



Greater Monster: The Creator or The Creation

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to analyze the theory of Monsters and Monstrosity. Through this concept it further strives to identify the real monster. The paper gives answers to the questions about 'who is the real monster'. The paper begins with an overview about the meaning and the genesis of the term itself. It talks about how they as terms and myths and fictional characters emerged. Followed by this, the paper leads to the appearance of the monsters in British Literature. Further, to identify the nature of the monsters and to understand their monstrosity the paper examines their significance in relation to the particular era. Referring to novels *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley, the paper attempts to identify the real monsters. It debates about the creator and the creation. Nevertheless, looking at the evil side of both the characters. Through this, aiming to prove the monstrosity in humans. Thus showing beyond doubts, how monsters have embedded themselves and reside in human form. As a result, the study answers the initial question presented above about identifying the true monster- the creator or the creation.

Keywords: Monster, The Hound, Frankenstein, Creator

“Sometimes human places create inhuman monsters” – Stephen King, *The Shining*

The Oxford Dictionary defines the term monster as a large, ugly and frightening imagining creature. Well, that clearly presents before us the physical appearance of the monster that we are talking about. Monster derives from the Latin monstrum, itself derived ultimately from the verb moneo ("to remind, warn, instruct, or foretell"), and denotes anything "strange or singular, contrary to the usual course of nature, by which the gods give notice of evil," "a strange, unnatural, hideous person, animal, or thing," or any "monstrous or unusual thing, circumstance, or adventure."¹

¹ The Rev. J.E. Riddle, *A Complete English-Latin and Latin-English Dictionary*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1870, s.v. monstrum, Latin-English part, p. 399.

The first recorded use of the term “monster” has been made in 14th century, doubtful if there is information about how and when. But, it can be seen that way before it was used, there has been a presence of these monsters among us in the form of characters from literature (Grendel – a monster of enormous strength and immense brutality, Beowulf), mythical characters (Typhon – a ghastly monster with hundred dragon’s head, Greek mythology). Every literature graduate is aware of this epic (Beowulf) written in the old English disputed to be dated between 700 and 1000 A.D, whereas, the Greek mythology is altogether packed with monsters and creatures.

Sigmund Freud says, “Monsters in our dreams are created by our unconscious mind and reflect our current worries and fears- even those we fail to consciously acknowledge.” Through the statement of the Austrian neurologist there is a paradigm shift from a physical monster to a psychological being of which we happen to be the creator. Monsters represent those that we fear. Anything and everything that is more powerful is always feared and often revered. At times these stronger beings than the humans are sought out to be destroyed (like Victor seeks to destroy his creation which was more powerful than him so that it may not pose any more threat to the humanity). But, of course, Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus puts before the reader an essence of dual monstrosity where the reader gets a taste of a human turned monster due to his obsession to become a creator, creates another monster – “Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriance only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same color as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion and straight black lips”²; who over the course of time through one’s own action make Victor responsible for the death of his near ones.

It is seen that over the course of time the term monster has conceived various forms. In the early 18 and 19 centuries it is considered that the defective people with unnatural body (birth disorder) were said to have monstrous birth. Seems like god has poured his wrath over the people. However, in recent age there has been a shift as mentioned above- a shift from physical deformity to mental deformity, where a human begins to behave in inhuman way: a loss of humanity in humans. Increasing organized crimes, homicides etc. will vouch for the fact about the increasing height of monstrosity in man.

This paper represents the human mind and behavior as a monster referring to gothic novels like *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley to opine to the above mentioned statement about the increasing monstrosity in humans. There would also be references from epic Beowulf. The paper would also present the different motives that drive men to monstrosity and the impact this has on the society.

Monsters and monstrosity are attributed to Gothic Literature dated back to 18th century with the publishing of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole. However, monster as an individual entity emerged with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Ever since the authors of the Gothic literature have added a touch of monster and their attributes to bring out the uncanny of their era. The list

² Mary Shelley, 1818, Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus, Chapter 5, Pg 45

continues with Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), *The Hound of Baskevilles* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1902), Richard Matheson's *I am Legend* (1954). All of these have presence of monsters in them. It goes on. Their appearance has passed on from Romantic era to Victorian era and now even to the 21st century. The difference is, they have evolved according to the new scientific advancements. The 21st century is flooded with the presence of zombies and supernatural creatures created as an outcome of scientific study and expansion.

It is surprising to see that in many of the novels the antagonist outshines and attract the attention of the readers than the protagonist. This would imply that the antagonistic character has more to offer to us. There appears to be change in the nature and presentation of these monsters according to the time and the era. Considering the great monster from the epic Beowulf – Grendel; of course there isn't much detail about this great sinister beast except that of his look – he seems to be born to be one. Like, he doesn't have a conscience of his own. However, it cannot be said that he is mindless as his actions prove to be born out of grudge³. The text presents no proof of even a crumb of goodness in him hence no hope for redemption is expected for him. Looking into the monster of Mary Shelley; Frankenstein has a history, a past where he is upset for being abandoned by his own maker. But, he sets out to build up his own life. He constructs his morale; so does he falls to become worse due to the rejections and apprehensions of the society. What is seen here is that his conscience is willing to be a moral and human creature. Unlike Grendel there is or at least there was a hope of redemption before Frankenstein.

Thus, it is very well evident that these monsters do tell something about the age. Professor Liz Gloyn who lectures at Royal Holloway University, London, on classical literature says, "It comes back to the idea that a monster arises from society's very deepest fears." The above statement would imply that a monster is a visible manifestation of the invisible fear of the unknown, anxiety or all that scares us. Like the monster of Mary Shelley (Frankenstein) that represents the anxiety of the age of enlightenment and reason, where scientific advancements were at its zenith. Similarly, taking the case of *Dracula* which manifests the fear and paranoia of the Victorian society, say the dehumanisation, immigration, increased rate of crime and ghetto community. As seen, these monsters are part of what's famously known as the Gothic era. Gothic symbolizes macabre, fear, horror, terror, anxiety etc. And monsters could be best means to depict all that's stated above.

Gothic writings are traced back to eighteenth century starting with novel *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole in 1764, later subtitled as *A Gothic story*. Thus, the copyright to the invention goes to him. Although, Edgar Allen Poe is attributed as the father of Gothic Literature. Gothic imply all the fear of the time. To be duly noted, it is seen that the elements of the gothic do have a lot of influence from the political upheavals prevalent during that time.

Both, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *Frankenstein* emerged in two different eras but belong to the Gothic family. There is nearly a gap of a century among them. The former one belongs to the Victorian era, whereas the latter one is the first modern science fiction that came out in the Romantic era. Although coming from different eras influenced by different events in history what binds them together is the presence of

³ Stephen Fox, Importance of Monsters, para 3 (<https://scarletreview.camden.rutgers.edu/theimportanceofmonsters.html>)

monstrosity. Monstrosity is a common feature in both these novels and the question about the real monster in Frankenstein has been debated for years. There is this creature with monstrous appearance and the creator-Victor Frankenstein. What is the monster in The Hound of the Baskervilles?

‘Footprints?’

‘Footprints.’

‘A man or a woman’s?’

Dr. Mortimer looked strangely at us for an instant, and his voice sank almost to a whisper as he answered:

‘Mr Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!’⁴

The element of monstrosity in The Hound of the Baskervilles is ‘a gigantic hound’ or at least that’s what the reader is made to believe. The description itself is a clear sign of how deadly and monstrous the hound is. Anyone who has read this novel would definitely agree that this novel is a perfect blend of gothic and detective fiction. There is a perfect transition in gothic and detective modes. In the absence of Sherlock Holmes where Dr. Watson is asked to describe all that he sees there at the Baskerville hall; the gothic mode awakes. Whereas in the presence of Sherlock Holmes the rational and reasonable in other words the detective mode is awakened. But still at one point of time even the rational mind (Holmes) is set to believe in the ancient myth of the ‘Hell- Hound’, It is seen that in the major part of the novel Sherlock Holmes is missing or at least he refuses to come into the limelight. And during all this time, the description of Dr. Watson is a perfect example to understand the presence of gothic elements in the novel. ‘Over the green squares of the fields and the low curve of a wood there rose in the distance a grey, melancholy hill, with a strange jagged summit, dim and vague in the distance, like some fantastic landscape in a dream.’⁵

The Hound, supposedly the monster does have monstrous features. The people living in the moor have witnessed them and they describe it to be a huge creature, luminous, ghastly. The hound is further featured as ‘an enormous coal – black hound, but not such a hound as mortal eyes have ever seen. Fire burst from its open mouth, its eyes glowed with smouldering glare, its muzzle and hackles and dewlap were outlined in flickering flame. Never in the delirious dream of a disordered brain could anything more savage, more appalling, more hellish, be conceived than that dark form and savage face.’⁶ This description is backed by the indications of the death of Sir Charles Baskerville - ‘There are indications that the man was crazed with fear before ever he began to run.’⁷ The doctor confirms his death due to massive attack. The description of death also fits that of Selden - the convict; the sight of hound filled in him a paroxysm of terror. Till now what is presented is the gothic face of the monster. As soon as the team of Holmes shot dead the hound the rationality of the detective fiction comes into action. The trio identify that it is not a hellish hound rather a hybrid of bloodhound and mastiff. The bluish flame that came out of its mouth was nothing else but phosphorus, which glowed in the darkness when Holmes lifted it up.

⁴ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, The Hound of the Baskervilles & The Valley of Fear, Wordsworth Classics, pg 21

⁵ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, The Hound of the Baskervilles & The Valley of Fear, Wordsworth Classics, pg 55

⁶ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, The Hound of the Baskervilles & The Valley of Fear, Wordsworth Classics, pg 150 -151

⁷ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, The Hound of the Baskervilles & The Valley of Fear, Wordsworth Classics, pg 30

‘But there was no sign within it of that desperate and defiant villain whom we expected to see.’⁸ – is the description given to the real villain and a debatable monster of the novel and the entire plot. Mr. Stapleton is a real Baskerville. His real name is Rodger Baskerville, the same as his father, which later he changed to Vandeleur and fled to England from South America. It was all his sinister plot to inherit the Baskerville treasure by killing first Sir Charles and later Sir Henry, which he failed.

Reading the novel of *The Hound on the Baskervilles* in the light of *Frankenstein* presents the same frequency of the gothic and monster. Scholars and critics have made unending discussions on the real monster in *Frankenstein*. *Frankenstein* came into existence by the hands of Victor Frankenstein by assembling different body parts and a mysterious spark. It is similar to the account of creation that is presented in *The Holy Bible*, where God creates Adam and breathes life into him. God hands over the entire Eden garden to Adam and Eve whom he created out of Adam’s rib to ward of his isolation. They were responsible for their deeds. They had a choice – a choice to do good or evil. Their deeds led them to their banishment. *Frankenstein* is presented in the novel as a monstrous creature with deformity and enormous size. His eyes yellow and scary, the nerves which serves as the pathway for the spark are all very dreadful. He is portrayed as a fiendish creature. What’s contradictory here is unlike the God in the Bible, Victor refuses to create a female for him. God of the Bible knew how isolation can lead a human to misery, but Victor fails to understand. The very moment the creature got life his creator abandoned him – reason lies behind his appearance. Well, like Adam and Eve, *Frankenstein* didn’t have a choice. He was born into being an outcast and neglect. There is a saying that goes ‘no one is a born criminal, but the surrounding creates one’. The monstrosity in *Frankenstein* can be perceived as a result of all that he suffered from the society and moreover from his creator. The novel also accounts for the capacity of the monster to be good. During the time the monster secluded itself in the barn away from the sight of the family, he learned how to communicate and understood the quality of humanity. At one point he stops taking away their food as it wasn’t sufficient for the family itself. He began to empathize. There are number of accounts which proves the capacity of goodness in the so called monster. This would imply the fact that the said monster is capable of doing good only if he is accepted by those around him to be one of them keeping apart his physical deformity.

There arises the question – who is the real monster? ‘Monsters within postmodernism are already inside—the house, the body, the head, the skin, the nation... Monsters of the nineteenth century—like *Frankenstein*, like *Dracula*—certainly still scare and chill but they scare us from a distance. We wear modern monsters like skin, they are us, they are on us and in us. Monstrosity... is replaced with a banality... because the enemy becomes harder to locate and looks more like the hero.’⁹ All the way there are samples of monsters being fiend, destructive, evil, they no longer reside in the deformed beings alone. They do reside hereafter in the creators of such beings. Beginning with the creator himself, Victor Frankenstein left his creation the instance when the creature came to life. His appearance had a dreaded impact on Victor is known. But physical deformity is no parameter to be judged as a monstrosity which would lead to lack of humanity in a creature.

⁸ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles & The Valley of Fear*, Wordsworth Classics, pg 153

⁹ Christie, L. The evolution of monsters in children’s literature. *Palgrave Commun* 6

Children born with deformity were considered to be cursed from God. Research shows deformity during birth was frequently seen in the 17th and 18th century. Victor being the God of his creature despised his own creation due to the malignity in appearance. His unbenign and hostile nature to his own creation send the latter to a world of unacceptance and loneliness. A creature capable of being good and benign was lost in the dark shadows of the outcast and unwanted. Had he not abandoned, he would have prevented a great evil upon the face of the humanity. Thus, more than the creature who is called as the monster due to his misguided and ill- parented deeds, it is the creator of the creature who must be first accused of being a monster for having lost a life into gloom and despair. The creator who should be a god to his creation became an angel of his destruction. Moreover, it is the creator who is the sole guardian of his creation. Hence, the blood of Justine Moritz, his brother William, best friend Clerval and his new wife Elizabeth is on his hands. It is the evil intention of Victor to be god led to the freedom of the monster within him in the form of Frankenstein.

Bringing the same theory into *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, where the Hound is perceived as the killer of Sir Charles following the family legacy of being haunted by a hellhound that is also believed to have killed Sir Hugo Baskervilles as a result of the oath that he made to get his hands on a woman. Sir Charles being a believer of the said family curse fell into this trap which was so maliciously planned by Mr. Stapleton with the motive to inherit the property as he was also Baskerville. Mr. Stapleton who is the real monster in the novel wears the mask of a naturalist to hide his evil deeds. Through the novel *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley proves how human beings are capable of both good and evil. And by the character of Mr. Stapleton, Doyle has brought out the evil side of the human being. 'He was a small, slim, clean-shaven, prim-faced man, flaxen-haired and lean-jawed, between thirty and forty years of age, dressed in a grey suit and wearing a straw hat. A tin box for botanical specimens hung over his shoulder and he carried a green butterfly-net in one of his hands.'¹⁰ – the first description which Doyle gives about Mr. Stapleton would make every first reader believe that he is a man loyal to his occupation. It is his sinister motive to know the next steps of Dr. Watson and Holmes so as to make his evil plans a complete success that leads him to interfere in the routines of Watson.

The next description about Stapleton is altogether contrary to what is seen in the description of Watson. 'down came his brother of hers, running at us with a face on his like a madman. He was just white with rage, and those light eye of his were blazing with fury.'¹¹ – this is the first instance where a devilish and evil side of Stapleton is portrayed. However, Stapleton apologises for this approach. Ms. Stapleton is presented in the novel as the former's sister, which is an utter lie. She is his wife. The reason behind the impropriety of Stapleton was not that he thought that his wife would slip into the hands of Sir Henry Baskervilles, rather through their intimacy his plans to kill Sir Henry and henceforth inherit large possessions would be lost. This itself shows the monstrous face of the antagonist. More than his sacred relation with his wife he wanted his plan to be rolling. This monstrous character is further justified by his treatment of his wife in the final part of the novel where he binds her and keeps her in room. 'Thank God! Thank God! Oh, this villain! See how he had treated me! She shot her arms out from her sleeves, and we saw with horror that they were all mottled

¹⁰ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles & The Valley of Fear*, Wordsworth Classics, pg 165

¹¹ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles & The Valley of Fear*, Wordsworth Classics, pg 88

with bruises.’¹² A man with sanity would never do such insane acts to his wife unless he is a monster in disguise. His wife addresses him as ‘villain’ which remarks the extent to which she was abused and tortured. The description of his monstrosity doesn’t end here further she says, ‘It is my mind and soul that he has tortured and defiles. I could endure it all, ill- usage, solitude, a life of deception, everything, as long as I could still cling to the hope that I had his love, but now I know that in this also I have been his dupe and his tool.’¹³ More than a physical torture he suffered her with mental agony which seldom heals. Even in Frankenstein, how the monster inflicted pain in the life of Victor was more of mental than physical. The loss of his near and dear ones brought void not only in his physical existence but also in his mind. This was the same that Victor did to his monster- gifted a mental agony. Stapleton can be attributed with the same devilish act. The way killed he Sir Charles was more than a physical torture. He scared him to death using the mutated hound. Again, it is the same pattern he used to kill Sir Henry, which he failed. The hound happened to be a medium that followed its own animal instincts to obey his master. It is Mr. Stapleton who worked his monstrous mind behind this menacing act. Thus, tracing back the real monster in a human.

Monsters are more than just horrid claws and teeth. Monsters are born out of deeds done and unforgivable ones.¹⁴ The monsters and their monstrosity is no longer attributed to their physical deformity as it was seen a couple of centuries ago. Rather, it could be said that there has been a shift in the meaning of this concept. It is not the looks and appearance of a person that characterises one as a monster, nevertheless it is their actions towards the other that defines them to be a monster. A monster has been completely transported to a whole new realm. As seen they are no longer necessarily animals and beasts with devouring nature. Everything that a human being is afraid of and that which has the power to destroy can be tagged as a monster. In that case what would be the monsters of the present 21st century. Although, debatable, technology and innovations are termed by many as modern-day monsters. No matter whether they function through the hands of humans, it is undeniable that they possess the power to destroy. A possible adaptation of these fears were made both centuries ago and in the present century too both in literature and films (Frankenstein, I Robot, World War Z). Science is creeping towards securing the place as one of the most feared aspect of human life. However, it is known that science has indeed led to such developments and advancements. But, the safety at which they perform isn’t assured. Concepts like zombies, defence systems like bio- weapons and nuclear weapons are no doubt modern day monsters. So again who is the real monster? These weapons or the hands that made it? The common term of the era is Artificial Intelligence. In short, creating a mind for a machine so that it could perform the daily tasks with its own prudence. Today, the humans are creating the monsters not with life in them but capable of mass destruction, who can vouch that tomorrow they won’t turn against us as independent monsters and we will be just sitting ducks waiting to be preyed by them.

It is generally and specifically told that monsters represent and helps to identify the uncanny and the fear of the century and culture. The humans ought to think, what frightens them the most. Isn’t it themselves that they fear the most; they, who are capable of creating monsters? Aren’t the creators the real monster?

¹² Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, The Hound of the Baskervilles & The Valley of Fear, Wordsworth Classics, pg 155

¹³ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, The Hound of the Baskervilles & The Valley of Fear, Wordsworth Classics, pg 155

¹⁴ Nivellen, The Witcher, Season 2 Episode 1: "A Grain of Truth"

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