Monstrosities from Minecraft and Greek Mythology

GREEK MYTHOLOGICAL

CREATURES

DEFINING THE CYCLOPS

The cyclops takes the form of a gigantic, one-eyed cannibal humanoid. Normally, they are exclusively gendered male. The Cyclops in Greek mythology is fearless of the Gods, and acts upon his own will, often violent towards humans. The modern depiction of the cyclops often holds few of the original characteristics of the Greek monster, such that it is not properly defined as a monster but rather an abnormal human.

REPRESENTATION

One of the most famous stories to feature the Cyclops is Homer's *Odyssey*, where Odysseus lands on an island with Polyphemus. However, a more modern take on the Cyclops monster is the hero of the same name in the Marvel comic series *X-men*, having one eye which has the ability to shoot lasers.

THEORETICAL APPLICATION

The cyclops monster is not ugly simply by having one eye, which should be even more perfect than two, per Winifried Menninghaus' view, given that one eye means fewer holes and more smooth surfaces. It is seen as disgusting due to the qualities that tend to be paired with its singular eye, such as bumpy, rough skin. The cyclops also is frequently shown to have scars and other deformities. Additionally, according to Margrit Shildrick's "The Self's Clean and Proper Body" the cyclops' stark distinctions from pure human features cause it to provoke fear and lead to its distinct classification as a monstrosity.

What is the Manticore?

The manticore is similar to the Egyptian sphynx, a Greek and Persian mythological creature whose name comes from the Persian word *mantiora,* translating to "man-eater." This is a beast containing a human head, lion's body, and the tail of (depending on the story) either porcupine quills or a scorpion. The manticore is said to eat the raw flesh of men, residing in the forests of Central Asia.

Symbolism and Cinematic Integration

The manticore was later recognized by Europeans and in Western literature as a sign of the devil. Generally speaking, it is seen as a sign of unbeatable strength, described as having the ability to effortlessly tear apart multiple human beings to eat. The beast is depicted in literature and movies as a uniquely strong being, nearly incapable of being overcome by an opposing force and instilling great fear in those who come across it. The monster can be seen in popular films such as *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*, as well as in *Harry Potter*, where Ron Weasley finds an account of a manticore who murdered a man. This manticore was determined to be "not guilty" as no one wanted to near the monster for fear of being torn apart, thus demonstrating its popular depiction as a threatening, untamable beast. On the other hand, it has even been portrayed in a "happier" and more positive manner in Disney's *Onward*, though the strength of the manticore is still portrayed clearly.

Application to Theory

As in reference to Shildrick's "The Self's Clean and Proper Body,*"* the combination of humane features along with the body parts of other animals serves not only to provoke a tendency to characterize as "monstrous," but also to incite fear as the borders between normal and abnormal are altered. This can be seen with the manticore's human features of a human head being merged with the animalistic qualities of a lion body and scorpion tail. Additionally, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, in "Monster Theory" describes how the monster is "the harbinger of category crisis." The manticore Is not able to be confined to one category: it is not human nor lion nor scorpion. It can only exist in its own category.

Defining Sirens

Sirens are typically depicted as having female human characteristics paired with that of a fish (similar to mermaids). In some cases, they also have morphing abilities, as they are able to completely morph into what resembles a female human. However, opposing the pleasant connotation that comes with mermaids, sirens use their beautiful voices to lure in sailors whom they then kill and eat. Sirens also tend to be described as containing sharp, fang-like teeth to rip apart their victims as well as claw-like nails. Sirens instill fear due to their animalistic qualities, as well as due to their ability to change forms. This capacity leads to an unsettling sense of the unknown, as one would not be able to distinguish a siren from a regular woman.

Representation

Sirens are often incorporated into films and literature, as can be seen with Freeform's television show *Siren,* as well as with Sybil from *The Vampire Diaries.* The name Sybil means "seer," referring to the character's ability to read and Invade minds. Some people believe that the portrayal of sirens is meant as a warning regarding one's loss of control while intoxicated either with alcohol or drug usage.

Theoretical Application

According to Shildrick, the siren's characterization as a monstrosity comes with the integration of animal-like qualities of claws, sharp teeth/fangs, and scales/fish-like lower half merged with human qualities. Sirens, even in their human-like forms also have the ability to invade one's thoughts and kill, disrupting the border between proper and improper and thus making them monstrous, as described by Georges Canguilhem in "Monstrosity and the Monstrous." Sirens also serve as a lesson regarding temptation. Desire without thought and reason can be destructive/disastrous, thus relating to René Descartes' "Meditations on First Philosophy."

Who Is Medusa?

Medusa is typically depicted as a woman seemingly normal except for her head of snakes for hair and tinted-green skin. Greek legends say that she was once a beautiful princess but was seduced and raped by Poseidon. After hearing of this, Athena altered her physical state, turning her into the repulsive creature that is commonly known currently. However, she gained the power of petrification via eye contact.

Cinematic Integration

Medusa's character when involved in stories and novels is typically an evil character, primarily one that has the ability to turn one to stone. This character can be seen in a variety of tv shows, movies, and literature including in *Clash of the Titans* and *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Theif.* In both, her partially human form, mingled with her reptilian form and her capacity for magic, instills fear into those who see her. This discomfort with Medusa's form, so similar yet distinctly different from the normative human, is a result of her containing animalistic aspects of snakes for hair, and in the case of Clash of Titans, for a slithering lower half as well. In *Percy Jackson,* her severed head even still contains the power to petrify, thus making her more of a monstrosity. The fact that she is dead, yet still with the abilities she had while alive, distinguishes her even more from the image of a typical human.

Application to Theory

In reference to Shildrick's work, Medusa form signals a sense of uncanniness, as she is portrayed with normative human features, such as two arms, a human-like face, and even the ability to speak English, but with the addition of reptilian features. Canguilhem would also define Medusa as monstrous, both fear-instilling and fascinating, due to the fact that she exceeds the threshold of normality with the additions that come with her female human form (such as the addition of snakes).

Defining Cerberus

Cerberus is a large, three-headed dog with large teeth and fangs, and in some tellings, a serpentine tail. He is referred to commonly as the "hound of Hades" as it is the guardian of the entrance to the Land of the Dead. The hound is the sibling to monsters such as the hydra and chimera, as they share the monstrous parents of Echidna and Typhoeus He was tasked with keeping the living out of the Underworld while keeping the dead within.

Representation and Symbolism

This creature is depicted as an enormous, vicious, evil, red-eyed monster in Disney's *Hercules* film. His head allows the beast to focus on multiple opponents at once, pairing well with his intense strength. Therefore, he is representative of the ideal guardian, one who can look in multiple directions at once to gain a more developed sense of perspective, and one who has enough power to fight off the opponent. Cerberus can also represent death and danger due to his ferocious involvement in the Underworld. In a different sense, similar to one's pet dog, Cerberus can represent the loyalty of guardianship. He is loyal to a specific person or group of people. This can be seen in *Harry Potter* with the character of Fluffy. Despite his menacing appearance (which is a fierce contradiction to his name), Fluffy is very loyal and trusting towards Hagrid, who can be seen as a leader of sorts to Fluffy.

Theoretical Application

Similar to Shildrick's comparison of the monstrous to the normative human image, the normative image of the dog is contradicted by Cerberus' large, three-headed malformation, leading to the installation of fear and the image of monstrosity. This fear is also the result of Cerberus' connection to death and the Underworld, also classic terror-stricken concepts. Further, according to Cohen, monsters are those which are not in order, which deviate from the usual. The usual image of the dog is a smaller (relative to humans) animal with one head. Cerberus' image clearly goes against this idea, as its large body and three menacing heads exceed this limit/threshold for normality. His form disrupts the stable canine image and includes much excess (excess in heads and size). However, similar to Godzilla and other large monstrosities, he also garners a sense of fascination and is marvelous in a sense, thus promoting imagination.

Minecraft Monsters
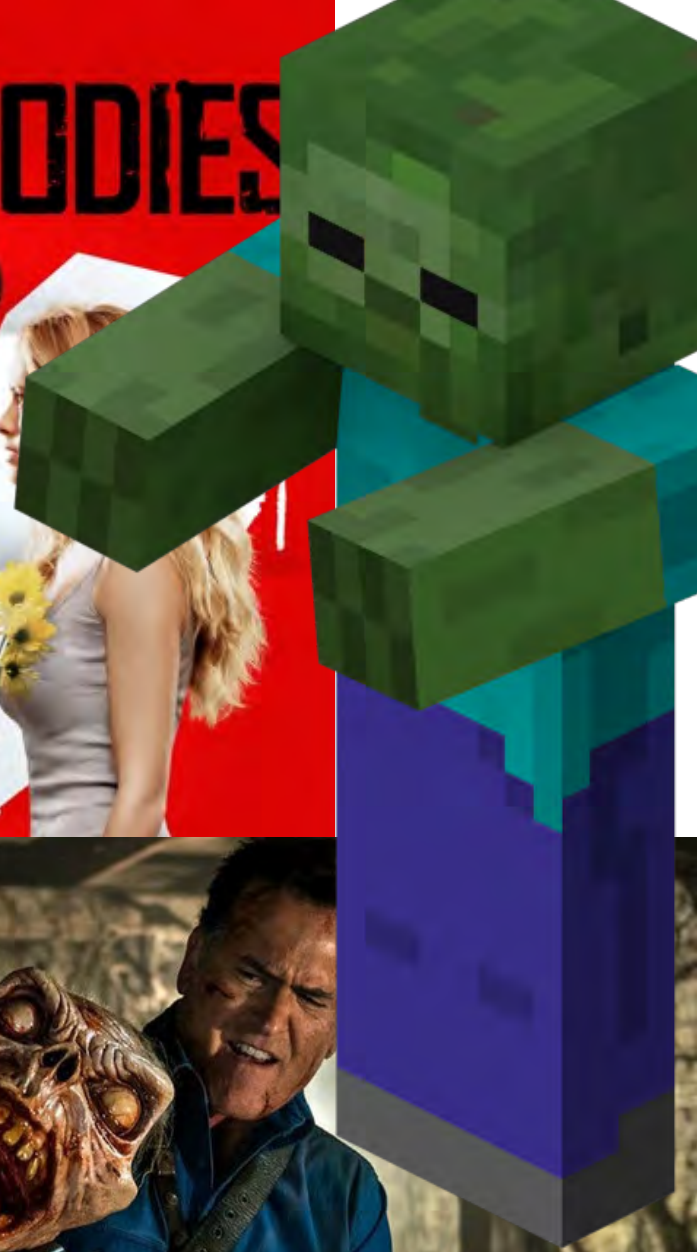
WHAT ARE ZOMBIES?

Zombies are known as human corpses that have been brought back to life in the sense that they are reanimated. The zombie as is familiar today was inspired by Haitian legend. where people were hypnotized by voodoo to become slaves known as "Zonbi." Zombies are not moved by the biological forces that move living things, but rather their energy comes from evil and magical forces, giving them mobility despite their lack of complete body parts. The modern concept of the zombie is as a reanimated dead, gaining extensive popularity from films and television series portraying the monstrosity. *The Walking Dead*, as well as the film *Night of the Living Dead*. In addition to their cinematic representations, they are also commonly found included in video games, notably in the infamous *Minecraft* video game as dangerous and threatening creatures.

WHAT DO THEY REPRESENT?

The zombie is traditionally seen as scary because witnessing dead bodies reminds us of our mortality. The zombie has also been used as a metaphor for consumerism and greed, whereby people blindly consume what is advertised to them without thinking critically.
It has additionally been seen as a representation of immigrants, the "outsider population", who are feared by local citizens who see them as inhuman and dangerous.

ZOMBIES AND MONSTER THEORY

Zombies are disgusting under the definition created by Winfried Menninghaus. Rather than being smooth and enclosed, zombies often have flesh falling off and organs spilling out. Further, according to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's "Monster Theory," minority groups are targeted in the development and portrayal of certain monsters. Thus, zombies, depending on one's perspective, can be a representation of immigrants "invading" the land. This, however, is representative of a poorer and more negative outlook on the concept of immigration.

What are WITCHES?

Witches are typically represented as repulsive, old, female figures that take part in evil activities, often having facial imperfections such as moles or warts with crooked or sharp teeth. Witches are also characterized by their high cruel high-pitched cackle and often their pointy hat, broomstick, and magical abilities. The alternate depiction of the elderly witch is the younger, sexualized female witch who doesn't necessarily have the same capacity for evil. Throughout history, witches were thought to be real in some instances, leading women to be killed in brutal "witch trials" that took place in Puritan settlements in the New World and Europe.

Cultural Representation

The term "Witchcraft" was often demonization of non-dominant religions, as opposed to Christianity. Historically, Christians viewed the practices of paganism and the occult as a worship of the devil, hence these were seen as evil, and by extension, the participants were evil. The accusation of "witchcraft" was, therefore, a high crime punishable by death. In modern times, a renewed interest in the occult and practices of "witchcraft" has emerged as a significant counterculture, as can be seen with the "goth" movement.

Representation In Literature and Media

Witches have been depicted in a multitude of popular films and pieces of literature, such as with the Wicked Witch in the *Wizard of Oz*. They are even displayed as threatening, large-nosed monsters in the popular video game *Minecraft.* A notable work focusing on the witch is Roald Dahl's *The Witches.* This novel describes witches as having non-normative human appearances, as they do not have fingernails, are "bald as a boiled egg," have large nose holes, do not have toes, and have blue spit and changing eye colors. These inhumane qualities characterize them as quite monstrous, pairing well with their evil Intentions regarding the consumption of children.

Theoretical Applications

"Disgusting Zones and Disgusting Times" written by Winfried Menninghaus discusses that more monstrous forms are created as the picturesque, clean image of the body is malformed. Specifically, the ideally beautiful body is that where there are no imperfections on the surface of the skin, where the skin is continuously smooth without disruption. The witch's archetype contradicts this perfect image, as she is typically displayed with grotesque warts paired with wrinkling skin, leading her to be characterized as a monstrous creature. In regards to Margaret Shildrick's "The Self's Clean and Proper Body," witches are sometimes portrayed as having a large, sharp nose along with abnormally sharp teeth. These features betray those of the normative human image, even being seemingly animalistic, leading witches to be seen as abnormal or monstrous in nature.

Defining Skeletons

Skeletons as monsters that are similar to zombies, but further on the spectrum of the dead, so that the movement of skeletons appears as purely the result of magic. The popularity of the skeleton as a monster peaked in medieval Europe, where reanimated skeletons appear extensively in art and fiction. The medieval skeleton is not exclusively hostile but instead is often seen dancing with people. Skeletons are also portrayed often without gender or a voice.

What Do They Represent?

The most well-known skeleton depiction is the personification Death, aka The Grim Reaper. Depictions of skeletons as representations of the descent into death heightened during the time of the Black Death, or In other words, the bubonic plague. Skeletons are common in American culture, especially around the time of Halloween. In *Minecraft,* these creatures of bone can also be seen as a harbinger of death, as they attack with the intent to kill the first-person player. Another common representation of the skeleton is the metaphor of the skeleton as a ruthless warrior, who can fight and kill without emotion or restraint. This may serve as a lesson that success in battle comes when one is able to release their emotions, focusing only on strategy and skill.

Skeletons and Monster Theory

The ideas of Winifred Menninghaus in his "Disgusting Zones and Disgusting Times" could apply to the skeleton, as the concept that the entirety of the skeleton is a monster of bone (an internal body structure) provokes fear and disgust. This is because witnessing the body's internal structures has been frequently seen to be classified as disgusting and terror-inducing.

WHAT ARE DRAGONS?

The dragon monster is one of the most widespread among historical Indo-European cultures, appearing in Japan, but also in Viking mythology, and in Greek mythology. While the modern image of the dragon is a reptile with wings, breathing fire, the original dragon, as described in the Vedas, was a large serpentine creature, lacking wings or legs.

REPRESENTATION AND SYMBOLISM

Beowulf is one of the first major stories in which the dragon is able to breathe fire, influencing later depictions of dragons. There are many modern depictions of dragons as well, such as in *Minecraft,* and in movies such as *How to Train Your Dragon,* and *Raya and the Last Dragon.* The common symbolism of the dragon is chaos and the weakness of humanity in the face of natural forces. Additionally, many heroic figures in various mythologies are deified for slaying dragons. This represents humanity's conquest of the natural world and our desire for control.

THEORETICAL APPLICATION

Canguilhem's theory of the monstrous indicates that monsters such as dragons threaten the nature of the human order. They exceed the limits and threshold of normality with their unusual and menacing characteristics. Although they are magnificent and incite fascination, their existence interferes with the human's established nature.

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Skeleton

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Dragon

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AUTHORS

Hannah Graham and Evan Leeds collaborated brilliantly to produce an informative yet fascinating presentation of creatures typically deemed monstrous in film, literature, and media. Although all of the monsters in this zine come from ancient origins, the authors investigate monsters common in modern culture such as those in the world's bestselling video game, *Minecraft,* separately from those that are rarely represented in modern culture (specifically Greek mythological monsters) and don't initially come to mind at the thought of "monster." (In other words, you don't see little kids asking their parents for a Cerberus Halloween costume). The authors hope you find this portrayal of the monstrosities and their relation to modern culture and monster theories to be captivating and enlightening.