism to posit life as meaningless absurdity. Overlooking the freeing elements of Sartrean philosophy that grounds meaning in individuals' creatively chosen and responsible actions, Gardner interprets existentialism as the death of everything good and important in this world. As such, he fashions Grendel into what he defines to be a perfect existential anti-hero. Grendel realizes the absurd and chaotic quality of existence and views everything as pointless accident. The third monster of the epic poem *Beowulf*, the dragon, is a literary manifestation of Sartre through an act of allegorical prestidigitation. Qua Sartre, the dragon embodies Gardner's misunderstanding of existential and meaningless existence.

Opposed to Grendel and the dragon are two characters that represent the Symbolic order that Gardner wishes to protect. The Shaper and Beowulf are two personifications of meaningful and faithful approaches to one's life and existence. The Shaper is the court poet who sings of the kingdom's glory and the feats of the Geatish heroes. Beowulf, the hero, evinces a faithful system of belief that adheres to objective meaning and value in existence. In order to suppress existentialism's threat, Gardner kills Grendel and presents Beowulf's philosophy as victorious.

From the outset of the novel, Grendel refers to himself as a “[p]ointless, ridiculous monster crouched in the shadows, stinking of dead men, murdered children, martyred cows” (Gardner 6). He acknowledges the meaninglessness of existence by complaining that “[t]he sun spins mindlessly overhead, the shadows lengthen and shorten *as if by plan*” (Gardner 7; italics mine). Grendel exhibits existential angst and despair: “[t]he cold night air is reality at last: indifferent to me as a stone face carved on a high cliff wall to show that the world is abandoned” (Gardner 9). Grendel's indifference denies the intrinsic meaning in life and ultimately causes him to succumb to the dangerous life of unfaith. Beowulf, however, acknowledges the regenerative meaning of existence; he has faith that there is some true meaning to the Shaper's words and thus he is able to thrive in what might very well be an absurd universe.

Gardner defines Grendel's monstrosity in terms of his nihilism. Grendel is seen rebelling against the world from the outset of the novel. He shakes his “two hairy fists at the sky” and questions why the animals that live around him cannot “discover a little dignity. . . . The sky says nothing, predictably. I make a face, uplift a defiant middle finger, and give an obscene little kick” (Gardner 5-6). Grendel's rebellion against the

world is seen again after his near-death experience of being impaled by a bull and stricken with an ax by humans while stuck in the limbs of a tree. Grendel realizes that “[t]he world resists me and I resist the world. . . . The world is all pointless accident” (Gardner 28). Thus, Grendel’s sense of exile is reinforced by the mutual disdain that he and the world have for one another. When Grendel returns to his lair, he attempts to relate his encounter and resultant epiphany to his mother: “I tried to tell her all that had happened, all that I’d come to understand: the meaningless objectness of the world, the universal bruteness” (Gardner 28). Like any good existential anti-hero, Grendel denies the objective existence of values or meaning in the world. For Gardner, Grendel’s surrender to the absurdity of existence makes him a monster.

Grendel is monstrous because he deconstructs the various ideals that have held up not only the culture of the Old English heroic code but of our contemporary society as well. Substantiating this vision, Grendel attacks Hrothgar’s heroic society, repudiating its various structures. For Gardner, Grendel’s “morality” then comes in the form of his saying “no” to the constructs of human society, such as the function of the hero, the queen, or the Shaper: “[s]o much for heroism. So much for the harvest-virgin. So much, also, for the alternative visions of blind old poets” (Gardner 90). One way in which Grendel denies the order of the heroic code is in refusing to kill Unferth, a cowardly warrior of Hrothgar’s meadhall: “[Unferth] lives on[,] . . . crazy with shame that he alone is always spared[,] . . . So much for heroism” (Gardner 90). Grendel rejects the culture of heroes, denying it any objective value. Although he at first desires to be a part of the rituals of the Shaper and the thanes of Hrothgar’s kingdom, he is excluded from them. He realizes that the world is meaningless after his discussion with the dragon: “I

understood that the world was nothing: a mechanical chaos of casual, brute enmity on which we stupidly impose our hopes and fears” (Gardner 22). Only Grendel is aware of the absurdity of existence, the fact that the world has been abandoned and that pointless structure is being imposed upon it by the humans.

Grendel is alienated because he rejects the notion of the hero. In an effort to fight Grendel, Unferth states, rather philosophically despite himself, that “[e]xcept in the life of a hero, the whole world’s meaningless. The hero sees values beyond what’s possible. That’s the nature of a hero. It kills him, of course, ultimately. But it makes the whole struggle of humanity worthwhile” (Gardner 89). Grendel rejects Unferth’s speech and mocks him, stating that heroism merely “breaks up the boredom” (Gardner 89). With Grendel’s response, it is evident that he gives no substance to the heroic virtues. In his analysis of Grendel’s monstrosity, Jay Ruud states that what may be the most monstrous aspect of Grendel’s nature is “the fact that he simply will not accept things as they are and totally and nihilistically rejects those cherished values of Anglo-Saxon society that Hrothgar, Beowulf, and, perhaps, the poet, accept without question” (13). Rather than defining Grendel as monstrous because he devours humans, thirty men at a time (*Beowulf* 120-25), Ruud defines Grendel as such because of his nihilistic philosophy.

Gardner exemplifies his hatred of existentialism in the guise of the dragon. In the dragon’s encounter with young and naïve Grendel, he explains that there is no inherent rhyme or reason to why the world functions as it does: existence is “a few random dust specks, so to speak—pure metaphor, you understand—then by chance a vast floating cloud of dustspecks, an expanding universe[.] . . . Complexity beyond complexity, accident on accident” (Gardner 70-71).

Musing on his epiphanic conversation with the dragon, Grendel explains:

I recall something. A void boundless as a nether sky. I hang by the twisted roots of an oak, looking down into immensity. Vastly far away I see the sun, black but shining, and slowly revolving around it there are spiders. I pause in my tracks, puzzled—though not stirred—by what I see. (Gardner 137)

Ober and Ellis compare the vision of hell that the dragon presents to Grendel as modeled after the hell that the angel in Blake's "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" presents:

[s]o he took me . . . down the winding cavern . . . till a void boundless as a nether sky appeard beneath us & we held by the roots of trees and hung over this immensity[.] . . . So I remain'd with him sitting in the twisted root of an oak[.] . . . By degrees we beheld the infinite Abyss, fiery as the smoke of a burning city; beneath us at an immense distance was the sun, black but shining round it were fiery tracks on which revolv'd vast spiders[.] . . . I now asked my companion which was my eternal lot? he said, between the black & white spiders. (Blake Plate 17-18)

The dragon's view of absurd existence is equated with Blakean hell.

By exemplifying the ultimate existential and nihilist anti-hero, Gardner has stated in interviews that he desires to reveal the ethical pitfalls of such a philosophy: "[w]hat *Grendel* does is take, one by one, the great heroic ideals of mankind since the beginning and make a case for these values by setting up alternatives in an ironic set of monster values. I hate existentialism" (quoted in Ellis and Ober 47). Gardner sees existentialism as a system of nihilism and as a philosophy of despair. In an interview with Joe Bellamy and Pat Ensworth he explains that "[f]aith and despair have always been the two mighty adversaries [. . .] A healthy life is a life of faith; an unhealthy, sick, and dangerous life is a life of unfaith" (187). And, for Gardner, existentialism falls under the latter category. Grendel's nihilistic rejection of meaningful existence is one of the key reasons for his alienation from human society: "Grendel is alienated from Hrothgar's society by the fact

that he refuses to accept the values of law and order inherent in that society, in the face of what he knows to be a chaotic and meaningless universe” (Ruud 3).

Gardner attempts to restore meaning via two essential tactics: using patterns in his text and contrasting Beowulf (the hero) with the existential dragon, and its (anti-hero) ally, Grendel. In an effort to secure the inherent meaning that grounds human existence, Gardner structures his novel upon the pattern of the zodiac. Each chapter incorporates an astrological sign whose associated meaning is intricately related to the heroic ideal or allegorical message that Gardner has planted for the reader. The use of the zodiac provides the novel with a circular structure that echoes Beowulf’s embodiment of meaningful and regenerative existence. According to Cowart, the

circle is an ancient symbol of eternity, perfection, and faith[.] . . . [I]t is the emblem of the annual round, the yearly progression of the seasons. This cycle, culminating in spring’s yearly triumph over wintry death, provides Gardner with the substructure of his novel and the great counter to Grendel’s dreary metaphysics” (48).

Hence Beowulf’s threatening promise, odd for a battle between fierce opponents, that “spring [. . . is] coming [. . . and the] world will burn green, sperm build again” (Gardner 170). The circularity of the novel undermines Grendel’s nihilistic philosophy and establishes that there are indeed patterns in life, and therefore meaning as well.

So far as his second tactic is concerned, Gardner uses similar language to describe both the dragon and Beowulf in order to highlight, contrastively, their diametrically opposed philosophies. He describes Beowulf as having “[f]lames slip out at the corners of his mouth” (Gardner 170). Earlier on, Beowulf’s grip on Grendel is referred to as “a dragon’s jaw on [my hand] . . . [H]is crushing fingers are charged like fangs with poison” (Gardner 168). This connection might be drawn so as to map out the relationship

between negative nihilistic philosophy, as expressed by the dragon and Grendel, and the meaningful philosophy that Beowulf propounds in his final lecture to Grendel:

as you see it it is, while the seeing lasts, dark nightmare-history, time-as-coffin; but where the water was rigid there will be fish, and men will survive on their flesh till spring. It's coming, my brother. Believe it or not. Though you murder the world, turn plains to stone, transmogrify life into I and it, strong searching roots will crack your cave and rain will cleanse it: The world will burn green, sperm build again. My promise. Time is the mind, the hand that makes (fingers on harpstrings, hero-swords, the acts, the eyes of queens). By that I kill you. (Gardner 170)

It is thus evident that Beowulf's philosophy is the exact opposite of Grendel's. Beowulf must accordingly kill Grendel, for he rejects Grendel's existential philosophy. By killing Grendel, Beowulf substantiates his words with his deeds and demonstrates the fulfillment of his meaningful and faithful orientation towards existence; his status as hero is secured.

Having assessed how Grendel deconstructs, constructs and polices the boundaries of the Symbolic order, I want to return to the question of the monster's fearsomeness. Is Grendel the absolute other or is he the intimate stranger? As I suggested in Chapter One, the monster is a necessary mixture of these two identities. The heroic society of the Old English text and Gardner's anti-Sartrean manifesto reject Grendel as the absolute other that needs to be vanquished in order to establish the success and stability of the Symbolic order. However, because Grendel blurs the boundaries between monstrosity and human being, existing in a strange alliance with the hero, Grendel is also the intimate stranger that exists within the society that attempts to reject him. In society's reliance on him, Grendel is intimately familiar. As mentioned in the Introduction, the realization that the monster supports the Symbolic order deconstructs the division between us and them. The monster does not fully succeed in deconstructing either of the two textual Symbolic

orders. Despite the fact that Grendel exceeds or frustrates certain knowledge structures or boundaries of human being, he is ultimately eliminated qua threat by his death.

Perhaps, however, the monster should be embraced rather than killed. While the monster of Nordic heroic society is a mythological construction, the monster of the allegorical modern tale is very much real as a manifestation of Sartrean existentialism. I now turn my attention to Gardner's rejection of existential philosophy and implicit acceptance of absolutist systems of meaning that deny individual ambiguity and subjectivity. Gardner is afraid that, like Grendel, we might succumb to doubts about meaningful existence and realize we live in an abandoned and meaningless world. Beowulf, however, serves as our hero by repressing such alarming doubts and allowing us to rest assured in the warm nest of his meaningful philosophy, thereby symbolizing the notion of the Symbolic order that Gardner wishes to secure. However, Grendel's existential philosophy is not inherently objectionable. As Sartre suggests, it is odd to lament the absurdity of existence (as Grendel does to some extent), for it is this very absurdity and lack of objective order that allows humans to exercise their unique freedom in determining their essence, and hence to determine their own, much more valuable subjective meaning after they are created.

Mistakenly, Gardner thought that existentialism was a nihilistic and hopeless philosophy. As the author of the Introduction to Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism* writes, "let us begin by saying that what we mean by 'existentialism' is a doctrine that makes human life possible and also affirms that every truth and every action imply an environment and a human subjectivity" (18). In the context of Gardner's novel, Grendel is understood as monstrous because of his nihilist and Sartrean existential philosophy of

existence. Beowulf, on the other hand, is a hero because he possesses the courage to face a godless and thus absurd world and is able to find meaning in the cyclical regeneration evident in nature. However, Beowulf clings to an objective system of meaning found in the heroic code and fails to embrace truly free and authentic being. Grendel may be an individual suffering from existential bad faith because he chooses his actions solely based on how others perceive him (namely as a monster); however, he is not a monster for espousing an existential framework to life.

Existentialism is fundamentally a philosophy of action and choice: “[it is not] an attempt to discourage man from taking action, since it tells him that the only hope resides in his actions and that the only thing that allows him to live is action. Consequently we are dealing with a morality of action and commitment” (Sartre 40). Although critics of existentialism will say that the philosophy is flawed as it proposes no plan for concrete action, the existentialist would respond that this criticism itself is misguided as proscribing specific content to action would defeat the very nature of freedom. While Gardner denies his existential model, Grendel, the opportunity to engage in the world, this exemplifies his misinterpretation of existentialism. The point still remains to be made that existentialism does not deny action but indeed encourages the individual to generate meaning through his or her actions: “freedom realizes itself only by engaging itself in the world” (de Beauvoir 78).

Existentialism deconstructs objective values and systems of predetermined meaning and asserts that each individual has the freedom to embrace his or her subjective ability to create meaning and purpose through life projects and actions. For Sartre, man is defined by action and choice: man is “condemned at all times to invent man” (29). He is

not what he would like to be but is rather what he does. Before acting, man is not yet defined. He is always in the making: “man is always outside of himself, and it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that man is realized” (52). For Sartre, “man first exists” and then defines himself; man is not anything until he makes something of himself (Introduction to Sartre 22). Man is nothing more or less than his actions, the realization of projects adopted through his life. We establish values (albeit not objective ones) via our actions. A choice’s value is affirmed by the fact that the individual has chosen it. We cannot blame our bad characteristics or habits, for instance, on external factors, such as physiological make-up or poor upbringing. Any perceived sign of guidance or direction lacks inherent meaning but is granted meaning by man’s interpretation. In explaining his intended deconstruction of existential philosophy, Gardner assesses the role of the artist and the heroic novelist as “an affirmer of life instead of a whiner against it. He takes responsibility and recognizes responsibility in other writers and in other people” (Bellamy and Ensworth 185). While Gardner contrasts his responsibility against existential “whining,” he overlooks the intrinsic and fundamental role that responsibility plays in Sartre’s philosophy. Perhaps it is only on an existential account that responsibility truly has meaning, for one does not rely on given structures of meaning and value but rather creates them via one’s actions. In a word, Gardner conflates the true insight of existentialism—that meaningfulness is created, not discovered—with the fear that there is no meaning to life at all.

Grendel is frustrated that humans take life as seriously as if there were objective purpose or meaning. However, this does not mean that one must give up hope, an ideal that the Danes cherish and that Grendel despises: the Shaper’s song “enraged me. It was

their confidence, maybe—their blissful, swinish ignorance, their bumptious self-satisfaction, and, worst of all, their *hope*” (Gardner 77). What he fails to realize, however, is that the humans have it right, for the only way that we may get around this absurdity without reverting to mass suicide is an invention of subjective meaning or purpose, something Grendel fails to do. Referring to the supposed nihilism of existentialism, de Beauvoir writes that “[t]o declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given a meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won” (129). Gardner seizes the ‘absurdity’ of existential nihilism. But, as de Beauvoir suggests, existentialism is not an absurd rejection of meaning, but an ambiguous assertion that meaning is not objective but rather subjective—created daily by individual action and choice.

Gardner assumes that existentialism is a faithless and amoral philosophy, but again he misses the point. Individual freedom and subjectivity are not “strictly individual in nature,” but necessarily involve “the existence of others” (Sartre 41). Man is condemned to freedom and choice and, in choosing for himself, he chooses man (Sartre 25). In fashioning myself, I fashion an image of human being as I wish it to be for all. In being free for one’s own actions, man is also responsible for all others: “when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men” (Sartre 23). Like Sartre, de Beauvoir explains that, when one individual acts, he or she acts for all others: different individuals’ “freedoms can forge laws valid for all” (18). In this intersubjective being (which is still subjectively-driven and -experienced) our own freedom depends on the freedom of

others. In willing our own freedom, “we discover that it depends entirely on the freedom of others, and that the freedom of others depends on our own” (Sartre 48).⁵

While Gardner wanted to create the ideal existential anti-hero, he created an individual in bad faith. Grendel realizes that any absolute system of morality, meaning or action is flawed, but he fails to then imbue his life with meaning by creating his own source of meaning. Existentialism is not a rejection of all meaning as it embraces individual creative meaning via action. When a society denies this freedom and enforces secure systems of established meaning (as manifested in Gardner’s depiction of Beowulf), the society—not the monster—should be feared and resignified. Gardner criticizes existentialism by writing a seemingly meaningful pattern into the very structure of his novel. As McWilliams suggests, “[t]he elaborate circularity of the novel’s design seems to deny Grendel’s absurdist vision of a world without significant pattern and to confirm Beowulf’s regenerative vision of a world constantly renewing itself” (41). But, as Grendel suggests, this pattern-making is the sign of the most frightful and dangerous being ever: man. In his first encounter with men, Grendel is stuck upside down in a tree. When the humans interpret his scream as a sign of aggression,

[t]he king snatched an ax from the man beside him and without warning, he hurled it at me[.] . . . [S]uddenly I knew I was dealing with no dull mechanical bull but with thinking creatures, *pattern makers, the most dangerous things I’d ever met*. I shrieked at them, trying to scare them off, but they merely ducked behind bushes. (Gardner 27; italics mine)

⁵ Sartre also claims that we cannot, in good faith, choose evil for this would deny the freedom of others and would in so doing also deny our own freedom. It would also present a mode of being that would be then chosen for all (because when man chooses a course of action he chooses for all others). However, evil certainly does exist (as I will show in my discussion of de Beauvoir). Therefore, given that evil exists, and given that Sartre says that man cannot *choose* evil in good faith, it seems that evil men (or women) are necessarily in bad faith when choosing evil actions.

And Gardner is one of those dangerous pattern-makers that adheres to established, putatively objective, systems of meaning that overlook individual freedom and responsibility. By comfortably adhering to a socially provided 'cookie-cutter' set of principles, individuals need not embrace their own subjectively established set of beliefs, values or meanings but are instead given them. Gardner's fear of existential questioning or doubt regarding pre-established meaning is an implicit (although not necessarily intentional) dismissal of individual responsibility and freedom, two phenomena that contribute to the individual's subjectivity and ambiguity. In providing clear and objective answers in set patterns of meaning, Gardner, and by extension society (or the Symbolic order), is truly at fault in his denial of genuine subjectivity and his reliance on a supremacy of the same (a state that results from a dependence on socially established ways of being).

Chapter Three: Please Don't Feed the Monsters

In Chapters One and Two, I determined how the monster exceeds the borders of the Symbolic order but does so in such a way that simultaneously constructs them. The Symbolic order fears the other's excessive nature and objectifies it qua monster, thereby securing its borders against deconstruction and permanently removing the deviant or excessive other as a threat. As a system that views the absolute other as a threat to the supremacy of the same, the Symbolic order can be equated with Levinas' totalizing egology that rejects the other either as an extension of the self (perhaps as the monster within) or as an object to be used (the monster that establishes social order). The Symbolic order denies the freedom of the self and other by limiting being to the same. I deconstruct the concept of the monster as a tool used by the Symbolic order to enforce assimilation and am left with self and (absolute) other. I determine that the other frustrates the normative ways of being that characterize the dominant strata of society and establish that this frustration is a positive feature of the monstrous other that should be embraced. But there still remains the question of what is inherently threatening about the other qua other.

In order to elucidate this, I turn to phenomenology. Beginning with Hegel, I assess the nature of his lord and bondsman dialectic, wherein mutual recognition of self and other is necessary to establish either's pure self-consciousness. I then move to de Beauvoir who agrees with Levinas and Hegel that the other is a fundamental component in establishing and grounding the self's freedom and essential being. However, because of this role, the other (as Hegel first recognized) also presents a potential threat to the self in that it has the ability to limit the self's ambiguous being and locate the self as a being-

in-self. To exemplify the nature of evil being, I examine the literary character Humbert Humbert, whose actions can only be redeemed once he acknowledges the ambiguous nature of Lolita (and her absolute alterity). I conclude by reference to Merleau-Ponty and embodied subjectivity as a mediation of strong delineations between self and other that are potentially the cause of strife and conflict.

In this chapter, then, I turn my attention from the monster to its creator, the Symbolic order. The Symbolic order that ostracized Grendel in Chapter Two may be considered evil because it denies his ambiguous nature, at least in terms of the modern retelling, and locates his identity as a monster, as the being over and against whom it defines itself. For Grendel to attain meaning in the text, he must subscribe to the thinking of the text's society and therefore relinquish his subjectively-determined identity. And, in turn, by defining itself against the monster, society theoretically eliminates the monster's subjectivity. This type of alliance is characterized by the objectification of the monster (what may be considered as a theoretical evil act). The monster is created by the Symbolic order so as to establish the supremacy of the same, eliminating alterity in the face of the other.

As such, the monster is not the being that should be feared; it is rather the Symbolic order that is fearsome. Because the Symbolic order is structured based on unity and similarity, it denies any deviating forms of otherness, limiting being to the same. While not all Symbolic orders (or social orders) are inherently evil, requiring the predominance of sameness over otherness, there are myriad historical examples that evidence social rejection of otherness (take for instance, social maltreatment of individuals of 'inferior' race, gender, sex, religion, physical embodiment or intellect).

Thus, what I will criticize are not those social orders that allow for or even embrace difference, but rather those orders that reject or castigate forms of otherness in order to establish a supremacy of the same. For Levinas, this sort of alterity-negating egology both denies the freedom of the other as well as of the self, for it equates freedom with assimilation. Egological social orders deny the subjectivity of the individual, committing what de Beauvoir will call an evil act by limiting ambiguous being to that of an object. In the Symbolic order's frustration of individual subjectivity and ambiguity, it becomes evil.

In the Introduction, I suggested that monsters are feared because they are evil and threatening others. Referring to the link between monstrosity and alterity, Kearney writes that strangers, gods and monsters "are three colloquial names for the experience of alterity" (13). But this abrasive relationship with alterity manifests a misguided engagement with the other. Levinas reproves traditional philosophy for epitomizing an egocentric way of thinking that negates the other by incorporating it into notions of selfhood (the Husserlian other as 'me-over-there') or objectifying and using the other for the self's well-being. Egocentric human being, whether individual or social, has a strong tendency "to think of other individuals either as extensions of the self, or as alien objects to be manipulated for the advantage of the individual or social self" (Introduction to Levinas [b] 12). Levinas turns to the history of Greek philosophy, wherein the "ideal of Socratic truth thus rests on the essential self-sufficiency of the same, its identification in ipseity, its egoism. Philosophy is an egology" ([b] 44). For Levinas, totalitarian thinking seeks to encompass the other in an all-inclusive, panoramic view of being that consumes individuality in the impersonal embrace of Hegelian *Geist* (Spirit) or Heideggerian Being,

for instance. Under the light of egology, freedom is equated with rationality and to be rational is to succumb to the totalizing system that denies unique and essential particularity. Alterity is absorbed and negated in this egocentric “system of harmony and order” (Introduction to Levinas [b] 15).

Levinas rejects philosophy as ontology that overlooks the original encounter with the other. He identifies totalizing modes of philosophy as traditional ontology, wherein the other is reduced to the same and freedom is defined as the stability of the same, which is secured against the alien other. Instead, he defines the other as possessing an infinite nature, namely a being who cannot be limited or defined in any meaningful way by other consciousnesses. If one attempts to do so, one commits a violent and oppressive action. The face-to-face encounter is not between me and my alter ego, another individual that superficially differs from me but whose essential being reflects mine. Rather, the encounter is between me and an absolute other.

For Levinas, in order for justice to prevail in the relationship between self and other, the former must accept the other without attempting to label or identify it, thereby respecting the other’s infinite nature. Levinas writes that “[t]he welcoming of the face and the work of justice—which condition the birth of truth itself—are not interpretable in terms of disclosure” ([b] 28). He goes on to define ontology (the type of philosophy that reduces the other to the same) as a philosophy of power. Ontology is “not a relation with the other as such but the reduction of the other to the same. [. . .] A philosophy of power, ontology is, as first philosophy which does not call into question the same, a philosophy of injustice” ([b] 46).

Levinas locates the recognition of the other's independent being as a necessary component in the self's achievement of freedom. For Levinas, totalizing egology not only denies the other his freedom but also limits that of the self. Alterity-negating systems equate freedom with 'fitting into' the system, a fit that requires sacrificing one's inner self (Introduction to Levinas [b] 17). Levinas characterizes ontological knowledge as "grasping being out of nothing or reducing it to nothing, removing from it its alterity" ([b] 44). In traditional ontology (wherein the individual's being is sacrificed to the cohesion of Being, such as the system of Dasein or Spirit), "[f]reedom comes from an obedience to Being: it is not man who possesses freedom; it is freedom that possesses man" (Levinas [b] 45). Ontology as a permanent tyranny of power is inherently violent in its denial of subjectivity and should be resisted by free men.

This totality can and should be broken up. Before the totality is conditioned, one is situated before "the gleam of exteriority or of transcendence in the face of the Other. The rigorously developed concept of this transcendence is expressed by the term infinity" ([b] 24-5). Levinas characterizes infinity not as an incidental term used to refer to an entity without bounds but to refer to an experience that is constituted in *me*: "[i]ts infinity is produced as revelation, as a positing of its idea in *me*" ([b] 26). Before the other is subsumed by ontology, he appears before me in the primordial face-to-face encounter as pure otherness that is separated from or exceeds any total system or whole. Levinas defines the idea of infinity as "[w]hat remains exterior to thought" and he qualifies infinity as the experience of the other. The relation with the absolute other that "always overflows thought" accomplishes the experience of infinity "in the fullest sense of the word" ([b] 25). There is always an aspect of the absolute other than cannot be

grasped within the all-encompassing control or understanding of the self. De Beauvoir also indirectly refers to the infinity of the other's "transcendence that can constantly push back the horizon toward which it rushes" ([b] 116). De Beauvoir explains that, to genuinely love the other, one must accept it in its free and strange alterity. Like Levinas, de Beauvoir describes the other's freedom as one that allows the other to escape ([a] 67).

In the moment of this encounter, the other regards me in its mortality and

summons me, calls for me, begs for me, as if the invisible death that must be faced by the Other [. . .] were my business. [. . .] The other man's death calls me into question, as if, by my possible future indifference, I had become the accomplice of the death to which the other, who cannot see it, is exposed. (Levinas [a] 83)

The other's beckoning and vulnerable face establishes my responsibility, and calls me into question for allowing his death in the totality (Levinas [a] 83).

For Levinas the other is "[a]bsolutely, not relatively other" (Kearney 16). The other is not an expressive manifestation of the ego's horizons of consciousness but instead "expresses itself" (Levinas [b] 50). While Levinas uses the term 'absolute other,' it is used in a qualified way. The notion of an absolute other (namely one that is entirely and totally distinct from the being of which it is other—namely the self) lacks meaning. To be other, there must be a point of comparison with the being of whom the other is other. If there is no intelligible relationship between the two then there is no self nor is there an other. Thus, I read Levinas' reference to the absolute other's infinite nature as implying its cognitive uncontrollability (namely it is impossible to totalize and encompass the other's being) rather than its cognitive inaccessibility (which would suggest the impossibility of any meaningful encounter between self and other).

Levinas develops an understanding of ethics as a first philosophy, one that precedes ontology (a mode of philosophy whose egological principles remain assumed and unexamined). His ethics are an ethics of responsibility, wherein the self is responsible for the other and realizes its own freedom through this very responsibility. Levinas characterizes the self-other relation in such a way that precludes any violent action to the absolute other. The other who presents itself as naked and vulnerable to the self precludes murder or any other form of violence. Levinas writes that, “there is the nakedness and destitution of the expression as such, that is to say extreme exposure, defenselessness, vulnerability itself” ([a] 83).

The ethical relation of responsibility of the self for the other is symbolized by the gaze, wherein the self does not momentarily glance at the other as a similar and thus totalized body (or worse, as an object), but instead looks at the other so as to acknowledge the other’s being. However, because of the other’s infinite nature, an aspect of its being remains forever beyond the control and grasp of the self. While the other is ‘absolutely’ other, it may still communicate with the self through language wherein the two interlocutors divulge their respective world views to one another. Through language, interaction and communication is possible.

For Levinas, language is the only way to coexist with the other, while still respecting his otherness: the “questioning glance of the other is seeking for a meaningful response. [. . .] This means that I must be ready to put my world into words, and to offer it to the other” (Introduction to [b] 14). Rather than stressing vision as a way of experiencing and seizing the other, Levinas joins self and other in the “diversity of dialogue” which allows for genuine communication via question and answer

(Introduction to Levinas [b] 16). In this communication, both interlocutors retain their autonomy. For Levinas, “[l]anguage is born in responsibility” ([a] 82). While he certainly does not mean that without his ethics of responsibility there would be no capacity for language, one could read Levinas as suggesting that a specific type of language is ‘born in responsibility’: dialogical rather than monological language. The language that is driven by an ethics of responsibility is not a unidirectional language wherein one speaker dominates the conversation and enforces his view of the world on the listener. Rather, Levinas’ understanding of language is that of a non-totalizing or non-egologicistic language that would characterize the discursive engagement of members within a non-totalizing Symbolic order. In the self’s responsibility for the other, a dialogical communication must be possible that evades the closed-mindedness that is indicative of one-way communication. Through dialogue, the self’s autonomy is “stimulated to further intensity by searching questions from a point of view that is not merely opposite and therefore correlative to mine, but genuinely other” (Introduction to Levinas [b] 14).

Because language is born in responsibility, it enables the relationship between self and other. In returning to ancient philosophy and its interpretation of alterity, Kearney cites Plato’s *The Sophist*, wherein he writes that “[t]he complete separation of same (*autos*) and other (*heteron*), of being and what is other than being, would be the obliteration (*apophansis*) of all speech” (15). Without some sort of relationship between self and other, language would be obliterated. While Kearney understands Levinas’ absolute alterity as doing just this—completely separating self from other—I think his understanding is too narrow.

Levinas cites the relationship with the other as the key way for the self to realize its own freedom. Only through communication with the other do I become “responsible, that is, able [or free] to respond” (Introduction to Levinas [b] 15). He characterizes ethics as the calling into question of the arbitrary views and attitudes that are encouraged by the same. The presence of the absolute other brings about the calling into question of my own individuality that has been overshadowed by the “egoist spontaneity of the same” ([b] 43). For Levinas, the encounter with the other is an expression of desire for “that which transcends me and my self-centered categories” (Introduction to Levinas [b] 16). The other plays a crucial role in allowing the self to experience its freedom as an escape from egology: “[t]he strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity” (Levinas [b] 43). Levinas embraces metaphysics as the “welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me” ([b] 43). By thus deconstructing the same by the other, metaphysics precedes ontology and “accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge” (Levinas [b] 43). Whereas ontology equates freedom with the “permanence in the same, which is Reason,” thereby limiting being and denying alterity, Levinas’ ethics of responsibility allows for and creates self-consciousness that is not limited in the incorporation of individuality in total systems (Levinas [b] 43).

Levinas’ assessment of absolute alterity is susceptible to significant misinterpretations. Because the ‘absolute’ other frustrates egology’s totalizing identification, it threatens to undermine the dominant modes of being and unhinge their secure borders of the same. Alterity-negating systems respond to this threat with a redoubled effort to reassert a supremacy of the same and further deny alterity. It views

the absolute other as an intensified threat to stability and rejects the absolute other qua monster. The monster comes back as that unknown which we cannot appropriate and in this sense is similar to the absolute other, a concept that is not generally tasteful to the eagerly totalizing ego of society.

It is not only totalizing egology that misinterprets the threatening quality of the absolute other, but scholars as well. Kearney understands Levinas' radical hermeneutics, as "reject[ing] the model of appropriation, insisting on the unmediatable and ultimately 'sublime' nature of alterity [. . . R]adical hermeneutics invokes an irreducible dissymmetry of self and other" (17). While he maintains that Levinas denies any means of communication between self and other, he misinterprets Levinas' message. Levinas desires communication between self and other and roots the self's freedom in that of the other (much like de Beauvoir and other phenomenological writers). What truly denies alterity is not the evil other but is rather social order itself, or the Symbolic order. The Symbolic order creates the monster and must itself be killed so as to enable genuine individuality and freedom.

Eschewing absolute alterity as a mode of philosophy that disables the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' strangers, Kearney asks how we can tell between "(a) those aliens and strangers that need our care and hospitality, no matter how monstrous they might first appear, and (b) those others that really do seek to destroy and exterminate" (10). While this is a fair question to ask, as we do not want to open our hospitable arms to *all* others, Kearney's question potentially regresses to an implicitly egocentric mindset. If Levinas determines that the only just relationship between self and other is one wherein the self fights the urge to question and identify the other, the approach that Kearney

requires (namely being able to assess the truly bad strangers from the innocent ones and to label each) necessitates the sort of intimate knowledge of others that absolute alterity precludes in an effort to undermine totalizing egologies that encompass alterity within an account of sameness.

Given Levinas' 'preferential' treatment of the other, however, Kearney is right in highlighting the inability of Levinasian absolute alterity to allow the self to appropriately consider its own well-being and autonomy provided certain situations wherein the other is an actual threat. In an effort to balance Levinas' radical construal of alterity, Kearney presents a hermeneutics of reciprocal alterity, wherein the self realizes itself in the other and the other recognizes the self within it. While this seems to be a good approach, wherein self and other come to understand one another, as I suggested at the end of Chapter One, one must pay close attention to who guides this reciprocal alterity, for it could easily fall back into a dominance of the same.

Having deconstructed the use of the term 'monster' as a product of the Symbolic order's inability to accept the absolute alterity of a supposedly threatening other, we are left with self and other. I now turn to a brief phenomenological assessment of alterity in an attempt to locate any potential validity to the egocentric fears of alterity. While the other's difference should be embraced because it presents a means for the self to express its own freedom, is there another aspect of the other's being, besides its difference, that presents a valid threat to the self? In assessing the relationship between self and other, I begin with Hegel's understanding of mutual recognition, wherein the other plays a necessary role in grounding the self's pure self-consciousness. In her analysis of the psychology of oppression, Kelly Oliver states that some phenomenological accounts of

alterity locate being othered as a fundamental step in achieving pure self-consciousness. By superseding this initial experience of otherness, the self establishes true self-certainty. This certainly holds for Hegel, in that pure self-consciousness only exists for itself when its being is recognized by the other. In order for mutual recognition to be accomplished, the self must regard the other as a being-for-self with its own desires and motivations, not as an object of desire that exists wholly for the beholder. The attainment of self-certainty is only possible by the double movement of two self-consciousnesses. Being-for-self exists “only in the being-for-self of the other” (Hegel 112).

In the mutual encounter, the other recognizes *itself* in the being of the self, just as the self recognizes itself in the other. Hegel explains that, while he sets out the process of pure self-consciousness in terms of one individual, the action is actually that of two self-consciousnesses as they mutually recognize one another and duplicate the experience of the encounter. The action of one is necessarily the action of the other as well (111-2). The process of achieving pure self-consciousness is not achieved as a single movement of one being. It is the ‘double movement’ of both self-consciousnesses. Recognition cannot be achieved through the action of one but rather necessitates the action of both.

When the self encounters another individual (another self-consciousness), the self “comes *out of itself*” or loses itself as it finds itself as an *other* being (Hegel 111); however, the self also supersedes the other, because it does not acknowledge the other as a pure self-consciousness, but rather as an extension of its own being. In order to reassert true self-certainty, the self must both supersede the other, thereby establishing the certainty of its own essential being, and supersede its own being, namely the aspect of the self that the other has recognized as its own (111). Double movement comes about

because the act of superseding “is directed against itself as well as against the other [. . . and] because it is indivisibly the action of one as well as of the other” (Hegel 112). In the encounter of individual A (self) with individual B (other), both A and B duplicate the process of recognition. Both see one another as the manifestation of their own selves. So, by superseding both the other’s being and the other within their own being, they both reassert their own pure self-consciousness and also release the other’s self-consciousness as well.

As seemingly pure self-consciousness posits everything external to it as an object, when two self-consciousnesses encounter one another, they appear to the other as being-in-self, “submerged in the being [or immediacy] of *Life*” (Hegel 113). Before the two beings mutually recognize one another, the self-consciousness of the self posits itself as being-for-self and everything that is outside of it as being-in-self. What is other is characterized as unessential. As objects to one another, they have not yet succeeded in achieving abstraction, wherein the individual eliminates all immediate being and attains the purely negative being of self-identical consciousness. In order to achieve being-for-self, the individual must abstract his existence from the immediacy of *Life*. Only by staking one’s life does one win freedom and prove that essential self-consciousness is not just “*immediate* form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that [. . .] it is only pure *being-for-self*” (Hegel 114). However, the death of the other denies the self the required significance of recognition that grounds true and certain pure self-consciousness: in death, the “two do not reciprocally give and receive one another back from each other consciously, but leave each other free only indifferently, like things” (Hegel 114). In order to establish pure self-certainty, two self-

consciousnesses must “*recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another*” (Hegel 112). Only through this mediation can pure self-consciousness exist.

Without recognition by the other’s essential being, the individual’s self-certainty lacks truth. For Hegel, when two individuals first encounter each other as immediate beings, they are not yet for-selves. In order to have ‘self-identical’ self-consciousness, they must mutually recognize one another as respectively pure and essential beings. Self-certainty only attains truth when “each in its own self through its own action, and again through the action of the other, achieves this pure abstraction of being-for-self” (Hegel 113). At this point, Hegel considers the nature of the potentially unequal relationship between self and other, introducing the lord and the bondsman. The encounter with an other dissolves the unity of ‘I’ as the absolute mediation of immediate self-consciousness and instead establishes one self-consciousness as pure for-self and the second consciousness as the immediate consciousness of the in-self that characterizes thinghood. Before there is mutual recognition, the encounter is unequal, joining two opposed forms of consciousness: the independent consciousness of the lord and the dependent one of the bondsman.

Because of his reliance on mediation, the lord is a being-for-self only through another, namely the bondsman, whom he holds in his power and subjugates (Hegel 115). However, the lord never fully achieves pure self-consciousness because, in denying the bondsman’s being for-self, the lord denies himself the opportunity for mutual recognition and true self-certainty. The lord bases his pure self-consciousness on the existence of an object, a being-in-self: “the object in which the lord has achieved his lordship has in reality turned out to be something quite different from an independent consciousness”

(Hegel 117). The lord is confronted with a dependent consciousness and realizes the uncertainty of his being-for-self. Instead, his reality is the unessential consciousness and its unessential action of being-in-self (Hegel 117). Because the lord bases his self-consciousness on an object, he cannot achieve the true self-certainty he desires. De Beauvoir echoes this in her writing, wherein she states that in the act of oppression, or suppression of freedom, “[o]nly the matter remains, and to the extent that [the master] depends on matter, he also is only matter and passivity. In suppressing man’s empire over things, he makes himself a thing among things” ([b] 132).

Hegel explains that not only is the lord’s role revealed as the reverse of what appeared to be true, but that the bondsman also has his role reversed. Just as the lord’s self-consciousness was shown to be what it does not seem to be, “so too servitude in its consummation will really turn into the opposite of what it immediately is” (Hegel 117). Because the bondsman follows the lord’s guide in staking his being-for-self, the bondsman achieves the negative and abstract consciousness of essential being-for-self (Hegel 116). Unlike the lord who does not attain true self-certainty because he neither supersedes the other as an independent consciousness, nor supersedes his own being as an abstract being-for-self, the bondsman succeeds in this double supersession and achieves abstract and true self-certainty.

As I have outlined, for Hegel, the other plays a crucial role in the development and assertion of pure self-consciousness and true self-certainty. Without the other’s recognition, self-certainty is not yet assured. Like Hegel, de Beauvoir sees the other as necessary to and constitutive of the self’s development and being. In fact, it is only through others that one may realize and experience one’s freedom. Agreeing with Hegel

that the self achieves self-certainty through the mediation of another, de Beauvoir writes that the other also helps establish meaning. The other in a sense gives us our being as, without action, man is rendered meaningless because meaning and value can only be established through action. She further qualifies that, starting from birth, man acts meaningfully only through others: we “need others in order for our existence to become founded and necessary” ([b] 129). Without others, we exist as inessential beings. Like the drawing that “requires an eye that looks at it” ([b] 116), without someone to look at us or to adopt our projects, our actions and existence are rendered not-yet-substantiated in a pure way.

Because of the other’s necessary role in grounding our essential being, de Beauvoir characterizes the self-other relationship as a fundamental horizon of human consciousness, one that is as fundamental as the subject-object relationship ([a] 72). The other founds our absolute freedom, which is not characterized as a license to do anything one likes, but as the ability to exceed one’s current being “towards an open future” ([a] 91). Like Hegel, who predicates pure self-consciousness (which he later identifies with freedom) on the other’s pure self-consciousness, so too does de Beauvoir assert that the self’s freedom is only established once that of the other is. The existence and freedom of others defines my situation and grounds my own freedom ([a] 91). For de Beauvoir, respect for the other is not a mere pleasantry but is rather a necessary condition of my successful freedom ([b] 136). The other’s freedom is necessary to save our being “from hardening in the absurdity of facticity” ([a] 71).

How do these interpretations of the other account for threatening or monstrous alterity? For the abovementioned philosophers, alterity is a fundamental part of the self’s

development. The other establishes and grounds the self's existence and freedom. Self and other exist in a mutually recognized and reciprocal relationship, wherein there is no totalizing possession of either being. In this intersubjective role, however, the other could be seen as a threat if it refuses to play its role in granting the self its freedom and autonomy. Because others can prevent our being from hardening into facticity, they also possess the power to restrict the self to present-being, thereby removing the opportunity for the self to freely project its creative being into the future. The other can deny the subjectivity of the self and render it an objective being-in-itself. For de Beauvoir, the only sense in which others pose a threat to the self—wherein alterity is oppressive or aggressive—is that others must adopt the self's projects as well in order to give such projects meaning; as the self's meaning rests on the other and its freedom, if the other fails to recognize the self's project—and by extension the self's freedom and subjective being—the self is essentially killed, as its being is rendered that of an object. In this sense, the other denies the ambiguous nature of the self as both subjective creator of meaning and objective existence in the creative world of another. When someone commits this atrocity, he or she is characterized as evil.

For de Beauvoir, humans are ambiguous beings that are both authors of creative meaning as well as objects in the world of others' creative potential. Man is both a transcendental freedom, a “pure internality against which no external power can take hold” and a “thing crushed by the dark weight of other things” ([a] 7). Rather than lament this ambiguity, we must assume its fundamental truth, namely that man is both an object that is surpassed by foreign transcendences and is also in turn a transcendence that surpasses his present being toward the open future ([b] 111). What grants the individual

his subjectivity is his ability to be something other than what he currently is. Unlike being-in-itself that has its being given to it, being-for-itself creates its own meaning as a lack. By having a past that forms one's present being and a future that allows one's present being to become other than what it currently is, humans experience their freedom and subjectivity. Individual ambiguity makes itself a lack thereby affirming its freedom and creative meaning: "only through man's freedom do voids and lacks spring up in the heart of being" ([b] 107). Thrown into the world, human being attains its truth by embracing and realizing its ambiguity, defining the present and future as lack.

The future that envisions man as pure positivity and fulfillment results in the stagnancy of tacit being-in-itself. If one negates man's negativity in the attempt to close the lack that is buried in man's heart, one kills man by preventing the particular movement that thrusts him towards an open future. In writing of the other's role in the self's freedom, de Beauvoir states that

my freedom, in order to fulfill itself, requires that it emerge into an open future: it is other men who open the future to me, it is they who, setting up the world of tomorrow, define my future but if, instead of allowing me to participate in this constructive movement, they oblige me to consume my transcendence in vain, if they keep me below the level which they have conquered and on the basis of which new conquests will be achieved, then they are cutting me off from the future, they are changing me into a thing. ([a] 82)

Affected by the atrocities of the Holocaust and the extent of human malevolence, de Beauvoir changed her attitude to evil in her text, *Ethics of Ambiguity*. Whereas she first denied the existence of evil (agreeing with Sartre that no human act could deny the self's transcendent freedom), in this text she defines evil as the successful denial of human ambiguity. While Beauvoir asserts that, located in the heart of man's being, "[n]o social upheaval, no moral conversion can eliminate" his lack ([a] 118), she also maintains that,

when denied the ability to realize one's creative potential, being thereby limited to being-in-itself, one is essentially killed.

While existentialism eschews a universal human essence (because existence precedes essence) all humans, for de Beauvoir, are characterized by their ambiguous nature and their creative potential-for-being. If one kills this potential, one kills the human. De Beauvoir writes that the "trick of tyrants is to enclose a man in the immanence of his facticity and to try to forget that man is always, as Heidegger puts it, 'infinitely more than what he would be if he were reduced to being what he is;' man is a being of the distances, a movement toward the future, a project" ([a] 102). The evil individual, then, is that being that kills one's potential-for-being. For de Beauvoir, in order to give one's project meaning, one must be able to engage all three ekstases of temporality (past, present, and future). One must be able to refer to one's past projects and continue to give them meaning in the present, while projecting them into the future: "[i]t is in time that the goal is pursued and that freedom confirms itself. And this assumes that it is realized as a unity in the unfolding of time" ([a] 26-7). The past is not dead but lives in the present which also concerns itself with the future. To love the past in its living truth is to acknowledge it as "an appeal; it is an appeal toward the future which sometimes can save it only by destroying it" ([a] 95). While de Beauvoir posits the other as essential to the self's realization of its meaningful projects, the other is also given the power to deny these projects and limit the self to a being-in-itself. De Beauvoir writes that others can deny one's projects (and therefore life), because it is in the other's power to confirm my projects and existence, thereby recognizing and founding my freedom ([a]

82). The type of being that is characterized by interdependence and intersubjectivity “explains why oppression is possible and why it is hateful” ([a] 82).

Having thus established evil being as the denial of others’ ambiguity, I turn to my literary example of evil being. While literary critics have qualified Humbert as a moral monster, because I have identified monstrosity as a socially-created tool used to ensure conformity, I have chosen to interpret Humbert instead as a representative of an alterity-negating and evil Symbolic order. Humbert Humbert, in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*, is a morally deviant other who fails to engage with a young girl, Dolly Schiller, in a truly intersubjective way that acknowledges her ambiguous being. As a result of this deficiency, he abducts and rapes thirteen-year old Dolly whom he sees as the nymphet Lolita. Humbert’s negation of Dolly’s subjectivity and his obsession with her body can be interpreted as a take on potentially solipsistic dualism which, as Merleau-Ponty asserts, does not allow “for other people and a plurality of consciousness” ([a] 407). Humbert denies his role as a collaborator in “consummate reciprocity [in which] our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world” (Merleau-Ponty [a] 413). He denies absolutely Lolita’s subjectivity and limits her being to that of an object. Not only does Humbert deny Lolita her innocence and childhood but, according to Ellen Pifer, Humbert also denies Lolita her life. This statement is reminiscent of my earlier suggestion that, in order to kill an individual, one does not necessarily need to physically attack him; it is sufficient to deny the other his or her ambiguous nature, rendering the individual’s being that of an object. Pifer states that “in the end Dolores Haze loses not only her childhood but her life; the first of these deprivations already implies [. . .] a betrayal of human consciousness and its creative potential” (93). It is not until the end of

the novel that Humbert redeems himself by breaking out of this dualistic world and moves “from thinking of Lolita as nothing more than an object that can be manipulated to fulfill his desire to thinking of her as a fully realized, fully rounded, hurt human being” (Olsen 34).

Humbert’s denial of the intersubjective community is first seen in his brief and failed relationship with a young girl from his past, Annabel Leigh. He remembers his interest in Annabel as the potential first instance of his pedophilic desires. Reflecting upon “these miserable memories,” Humbert asks himself if it was “in the glitter of that remote summer, that the rift in my life began; or was my excessive desire for that child only the first evidence of an inherent singularity” (Nabokov 13). He also notes that his distinction from others was evident from the youngest of ages. Humbert reflects on a photograph of Annabel, himself and their respective families: “I, sitting somewhat apart from the rest, came out with a kind of dramatic conspicuousness: a moody, beetle-browed boy in a dark shirt and well-tailored white shorts, his legs crossed, sitting in profile, looking away” (Nabokov 13).

The first instance of Humbert’s appropriation of Lolita’s freedom and being is in the masturbatory scene in which Lolita, munching on an apple, spreads her legs over Humbert’s lap: “[w]ith the deep hot sweetness thus established and well on its way to the ultimate convulsion, I felt I could slow down in order to prolong the glow. Lolita had been safely solipsized” (Nabokov 60). Humbert clearly admits to his dualistic tendencies when he writes that “[w]hat I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita—perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness—indeed, no life of

her own” (Nabokov 62). Humbert also freely suggests that he interacts with Lolita in such a way that separates her mental life from her physicality. Humbert further acknowledges his dualistic sympathies in the following quotation: “[m]entally, I found her to be a disgustingly conventional little girl. Sweet hot jazz, square dancing, gooey fudge sundaes, musicals, movie magazines and so forth—these were the obvious items in her list of beloved things” (Nabokov 148).

Humbert treats Lolita solely as a nymphetic body to be taken advantage of (or to indulge in the seductions of). In his desire to seize his nymphet “Humbert can only possess, in the physical or sexual sense, the *body* of a child he has imaginatively transformed into the figment of his dreaming mind” (Pifer 85). Pifer explains that “the child Dolores Haze is trapped within the nymphic guise conjured by Humbert’s imagination” (99). Yuval Eylon stresses that throughout the text “Dolly-as-nymphet [. . .] is not a person, not a normal teen-ager, but rather a beautiful and desirable object—elevated to this status by Humbert’s rare ability to recognize her true nature” (169). Colin McGinn seconds Eylon’s reference to Humbert’s treatment of Lolita as an aesthetic entity: “[i]t is as if he undertook his affair with Lolita with a loftily artistic aim in mind: to articulate the meaning of the ultimate aesthetic ideal, here embodied in the ‘nymphet’” (34). While it is certainly true that Humbert treats Lolita as a beautiful body to be taken advantage of, Eylon’s reference to her ‘true nature’ is faulty; Humbert’s treatment of Lolita gives her the type of being that belongs to an object, while she is most certainly not an object but an ambiguous and free human being. Humbert does not know her true nature as human beings do not have ‘true’ essences; their meanings and values are established through their autonomously chosen actions and projects.

Humbert often wears sunglasses, suggesting that he does not engage with others' looks. While he may gaze at Lolita (or others), it is always unidirectional: Humbert gazing at others. He never lets others see him, or at least return his gaze in a meaningful intimate encounter with the other. While Humbert covers his eyes with sunglasses, he still manages to engulf Lolita's being. Humbert's unidirectional gaze draws to mind my earlier discussion regarding Levinas' assertion that language is born in responsibility. Only dialogical language (or in this case vision) grounds a mutually reciprocal relationship between self and other that allows for a meaningful encounter wherein both interlocutors retain their respective autonomy and freedom. Yet another instance of Humbert's objective treatment of Lolita is evident in his obsessive and absolute gaze upon her, in which he "consumes Dolly with his eyes" (Olsen 66).⁶ Several phenomenological thinkers (Husserl, Hegel and Sartre) mention the fact that the individual is rendered an object when looked upon by another self-consciousness. While Merleau-Ponty most stresses the fluidity between self and other, even he describes the potential aggressive relationship between the two: "in so far as I have a body, I may be reduced to the status of an object beneath the gaze of another person, and no longer count as a person for him, or else I may become his master and, in my turn, look at *him*" (Merleau-Ponty [a] 193). In the sexual act, whichever being is looked at is rendered an object. Humbert chooses his sexual partner so as to ensure that he is never rendered an object and he alone can always do the looking. Maurice Couturier defines the consequences of Humbert's choice of a sexual partner as "running the risk of never

⁶ The reference to vision as consuming its object is reminiscent of Irigaray's rejection of sight as a masculine and egocentric way of negating alterity and consuming the other within the same.

becoming himself an object of desire for another subject, of never experiencing true love” (26).

It is finally at the end of the novel that Humbert allow’s for Lolita’s true existence as Dolly Schiller. He willfully ignores the fact, for instance, that “there were times when I knew how you felt, and it was hell to know it, my little one. Lolita girl, brave Dolly Schiller” (Nabokov 284-85). By the end of the novel, Humbert “glean[s] an image of the child as an autonomous being, an individual with the right to her own kingdom, her own universe of hopes and dreams, feelings and flights of fancy that have nothing to do with his desire” (Pifer 104). While “his” Lolita is “hopelessly worn at seventeen,” despite her sad appearance, Humbert “looked and looked at her, and knew as clearly as I know I am to die, that I loved her more than anything I had ever seen or imagined on earth, or hoped for anywhere else” (Nabokov 277). For the first time, Humbert sees Lolita as she is—the seventeen-year old, no longer nymphetic, Dolly—and, upon his departure from Coalmount, he reflects that he “simply did not know a thing about my darling’s mind and that quite possibly [. . .] there was in her a garden and a twilight, and a palace gate—dim and adorable regions which happened to be lucidly and absolutely forbidden to me” (Nabokov 284). Pifer appeals to “Humbert’s wish to protect Lolita’s privacy” as another “manifestation of his belated recognition of her autonomous being” (104). By the end of his text, Humbert, the “artist and madman” (Nabokov 17), experiences all four qualities of aesthetic bliss.

Nabokov explains that he specifically created this type of morally deviant character to test the bounds of the reader’s intersubjective sympathy and curiosity in others. For Nabokov what is so bad about Humbert’s character is that he is a failed artist.

He feels no sensitivity or curiosity for those around him, namely Lolita. If one accepts dualism, then both Humbert and his creation, Lolita, certainly live in “an abstract universe, emptied of love and meaning” for a world in which subject is separated from object, wherein minds cannot genuinely engage or sympathize with one another—a process that disinterests Humbert—surely lacks any meaningful emotional capacity (Pifer 103). Through writing, Nabokov searches for “aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (*curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy*) is the norm” (315). As Angelo Caranfa suggests, the act of writing “promotes an encounter with the *other*” (99) which encourages understanding the other.

Humbert’s absent orientation towards his worldly engagement denies him the possibility for genuine curiosity in others—one of the main tenets of artistic pursuit as Nabokov defines it (315)—as well as the ability for empathizing with others, particularly Lolita. Olsen writes that *Lolita* “is an impassioned attack against human insensitivity, against our all-too-frequent inability to grant another human being freedom and individuality. [. . .]it is nothing less than a deeply moving, deeply moral monograph” (35). Again referring to the source of the reader’s sympathy, Kellie Dawson explains that “the uncomfortable sympathy [Nabokov] achieves for Humbert in *Lolita* is not a side-effect but the very essence of the novel, that Humbert’s specific monstrosity is, in fact, beside the point” (116). Dawson also writes that Nabokov is interested in studying “the pain of otherness and the limits of human sympathy” (116). Clearly though, such understanding and sympathy for Humbert is not possible until the end of the novel when he accepts his role in a world with other subjects; “[w]ith *Lolita*, Nabokov has

manipulated his reader's imaginations in order to challenge them to experience some amount of compassion for something they would usually detest in order to illustrate the concept of aesthetic bliss as he, himself, enjoys it" (Dawson 129).

While Humbert lacks artistic sympathy towards Lolita, Nabokov has certainly achieved his end in garnering sympathy for Humbert from his readers. Because of the first-person narrative of *Lolita*, the reader becomes implicit in his depraved actions to the point that he almost sympathizes with Humbert Humbert. As Olsen suggests, if one were presented with a third person narrative, "[d]ivorced from [Humbert's] consciousness, we would suddenly see him mainly from the outside, through his actions, rather than mainly from the inside, through his thoughts and feelings, and we would thus find it much easier to judge him" (51). Further elaborating on the consequences of first-person narrative, Eylon writes "[b]y actively imaging ourselves actually performing it we forgo the possibility of viewing it as cruel, disgusting, or foolish" (163). However, to understand is not always to forgive; understanding an individual's motives does not necessitate forgiveness or exoneration: "[t]he view that to understand all is to forgive all presumes that one always excuses her own actions *as long as one maintains a first person point of view and treats these actions as her own*" (Eylon 164). Dawson qualifies, however, that "having sympathy for a human being need not have anything to do with condoning his crimes" (125).

At the beginning of this chapter, I deconstructed the use of the term monster as an assimilative move towards ensuring a supremacy of the same. Undermining the use of this term and establishing the Symbolic order as the being to be feared, I determined that we are left with the relationship between self and other and established that the other

presents a *potential* threat in its ability to deny the ambiguity of individual being. I used Humbert as a literary manifestation of this denial. While Nabokov created an evil character that *overlooks* Lolita's subjectivity until the end of the novel, his specific purpose in writing the text was to cause the reader to feel sympathy with the character, a position that seems to suggest the very intersubjective approach to alterity that I have alluded to throughout this investigation as a means to evade perceptions of threatening and 'evil' others. However, Nabokov qualifies sympathy as an artistic endeavour, wherein the self imaginatively places himself in the shoes of the other so as to creatively feel what the other may feel. Leland de la Durantaye stresses Humbert's inability to reach out to the subjectivity of others, writing that "despite [Humbert's] lively imagination and singularly precise perception, imaginative identification of the sort Nabokov associated with the artist's calling is something that he does *not*, at least until very late in his days, engage in" (317). However, I argue that imagination is not what is necessary to reach out from the self to the other and turn to Merleau-Ponty's assessment of intersubjectivity to highlight how sympathy is by no means imaginative (a process that suggests a solipsistic tendency when engaging with others), but rather is a process of genuine identification, wherein the boundaries between self and other are rendered porous.

Merleau-Ponty agrees with the aforementioned philosophers that the other is a fundamental aspect of the self's horizon of being, but he takes the notion further and stresses the fluidity between self and other as two body-subjects (or embodied consciousnesses) whose mutual reciprocity contributes to the worldly meaning of their shared situation. Departing from his philosophical predecessors, Merleau-Ponty

explicitly rejects mind-body dualism and instead refers to individuals as ‘body-subjects,’ a term that highlights our cognition of the world and others as a sort of corporeal knowledge. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty highlights body-subjects’ shared fleshiness, a phenomenological attribute that refers to the mutually reversible role of the ‘sensate and sensible’ that further renders the strict delineation between subject and object—or self and other—more fluid. Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of mutual reciprocity is essential in deconstructing the use of monstrosity as a social scapegoat because, if one acknowledges that the terms self and other lack any absolute separation, one realizes that the ‘other’ runs within the being of the self, thereby undermining the possibility for a fearsome absolute other and the need to use the term ‘monster.’

For Merleau-Ponty, meaning and knowledge of the world—and those in one’s world—are established by a mutually constitutive and implicative conjunction of both mind and body, i.e. by one’s being as embodied consciousness. Cognition is no longer strictly focused on one’s consciousness as a mind but, rather, on one’s corporeal being and how it not only receives knowledge of the world but also creatively contributes to the establishment of one’s meaningful embodied situation (take, for example, a blind person whose perception and understanding of the world and the way it is structured will ‘create’ a very different world from that of a person with fully functioning vision). For Merleau-Ponty, one’s corporeality is no longer a shell for the thinking subject but instead contributes to the construction of worldly signification, affecting one’s understanding, perception and experience of the world: “the body is not simply the vehicle for acquiring knowledge but is also a participant in creating meaning” (Hamington 45). Merleau-Ponty writes in *Primacy of Perception* that, in so far as the biological composition and sensory

fields of man are concerned, he only perceives the world, “[b]ut as an active body capable of gestures, of expression, and finally of language, it turns back on the world to signify it” ([b] 7). Perception necessarily involves both the mind and the body as one composite and cohesive unity; in other words, “subjectivity is physical” (Hamington 47).

For Merleau-Ponty, the other is a crucial component of the self’s being and engagement in the world. Referring to the relation between the body and the world, Merleau-Ponty writes in *Signs* that “[w]hen I try to understand myself the whole fabric of the perceptible world comes too, and with it come the others who are caught in it” ([c] 15). He allows for a certain fluidity of being between self and other, redefining the boundaries of individual self-consciousness as “more ambiguous, more embedded in the other, and more permeable than the notion discrete subjectivity allows” (Schertz 166). Further elucidating the nature of intersubjective being, Soren Overgaard suggests that, for Merleau-Ponty, “[w]e do not have to build epistemic bridges to reach other minds” (55). Because human consciousness is embedded within bodily experience, there is no problem of other minds.

To clarify the sense in which Merleau-Ponty dismisses the problem of other minds, I refer to his understanding of the anonymity of body-subjects as well as to their shared primordial ‘fleshiness.’ Merleau-Ponty explains that “[t]he other can be evident to me because I am not transparent for myself, and because my subjectivity draws its body in its wake” ([a] 410). When he suggests that I am not entirely transparent to myself, he refers to the primordial state of being before I come to be fully self-aware or self-conscious. He suggests that there are elements of my corporeal being that carry on without my knowledge (take for instance the beating of one’s heart that is not

characterized by any specific identity or motivation but is rather an aspect of one's embodied being that carries on unintentionally). Because I am not totally transparent to myself, self and other enjoy a shared anonymity, wherein "we all participate as anonymous subjects of perception" (Merleau-Ponty [a] 411).

Merleau-Ponty also renders the boundaries between self and other more porous in that, "[a]s part of the flesh of the world, [. . .] I have an 'echo' or 'trace' of understanding" (Hamington 55). As body-subjects, self and other share in the primordial 'flesh' of the world. For Merleau-Ponty, 'flesh' does not refer to a 'spirit-like' force that runs through each individual. Instead, it is used to refer to the fundamental reciprocity and reversibility of the 'sensate and the sensible.' In elucidating the nature of mutual reciprocity, Merleau-Ponty refers to the 'mutual touch.' When an individual touches another person, there is not just the action of *touching* the other person but also that of being *touched* back. The mutual touch highlights our shared fleshiness and embodied consciousness, illustrating the fluid boundaries between self and other. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty asserts that, "[t]hrough this crisscrossing [. . .] of the touching and the tangible, [my hand's] own movements incorporate themselves in the universe that they interrogate" ([d] 133).

For Merleau-Ponty, it is our shared 'fleshy' understanding of one another that negates a unidirectional intentionality of one individual touching the other but rather suggests the image of a fold, wherein the individual touching turns in on itself and is at the same time the one that is touched. In blurring the distinction between subject (the one that touches) and object (the one that is touched), Merleau-Ponty undermines the strict delineation between subject-object dualism. Schertz explains that the intersubjective

world is characterized by “elements which are neither merely cognitive nor affective” but that are united in embodied consciousness wherein self and other both contribute to the “interpersonal process of mutual subjectification” (Schertz 173). This is similar to Husserl’s notion of the shared objective Nature or World that comprises the community of monads that share access to the same world, just constituted somewhat differently from independent and distinct consciousnesses.

It is important to note that, while he allows for intersubjective being and mutual reciprocity of self and other, Merleau-Ponty does not negate alterity in a totalizing and encompassing subsuming of the other. Although he breaches the gap between subject and other, discarding the problem of other minds, he himself preserves the other’s alterity: I can never fully ford the gap between self and other because I cannot grasp first-hand the experiences and lived meaning of the other. Merleau-Ponty writes that, while another’s embodied consciousness and mine communicate with one another in a shared situation, “it is nevertheless from the subjectivity of each of us that each one projects this ‘one and only’ world” ([a] 415). While this may seem to negate alterity, encompassing the other within the self in what Levinas will call egology, I again turn to the notion that the self can only experience from its own perspective and that it certainly acknowledges the existence of other beings in their own autonomous being who have an element of their being that exists independently from that of the self.

I conclude this section with a return to Nabokov’s discussion of imaginative sympathy, which is one that Merleau-Ponty would instead term empathy. One does not need to imagine what pain feels like but can sympathize with it, because the other is not posited as a totally distinct being. Hamington stresses the distinction Merleau-Ponty

draws between sympathy and empathy as is evident in the following quotation that discusses the specific type of knowledge that belongs to embodied consciousness (a way of engaging with being that is not dualistic between mind and body):

[w]hen my body confronts another, even if it is a foreign body attired and socially constructed differently from my own, there is still a fundamental connection and understanding in the flesh that Merleau-Ponty refers to as the ‘propagation’ of bodily experience. [. . .] Corporeal knowledge creates the potential of sympathetic perception that makes care possible. (Hamington 55)

Because Merleau-Ponty shifts the emphasis of knowledge “from intentionality to motility, creating a distinctively bodily perspective for phenomenology” (Solomon 419), highlighting our shared ‘fleshy’ understanding of one another, one need not employ the projective faculty of imagination (which implies a unidirectional process) in empathizing with another, but one can instead sympathize with the other in a mutually reciprocal or bidirectional manner. Empathy is relegated to the realm of discreet subjectivity and what is rather of importance in Merleau-Ponty’s account is sympathy. Because of the fluidity between self and other, sympathy becomes a necessary function of interaction between embodied consciousnesses in a shared situation. Whereas empathy implies the imaginative placement of oneself in another’s shoes (reiterating the dualistic separation between self and other), sympathetic perception is more organic, following from the self and other’s shared fleshiness that results in their intertwining reversibility.

In intersubjective being, the strong delineation between subject and object, or self and other, is lessened. For Merleau-Ponty, “there is no being apart from world and there is no world apart from our being in it” (Schertz 171). As such, any absolute delineation between subject and object or perceiver and the perceived is deconstructed as porous and fluid. Because “there are no discrete limits between self and other,” sympathy becomes a

natural product of the interaction between body-consciousnesses (Schertz 172). And because of this, the problem of empathy being an imaginary act of self-projection dissipates and self and other feel genuine sympathy.

I return to Levinas, for whom Merleau-Ponty's notion of mutual reciprocity or shared embodied consciousness embraces a way of thinking that perpetuates traditional egology. On this account of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the self grasps the other as it grasps itself in that the other is an extension of the self. If the other is an integral part of the self's being, the other's infinite nature is limited and subsumed within the realm of the ego. Levinas specifically criticizes the fact that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy allows for the fluidity of self and other, wherein the boundaries of each self-consciousness are porous and ambiguous. With the abstract delineation of self and other comes the negation of alterity for Levinas. That being said, Levinas also says that the other is necessary to the self's development and realization of its freedom. While Levinas might see Merleau-Ponty as eliminating alterity, the latter's philosophy does so only in that it denies *absolute* alterity, while still allowing for the possibility of the other's independent existence (the self does not presume specific knowledge of the other as the self only acts from the perspective of its own pure transcendental ego). Is it not possible for the other to retain its independent and self-derived meaning without being absolutely other? Indeed the possibility of a being whose system of meaning and identity is wholly—or even in part—distinct from the influences of those within one's environment is practically impossible. While the other should not have its identity forced upon it, it cannot create its meaning and identity *ex nihilo*, independently from its worldly engagement and experience that are both necessarily with others.

While Merleau-Ponty's account of intersubjectivity may be reminiscent of Kearney's approach to interbeing, there are certain elements of the former's philosophy that differ significantly. For Merleau-Ponty, there is no specific effort that needs to be enacted in seeing the self in the other and the other in the self because intersubjectivity is simply a fact of existence. Because we are to some extent anonymous subjects of primordial experience, the boundaries between self and other are rendered more ambiguous. Intersubjectivity is necessarily an element of each individual's self-understanding. Merleau-Ponty's account of alterity does not run the risk of negating alterity or placing self or other on a hierarchy as Kearney's interbeing has the potential to do. By acknowledging that self and other both contribute to the worldly meaning of their shared situation, we demolish the conceptual need for monstrosity. While there may still be the potential for evil (or to put it less intensely, immoral) behaviour, this is sadly a feature of human existence. As de Beauvoir suggests, we are condemned to failure because we are condemned to violence. Without the monster as a scapegoat for polymorphous and violent behaviour, we are left with our own responsibility for social and individual treatment of others. Although this reveals the evil potential within each individual, it is to be hoped that, with the genuine acknowledgement of our existential responsibility for mankind, we will overcome the inherent tendency for violence and instead embrace our others.

Conclusion:
A Farewell to Monstrosity

In the Introduction, I wrote that monsters blur the binary logic that defines the categorical knowledge of the Symbolic order and suggested that, fearing unknown otherness, the Symbolic order in turn ostracizes the monster, thereby securing its supremacy of the same. Because of this connection between social order and constructed monstrosity, the figure of the monster reveals features about a specific socio-cultural group. Despite the alliance between monstrosity and social construction, Cohen believes that monsters succeed in deconstructing the society that they are created to construct. He asserts that monsters “ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression” (20). However, in Chapters Two and Three, I suggested that social order refuses to allow its borders to crumble. Having created the monster to serve a specific purpose (uphold a supremacy of the same from its liminal and abject periphery), the Symbolic order nullifies the monster’s ability to genuinely deconstruct anything. We come to love the monster that serves to establish our human community in its unity and security.

While the monster has historically been the physically deviant body that destabilizes ideals of ‘normal’ embodiment or the morally deviant being that frustrates established notions of law and morality, I argue that the monster is moreover that being that frustrates the Symbolic order, thereby calling into question the same. While the monster is an intimate stranger because it contributes to the construction and security of social boundaries, it is also characterized by society as an unknowable other. In order to

banish our Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde relationship with alterity, we need to come to terms with the stranger within and not pathologize it as a monster. As mentioned in the Introduction, human culture likes to project its own unknown onto the other and then categorize that being as monstrous. Monsters are intimately related to the human system that they not only inhabit but also construct. They reveal the monster within human being.

The application of the label monster is more telling of society than of the deviant being, because there are no naturally born monsters. Thus, the use of the term 'monster' signifies what society refuses to acknowledge or accept within itself and thereby excludes as in- or subhuman. In the need to secure the stringent borders of human being, the Symbolic order establishes a supremacy of the same, requiring those within its borders to relinquish their subjectivity, and characterizing those that exceed its borders as monstrous. The Symbolic order is often evil because it denies the individual the capacity to be other than what she currently is, namely it denies being-for-self. We say that monsters live in the dark but, as I understand it, monsters live in the broad daylight of the Symbolic order, which is itself dark and minatory.

Because of the monster's excessive nature, it "represents all that is beyond human control, the uncontrollable and the unruly that threaten the moral order" (Gilmore 19). While this uncontrollable excess may be threatening, Gilmore, like Cohen, suggests that the monster is a positive being: we desire monsters because they free us from culture which has a limiting and repressing impact on natural human desires and instincts: "the creation of monstrosities, recombinants, anomalies, and so on frees humans from their day-to-day location in the world of common sense" (20). The monster is Levinas'

absolute other whose infinite nature allows the self to break free from totalizing egologies that negate alterity and individuality with their assimilating gazes.

The Symbolic order denies alterity, using the monstrous other to solidify the impermeable continuity of the same. It establishes absolute systems of given meaning that grant individuals their identity based on their adherence to social order. As suggested in Chapter Three, however, the social creation of the monster must be undermined to allow for the other, a necessary being that both frees the self from its adherence to a totality and also grounds the meaning of the self's projects and meaning. We need to embrace the other and allow for its difference to challenge the Symbolic order and perhaps resignify its stringent and discriminating borders.

Having established monstrous being as a constructed manifestation of socio-cultural anxieties regarding borders or boundaries of 'appropriate' human being, in Chapter Three I strove to deconstruct this dangerous social crutch that denies alterity and, instead, to establish a groundwork for mutual reciprocity that abets the abrasive relationship with otherness and embraces difference. Given the monster's constructed quality, I now turn to Cohen's query about the monster's existence. He questions if monsters really exist and responds with an assertive yes, explaining that, if monsters did not exist, neither would humans (20). As I established in Chapters One and Two, socio-cultural identity defines itself in respect to the monstrous being it excludes from its borders. Not only is the monster defined against what is thought to be human, but prescribed parameters of human being are also established and secured over and against monstrous being.

Despite monsters' essential role in constructing the Symbolic order, Gilmore claims that we take them for granted, "while not believing in their existence" (4). In an attempt to locate the type of existence that belongs to monsters, Ng identifies them as 'irreal' beings: they hang between reality and fantasy as both artificial (the label does not denote a natural kind) and real (there exists the deviant human being that we label 'monster' and there exists the all too real effect that imagined monstrosity has on social being). Thus, to answer Cohen's question, the monster that threatens human being with its polymorphous embodiment that blurs established categories of knowledge determined by either/or binary logic also blurs another category: existence. Monsters both do—as social kinds—and do not—as natural kinds—exist.

As vague 'irreal' beings that linger in the grey area between black-and-white binary categories, monsters evoke our fear, especially concerning our ability to have concrete knowledge of both the world and ourselves. To return to the Introduction, I suggested that people like what they know and *fear* what they cannot know. Like Gardner's misguided fear of existentialism, a philosophy that recognizes the absurdities and vagaries of existence, the Symbolic order requires concrete and objective knowledge and answers. The requirement for a deterministic and utterly knowable universe is driven from a fear that, without definite structure and reason, the world would crumble into chaotic mess. As William James wrote of our fear of chance: "if the slightest particle of it exists anywhere, what is to prevent the whole fabric from falling together, the stars from going out, and chaos from commencing her topsy-turvy reign?" (153). I suggest that this fear regarding chance is another way of expressing our fear regarding freedom.

To facilitate my understanding of the Symbolic order's dependence on absolute systems of meaning as a way of evading the fear-inspiring implications of freedom, I draw on existentialist thought. As a mode of philosophy that highlights the groundlessness of objective meaning or value, existentialism mirrors the monster that exceeds constructed boundaries of social being. The existential monster may be a threat to the Symbolic order, but this threat is a positive one as it frees individual subjectivity and alterity from totalizing systems. Epitomizing a main tenet of existentialism, de Beauvoir establishes value via human action. Human existence "makes values spring up in the world" ([a] 15). For contemporary society, we need the existence of monsters to uphold this society that we create, but monsters are used to establish the impermeability and absoluteness of social constructs of value. For existentialism, any given meaning lacks a basis, as only action and choice ground meaning. Humans are the only ones responsible for their own defeats and victories. But it is not the individual alone that defines value: it is a community of people that share in one another's projects and meaning. For existentialism, impersonal and universal systems of meaning do not define human being and value. Instead, the plurality of concrete beings freely projecting themselves towards their particular ends individually help to create the polymorphous and uncontainable conglomerate whole that is humanity. Like Sartre, de Beauvoir says that man has no choice but to choose, and further iterates that man also has no choice but to act. While this responsibility may be a source of anguish, it is also the source of man's freedom. The groundlessness of being may induce fear, but it is also ironically the ground of our phenomenological authenticity that pulls us away from the inauthentic

they-being to which we have become complacently accustomed. As the Symbolic order engulfs individual choice and freedom into its totality, it kills subjectivity.

Existential philosophy grounds the individual's freedom on the death and deconstruction of any absolute systems of meaning that deny individual creative meaning and authenticity. The entire premise of certain Symbolic orders is that they defend any system that outlines definitive ways of being. Existentialism destabilizes these systems and locates the individual's freedom *outside* the Symbolic order as the type of totalizing system that Levinas denounces. For the Symbolic order, the monster is the embodiment of existential thought. Perhaps the only way to come to terms with the monster as perceived by the Symbolic order is to embrace the monster, to *become* the monster. The deconstruction of absolute systems is just the restructuring that is necessary to express individual freedom and authentic being. Ng suggests in his four examples of the relationship between the Symbolic order and the monster that the latter can be resignified as a positive restructuring of the Symbolic order it threatens. If the monster is understood as a genuine existential 'hero,' we should resignify the monster as a positive challenge to a Symbolic order that negates alterity and denies individual creative meaning and freedom.

In accepting our existential freedom and the deconstruction of absolute systems of meaning, we must also accept our others. According to Sartre, in being responsible for oneself, one is also responsible for all mankind. Being is necessarily intersubjective. The only way to come to terms with the other, according to Kearney, is to "let the other be other so that the self may be itself again" (8). Referring to the enlightenment's rejection of anything that might be unknown or other, Kearney writes that, "the project of

enlightenment will remain unenlightened until it comes to terms with the strangers, gods and monsters that it has all too often ostracized or ignored” (7). For Kearney, in order to rid ourselves of the haunting monster, we must develop a “narrative understanding capable of casting rope ladders and swing bridges across opposing extremes” (12). Perhaps instead of seeing the relationship between self and other as dichotomous, we need to accept it as a fluid engagement between self-and-other, as a form of intersubjective being. In order to rid ourselves of the scapegoated monster, we have to accept the monster within. The only way to evade the need of a scapegoat, or the belief in monstrosity, is “to accept one’s other as oneself, thereby overcoming the condition of mimetic strife which gave rise to scapegoating in the first place” (Kearney 39). By accepting ‘one’s other as oneself,’ one finds a successful way of ‘killing’ the monster without killings ourselves.

We are “waiting impatiently for the day when there will be no longer the *other* nor *me*, but only definitely *us*” (Schott 231). Kearney seconds Schott’s sentiment when he questions whether there is perhaps something to be learned from some of our neighbours: “[m]ight not certain Buddhist, Taoist or native American myths [. . .] express a genuinely open impulse to imagine other possibilities of existence which challenge the status quo and embrace peace and justice over dualist agonistics?” (41). While the elimination of duality and promotion of integration exceeds what Merleau-Ponty intends by mutual reciprocity (and certainly embodies the type of totalizing egology that Levinas rejects), it is still possible to diminish the abrasive and hostile approach to alterity that has characterized social treatment of others.

I end my discussion of monstrosity by reference to a quote from Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "[w]ithout Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence" (Plate 3). The Symbolic order's insistence on definitive answers is wrong-headed. Having suggested that the Symbolic order denies the freedom of both self and other in its alterity-negating totality of sameness, I now argue that this refusal of difference (refusal of vagueness) renders society static, a state that may even lead to societal regression. Without the allowance for difference, society stagnates, denying the freedom of all its members. While vagary and uncertainty may be a source of fear, once society recognizes this vagueness as a source of existential and subjective freedom, the fear dissipates and one paves the way for a richer and more enlightened way of being.

Cohen's final thesis of his monster theory states that "The Monster Stands at the Threshold . . . of Becoming" (20). While the monster may be understood as standing at the threshold of the Symbolic order's generation (as the monster contributes to the construction of social order), I choose to read Cohen's thesis as referring to the beneficially deviant monster that deconstructs a Symbolic order that denies subjectivity and that thereby aids in the construction of more tolerant and less totalizing Symbolic orders. To deconstruct monstrosity, we must make sure we have the correct target: egocentric totalizing and alterity-negating systems (or individuals). Having revealed the socio-cultural tendency to ensure the supremacy of the same by creating monsters, it is clear that the Symbolic order that admonishes alterity is at fault. To deconstruct monstrosity, one must embrace the difference of the other, for only with the contravening voice that the other presents to us are progression and evolution possible.

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