The Monster in the Mirror: Challenging the Glorification of Humanity in Human and Monster Literature

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“The Monster in the Mirror: An analytical look at the representation of human and monster similarities throughout literature.”

The struggle between humans and monsters has presented itself in literature since the beginning of the written word.

Though it may seem that monsters serve the purpose of celebrating the human’s triumph over adversity, a close analysis of literary works throughout time reveals that monsters and humans have more in common than people would like to admit.

The revelations of the similar characteristics between humans and monsters are evident in *The Odyssey* by Homer, *Beowulf*, and The Hannibal Lecter Series by Thomas Harris.

These literary works reveal the progression of the human and monster from giving them equal opportunities to succeed to the realization that monsters and humans can be one and the same being.

The shared human and monster characteristics throughout literature including coveting, vengeance, and hybris indicate that the concept of human and monster similarities is not a recent discovery, but in fact a developing notion that has always been present.

Therefore the monsters in this study reveal more about the human condition through an evolution of the literary works’ themes to the realization of our monstrous flaws and capabilities as humans.

Abstract

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Earlier scholars have claimed that literary monsters merely serve the purposes of celebrating the human's triumph over adversity. I contest this claim in my close analysis of Homer's *The Odyssey*, the medieval epic *Beowulf*, and the Hannibal Lecter series of novels by twentieth-century American author Thomas Harris. I show that each author uses monsters not to convey human dominance over their ability to defeat the monster but rather to reveal the monstrous flaws found within all of humanity: coveting, vengeance, and *hybris*. My analysis of these flaws shows how society's willingness to admit our monstrosity progresses from Homer to Harris. Homer shows that flaws make humans less morally superior to other creatures such as monsters and places humans and monsters on the same wavelength in terms of their social status. The *Beowulf* poet uses these shared characteristics to establish a parallel between his dominant humans and social outcast monsters, who both desire power, essentially acknowledging that humans have monstrous qualities. Thomas Harris takes this concept to the next level. He asserts that all humans by nature are capable of becoming monsters. Whether or not society is ready to hear it, each author challenges our notions of what it means to be human and warns us against becoming monsters.

Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story of that woman, the dreamer, who worked for months on end to complete her English thesis at the prestigious institution of Union College.

She had been educated and inspired by her former educators at Cheshire High School. She is incredibly grateful to Robert Schaefer who introduced her to *The Odyssey* and made her realize she wanted to study English. She also gives many thanks to Andrea Kelmachter for introducing her to *Beowulf*, and some of her favorite novels; though she's no longer with us, she's been a huge influence on this woman's thesis.

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Introduction

Prior to the written word, monsters have always had a presence in storytelling. These stories typically included the theme of a brave man who triumphed over a monster in order to save the sanctity and lives of the human population. For example, Odysseus triumphs over many monsters on his way home to Ithaka in Homer's *The Odyssey,* and Beowulf triumphs over monsters to protect his society from peril in the medieval poem *Beowulf*. Scholars of the Western literary tradition such as Karl Reinhardt, Erwin Cook, Cedric H. Whitman, and John Nist, have argued that these tales represent the Everyman, and a hero who triumphed over all adversity and who represented the perseverance that we must have when evil and obstacles stand against us. Though all ancient authors and poets such as Homer and the *Beowulf* poet typically featured a human triumphing over the monster, a close analysis of these texts reveals that perhaps there is a deeper lesson in these tales besides the celebratory killing of the monster. This notion is influenced by the literature in contemporary society such as Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter series, in which the monsters are humans trying to destroy other humans. The purpose of my thesis is to determine to what extent ancient and contemporary writers were able to denounce humans as monsters and if their audience was able to handle that revelation. In my thesis, I will explore the ambiguities of the human and monster characters' actions within Homer's *The Odyssey*, the medieval epic *Beowulf*, and the Hannibal Lecter series of novels by twentieth-century American author Thomas Harris. My observations about the

monster and human's shared characteristics, including coveting, vengeance, and *hybris,* will help me analyze the progression of these three writers' acknowledgements of the flawed human condition throughout the literary timeline.

Earlier scholars have claimed that literary monsters merely serve the purposes of celebrating the human's triumph over adversity. I contest this claim in my close analysis of Homer's *The Odyssey*, the medieval epic *Beowulf*, and the Hannibal Lecter series of novels by twentieth-century American author Thomas Harris. I show that each author uses monsters not to elevate humans to a position of superiority but rather to reveal the essential flaws in the human condition: coveting, vengeance, and *hybris*. My analysis of these flaws shows how society's willingness to admit our monstrous nature progresses from Homer to Harris. Homer shows that flaws make humans less morally superior to other creatures such as monsters, but he does not allow it to turn them into monsters themselves. The *Beowulf* poet uses these shared characteristics to establish a parallel between monsters and humans, who both desire power, essentially acknowledging that humans have monstrous qualities. Thomas Harris takes this admission to the next level. He asserts that all humans by nature are capable of becoming monsters. Whether or not society is ready to hear it, each author challenges our notions of what it means to be human.

It has been several thousand years since Homer first introduced his epic poems to Western society and challenged his audience's views about humanity. It has been argued that *The Odyssey* merely follows the structure of the Everyman's plight against the monster; however, in reality, Homer presents his audience with a

lesson about how we as humans must recognize that we are not mightier than all creatures. The poem is about a man named Odysseus who is trying to get home to Ithaka after the Trojan War and is continually facing obstacles that spring from the wrath of monsters and gods. For the purposes of my thesis, I focus primarily on chapter nine of the poem, because it provides the best example of Homer removing the hierarchy of the human over the monster. Chapter nine features the hero Odysseus and his men coming face to face with a Cyclops that appears civilized at first glance, but is actually a brutal monster who seals their tragic fates. The human characteristics of the Cyclops are used to lure in Odysseus's men before he consumes them. Homer depicts the pious, but flawed humans being punished and the impious and flawed monster being rewarded by the gods, which challenges previous scholars' views of humans as the dominant species. Though Homer allows Odysseus to make it home to Ithaka, the death sentence given to all of his men indicates that the hierarchy between humans and monsters is non-existent. Therefore, Homer is the first to dismiss the humans as the best and model species.

Over a thousand years later, an anonymous poet crafted the epic poem *Beowulf* and emphasized the hierarchy of the human over the monster that Homer dismissed in *The Odyssey*. However, the poet gave his humans dominant standing over the monsters in order to show that humans and monsters possess the same monstrous characteristics. Though in *Beowulf* God allows humans to live in society, and humans have rules to hold society together, such as wergild and gift-giving, humans still manage to destroy each other. Thus the poet is explaining that the humans use their inherent monstrosity despite their blessed state. The main plot of

the poem tells the story of a hero named Beowulf who fights three different monsters throughout his lifetime in order to achieve glory given by God. Throughout the poem, the poet tells stories about the tragic flaws of the humans in Beowulf's society that parallel the characteristics of the monsters. Though the poet sets up the parameters of his poem's society so that God blesses humans and casts out all monsters, his depiction of humans implies that they do not deserve this high honor. The *Beowulf* poet presents the humans and monsters as vulnerable to the same flaws of coveting, vengeance, and *hybris,* for the same reasons of selfishness and power. The poet agrees with Homer's assertion that we aren't the dominant species, and takes his argument a step further, revealing that we do not deserve to be favored. He provides a warning to his readers that we should not take our social standing for granted, and we must cease the constant killings that can take place in society. The poet introduces a critical view of humanity in order to prevent these monstrous characteristics from reoccurring within the human culture.

Late twentieth-century writer, Thomas Harris took the *Beowulf* poet's critical view of humanity still further. He created a series of novels that center on a human monster, thus arguing all humans have the capability to become monsters. Throughout his series, Harris features a human monster named Dr. Hannibal Lecter who is a renowned psychologist with a desire to consume human flesh. Dr. Lecter serves as the epitome of the human-monster hybrid: he appears refined and cultured, but is just as deadly as the epic monsters that came before him. In this thesis I show the progression of Harris's thinking over the course of his trilogy.

In his first novel *Red Dragon* (1981), Harris depicts the downfall of a great human protagonist named Will Graham who falls at the hands of a human monster due to the manipulations of a detained Dr. Lecter. Harris has Graham conclude both that humans have dark urges, and that this darkness could be harnessed to fight against our own monstrosity. In his second novel, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), a new protagonist named Clarice Starling must also use the services of Dr. Lecter to capture an involuntary human monster on the loose. Though Starling is victorious in capturing the involuntary human monster, the novel begins to unravel any distinction between humans and human monsters. Harris's third novel *Hannibal* (1999) reveals the inherent monstrosity of the human condition by making the human and human monster characters indecipherable. Dr. Lecter is on the loose and a connected human monster named Mason Verger corrupts the FBI. Eventually, Starling meets up with Dr. Lecter and joins him in a life of cannibalism and monstrosity. Therefore Harris's argument comes full circle, from the initial observation in his first novel to the final outcome of the transformation of the beloved human protagonist into a monster antagonist. The distinctions between the humans and monsters of the earlier poets have been fully destroyed.

The Identification of Human Flaws

Throughout my thesis, I identify the flaws of coveting, *hybris*, and vengeance consistently found in humans and monsters depicted in the works of all three writers. The writers present the concept of coveting as a shared characteristic between humans and monsters due to the fact that it comes from an inherent

emotion found within humans that if carried out could be rendered as monstrous. When one covets, one will do anything to fulfill the desire for something that one cannot obtain. Though humans cannot control their internal thoughts and feelings, the act of desiring what one cannot have and sacrificing everything to obtain it leads to monstrosity. The general covetous nature of the monsters portrayed through these writers is their evil desire to always say *yes* and act solely upon their selfish desires. The writers portray the covetous actions in humans as a means to warn their respective audiences of how coveting can lead to the destruction of the constructs of society.

Like coveting, vengeance is a controversial concept in itself. The writers choose to focus on violent vengeance where the human characters challenge their humanity in their monstrous actions against the offender. An example of this type of vengeance that is depicted by all three writers is the act of harming or killing another person for murdering someone else. Homer demonstrates this type of vengeance when Odysseus blinds Polyphemus, though he was partially motivated by his own escape (*Odyssey* 9.394). The *Beowulf* poet portrays violent vengeance when Beowulf wants to kill the dragon for destroying his home (*Beowulf* 2336). In *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), Harris shows the act of violent vengeance through Starling when she kills Gumb as indirect vengeance for the horses her cousins slaughtered and that she was unable to save as a child (163). All three writers emphasize that two wrongs do not make a right when it comes to vengeance and humanity. The writers' depiction of monstrous vengeance reflects the monsters' desire to overthrow the constructs and livelihoods of humanity. Their

determination for retribution through vengeance comes from being punished by humanity or by a higher power that favors humanity. Humans seeking violent vengeance on monsters or other humans leads to the conclusion that we're sometimes no better than monsters. Therefore Homer, the *Beowulf* poet, and Harris emphasize that humans should never seek violence on anyone because it makes one susceptible to becoming a monster.

Hybris is another flaw that Homer, the *Beowulf* poet, and Harris present in their human characters that could lead to monstrosity if the human believes he or she is above everything. The concept of *hybris* first appeared during the time of the ancient Greeks, and therefore is a theme that has survived the tests of time throughout the literary word. The writers depict human *hybris* as a pride or arrogance, which challenges the main authority in a poem or novel. In *The Odyssey* and *Beowulf*, the authority figures are divinities who control the fates of humanity. In Harris's series, there is no divine authority character who tells humanity how to act; however, there is a government that dictates the laws that humans must follow. If a human has *hybris,* they deem themselves as better than anything in the world, and they're adapting the monstrous mentality of always saying *yes* and selfishly believing that they're the best. For humans, that indicates that they lose their humility or the metaphorical adhesive bond that holds the human population together. The writers all present monsters as being above the constructs or higher powers that control society. The writers convey this frequent theme not only as a means to show how easy it is for humans to take on this monstrous mentality, but also to reveal how it can only lead to utter destruction.

In chapter one, I use Homer's Book nine of *The Odyssey* to challenge previous scholars' views that the ancient Greek human was viewed as a dominant figure who could defeat all his monstrous adversaries. Previous scholars such as Dr. Erwin Cook, Karl Reinhardt, and author Cedric Hubbell Whitman have interpreted Homer's work as a representation of humanity at its finest and view the monster as an evil presence that humanity must remove to protect their society. I challenge these scholars' views by showing that Homer has his monster destroy many pious human lives, and that there is ambiguity within Homer's hierarchical distinctions of the human being favored above the monster by the gods. Homer's presentation of the monster reigning victorious over his human characters reveals that life is not always fair, despite the Greek practice of piety. At the same time, any blasphemy the humans commit against the gods is severely punished, which further emphasizes the ambiguity of the human characters. Therefore I argue that Homer sets the stage for the later literary works to portray humans and monsters as equally wrong in their pursuits.

In chapter two, I use Homer's idea of the equality between human and monster and show how it resembles the *Beowulf* poet's views of the relation between human and monster. Though previous scholars such as W.P. Ker and John Nist belittle the poet's work by stating that humans are merely monster killers who must battle monsters to preserve humanity. I argue that the *Beowulf* poet reveals that humans and monsters are both capable of monstrous characteristics. I identify the various scenarios involving the monstrous acts of people in this society, which the poet reveals happens because humans and monsters are all driven by a desire

for power. I argue that the poet acknowledges how the morality of humanity has fallen by showing how humans resemble monsters and is warning his audience that this trend must cease if we want humanity to continue to exist.

In chapter three, I argue that the initial ideas of the *Beowulf* poet regarding the monstrous characteristics of humans come full circle in Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter series, in which Harris argues all humans can be monsters. I follow the progression of Harris's ambiguity from the initial observation in *Red Dragon* (1981) where Will Graham notes that we all have dark urges to an actual example in *Hannibal* (1999) when Clarice Starling becomes a human monster. Harris successfully changed the playing field for human and monster literature, but his novel, *Hannibal* was met with a sudden shock from his audience, who weren't ready to handle the truth of Starling easily transforming into a monster. Scholar Stephen M. Fuller and author Benjamin Szumskyj argue that Harris created his characters in a specific way to create successful narratives, but they overlook why he made this decision or what message he was trying to portray to his audience. Both scholars begin their works by identifying the audience's contempt with the ending of Hannibal (*1999*) in which Starling becomes a monster and falls in love with Dr. Lecter. I stress that Harris's conclusions were too ahead of their time: audiences couldn't accept that if one of the most endearing human characters could suddenly become a monster, then it could happen to any human.

We Created the Monster in Our Image

The purpose of this thesis is not to condemn the actions of humanity, but to project the messages that these writers have emphasized within their literary works about monsters and humans. Monsters come from writers' imaginations, so therefore they're thoroughly imbedded in the writers' own representations of humanity. My argument is that the monsters the writers created do not represent the most evil external obstacles humans have to face, but rather the worst characteristics that can be found within all of humanity. The writers' repetitive use of the shared human and monster characteristics acknowledges that the concept of monsters and their similarities to humanity have always been present since the beginning of oral storytelling. Though humans should do everything in their power to save themselves from monstrosity, they must first gain perspective on their humanity to prevent becoming monsters themselves. These writers dreamed up monsters that possessed the worst characteristics of any living thing and progressively explained to their various audiences throughout time that humanity should never represent this horrifying model of monstrosity.

Chapter 1: Leveling the Playing Field

Initially, it might seem that Homer creates only contrasts between the monstrous and the human. Homer's monsters are large, disfigured creatures who consume humans, live in remote areas away from humans, obey no entity because of their *hybris* or pride, always say *yes* due to their selfish attitudes, and are uncouth and impious. Humans, as defined by Homer, eschew cannibalism, enjoy camaraderie with their own kind, must obey Zeus and the other gods, and show remorse to the gods to rectify their mistakes. Homer's humans also have more intelligence than monsters. Homer's humans and monsters both practice violence, but humans only do so for protection or in formal battle, while monsters can attack with no cause. The contrast Homer establishes between monster and human supports ancient Greek ideas of *xenia* or hospitality, and piety towards the gods, which the human honors and the monster seeks to destroy.

However at times, Homer also blurs the line between the monstrous and the human, creating ambiguity. He points out monstrous qualities within the human characters and human qualities within the monster characters. Though Homer's audience was aware the Greek gods could do as they pleased, they would expect piety to be rewarded, and Homer shows that this isn't always the case. The gods immediately punish the pious humans for their monstrous actions, yet are content to help the impious monsters even though they may perform the same actions. Therefore Homer challenges the Greek ideal of piety. Occasional divine favoritism

towards the monsters thwarts Greek expectations that humans should be more favored than monsters; the gods are supposed to help the Greek people through life, rather than helping their enemies. Homer's definition does not fully challenge Greek cultural ideology because he points out that humans would suffer more at the hands of the gods if they were purposely impious. However, showing the unfairness of the gods' actions toward humans, Homer challenges his audience's expectations that humans rank more highly than monsters.

Previous scholars such as Dr. Erwin Cook, Karl Reinhardt, and author Cedric Hubbell Whitman have interpreted Homer's work as a representation of the dominant human species at its finest. The scholars view the monster as an evil presence that humanity removes in order to restore the hierarchy of humanity over monstrosity. According to Cook, Homer holds the human in higher esteem than the monster for his cunning and intelligent nature and civilized social life (120). Reinhardt states that Homer's humans can make mistakes, but are capable of self-punishment as part of the exploratory view that life is a test, while the monster despises all that is right (83). Similarly, Whitman believes Homer's humans are a measure of "fixity and definition" against the unpredictable monstrosity that tries to destroy them (297). I would challenge these general views of the poem because of the ambiguity in how the gods treat humans and monsters. In *The Odyssey,* man is severely disciplined for minor errors, but the monster is able to wreak havoc using human qualities to appear civil before they consume humans. The monster's aid from the gods reveals that Homer believes humanity is not always the favored species. Homer's humans and monsters are both able to face triumphs and failures.

Thus, though it may look like Homer favors humans, he actually destroys the premise that humans should always be victorious against the monster.

Coveting Cannot Buy Happiness

Homer begins chapter nine of *The Odyssey* portraying the Greek humans as a high-ranking species that deserves praise and rewards. During their long journey home from war, a god leads Odysseus and his men to an uninhabited luxurious island overpopulated with flora and fauna. The island is infinite in resources that the men will need on their journey. Homer writes,

> There we sailed ashore, and there was some god guiding
> us in through the gloom of night…
> But when the young dawn showed again with her rosy fingers,
> we made a tour about the island, admiring everything
> there, and the nymphs, daughters of Zeus aegis, started
> the hill-roving goats our way for my companions to feast on
>
> (*Odyssey* 9.142-55).

Odysseus and his men are sent to this magnificent island by a god and are given gifts by the daughters of Zeus filled with everything they could possibly need on their journey. In this moment, Homer defines humans as a loved and respected species that deserves good things from the gods. This particular passage is reflective of how Whitman views the human characters throughout the poem: "[the] formulae of peace [,and] the norms of social existence" (293). I agree with Whitman that in this scenario Homer defines the humans as a blessed species, but this sentiment must be

viewed as a brief side note due to the fatal suffering that the humans later face and that the gods allow. Homer allows the humans of this poem one moment of peace and plenty before he removes all happiness and security from the rest of their tumultuous journey.

Homer defines his human characters as pious but imperfect beings who are capable of making mistakes. Odysseus and his men are given this uninhabited island as a gift from a god, so the right thing to do would be to appreciate what the god has given them and to go on their way. However, Homer has Odysseus covet what is on the island of the Cyclopes, which begins a series of downfalls that show that humans in *The Odyssey* are not always blessed by the gods. Homer makes the uninhabited island and Cyclopes island identical in resources to stress how unnecessary it is for Odysseus to go there (*Odyssey* 9.183-4). Odysseus covets what is on the island of the Cyclopes, because he wants to see the island and has no business going there. Odysseus's decision to covet something more leads the humans to an island where they face the wrath of a monster named Polyphemus. Thus, I argue that Homer introduces Odysseus's coveting as the ultimate cause of the destruction of his men.

Homer did not intend for human perfection to be a distinguishing quality from the monster, so Odysseus should not be fully condemned for giving into his covetous desires. However, the mistake that Odysseus makes in taking his men to this island is followed by a series of unfortunate downfalls that lead to the eventual deaths of Odysseus's men. Odysseus recognizes his error of going to the island only after Polyphemus kills some of his men and curses him with a long and rough

journey home. The gods do not respect Odysseus's pious sacrifice of Polyphemus's ram. Homer writes,

> I sacrificed [the ram]
> on the sands to Zeus, dark-clouded son of Kronos, lord over
> all, and burned him the thighs; but he was not moved by my offerings,
> but still was pondering on a way how all my strong-benched
> ships should be destroyed and all my eager companions
> (*Odyssey* 9.551-5).

Odysseus reflects on how Zeus does not accept his sacrifice, but instead is looking for a way to destroy his ships and his men. Homer is intentionally ambiguous when he has the humans chastised by Poseidon and Zeus and the bloodthirsty monster rewarded, thereby challenging the valued order of Greek society and his audience's expectations.

Guest-Gifts from Nobody

Homer further illustrates how gods ignore what a human feels is his or her privilege when he shows his Greek audience how a pious human practice can be completely dismissed by the gods. Ancient Greek audiences recognized hospitality and gift-giving to strangers as the pious human practice of *xenia*. Observing *xenia* resolved any tension with foreign peoples or strangers. Homer presents an example of gift-giving being rejected when Odysseus and his men first meet Polyphemus. Odysseus proclaims to the Cyclops:

> …but now in turn we come to you and are suppliants

> at your knees, if you might give us a guest present or otherwise
> some gift of grace, for such is the right of strangers. Therefore
> respect the gods, O best of men. We are your suppliants,
> and Zeus the guest god, who stands behind all strangers with honors
> due them, and avenges any wrong toward strangers and suppliants
> (*Odyssey* 9.266-271).

In Homer's Greek society, giving a guest-gift to a stranger allows people to befriend the stranger to maintain human camaraderie. In his article *Guest-Gifts and Nobodies*, A.J. Podlecki notes that gift-giving is a primary practice in Homer's epics. Podlecki calls this premise of gift-giving, "[t]he whole of what we call foreign relations and diplomacy" (126). Podlecki views the exchange of gifts as a part of Greek diplomatic relations, but it is also a practice of piety, protected by Zeus. Zeus is the god of Guest-Friendship or *xenia* and is called Zeus Xenios (Morrison 25). According to scholar M.I. Finley, by the laws of the gods, humans are supposed to exchange guest-gifts with strangers because all strangers could be beggars of Zeus (101). Homer again goes against the views and expectations of his Greek audience when Odysseus and his men are faced with the monster's wrath instead of a guest-gift right after exchanging polite introductions with each other.

Homer challenges his audience's pious practice of gift-giving that had been the foundation of foreign affairs in their society. In *The Odyssey,* Homer's humans are not protected by the gods for asking for an exchange of guest-gifts from the monster Polyphemus, who replies:

> Stranger, you are a simple fool, or come from far off,

> when you tell me to avoid the wrath of the gods or fear them.
> The Cyclopes do not concern themselves over Zeus of the aegis,
> nor any of the rest of the blessed gods, since we are far better
> than they, and for fear of the hate of Zeus I would not spare
> you or your companions either, if they fancy took me
> otherwise
>
> (*Odyssey* 9.273-279).

Homer's monster, Polyphemus is proud and impious, distinguishing characteristics of the monster. Polyphemus views himself as better than the gods and therefore thinks he can do whatever he wants to Odysseus and his men. However, Homer doesn't explain why he chooses to have Polyphemus severely attack these humans for practicing what they were taught by the gods.

Whitman would view this encounter as an example of humans attempting to use human values to fight monstrosity in the world. Whitman claims that Homer designs these challenges as a means to portray humans in a good light and states, "…the *Odyssey* presents an infinite and rather amorphous world, under the image of the sea, out of whose mists any monstrosity or beguiling vision may arise, while the hero is the measure of fixity and definition" (297). According to Whitman's view, Homer presents the monster simply as a foil to humans with their "fixity and definition", which indicates that humans are the dominant and favored species. Whitman's view would also resolve any tension that a Greek audience might have about a monster disparaging the value they place on *xenia,* because the humans defeat this anti-Greek monster. However, I challenge Whitman's view that the

monster that Homer presents is merely Homer's way of showing how capable humans are of facing and overcoming difficult odds. This explanation doesn't account for why Homer has the monster dismiss the humans' piety in this encounter. Therefore Homer is deliberately challenging this pious practice through depicting a scenario where gift-giving not only does not work, but also results in many casualties at the hands of the monster.

Homer dismisses the impact of human piety in a way that could potentially offend his audience. After Polyphemus refuses to exchange guest-gifts, he snatches, kills, and eats two of Odysseus's men (*Odyssey* 9.289-91) Homer presents an ambiguous picture of a human whose men are killed at the hands of a monster after following the pious practice of gift-giving. Therefore Homer makes a curious decision with this encounter because he challenges a foundational practice that his Greek audience values. If the human had triumphed over this impious monster and had been rewarded with a smooth journey home, then there would be no ambiguity in Homer's definitions, and humans could just be recognized as a perfect species. Greek audiences would enjoy this view because it would portray the clever Greek hero defeating the anti-Greek monster. But, Homer does not present us with this scenario. Instead, he leads the audience to question why he chose to have the gods punish the humans with such a perilous journey. Homer's final ambiguous decision at the conclusion of chapter 9 of *The Odyssey* creates uneasiness in the audience when the human ingeniously defeats the monster but is also devastatingly punished by the gods.

Virtuous Vengeance

Homer temporarily appeases his Greek audience when he presents Odysseus as the clever and meticulous human who triumphs over the monster. Though vengeance can easily become monstrous, Homer has Odysseus carefully and cleverly wound the monster in order to rescue and protect his men. Odysseus's cleverness begins when the Cyclops asks for his name and Odysseus replies, "Nobody is my name. My father and mother call me/ Nobody, as do all the others who are my companions" (*Odyssey* 9.366-7). Odysseus's decision to remain anonymous and plan things out patiently shows Homer depicting his hero as the epitome of a fine Greek human. After the Cyclops reveals that he will eat Odysseus and his men, Odysseus plans to drive a stake into the eye of the Cyclops but not kill him. Otherwise, the huge boulder blocking the door to the cave would keep Odysseus and his men trapped inside forever.

Cook in his article *'Active' and 'Passive' Heroics in the* Odyssey, claims that through Odysseus's meticulous plan, Homer portrays success of the cunning and intellectual human over the monster (118). According to Cook, Homer's Odysseus came up with this plan to show his high regard for human's intellectual capabilities. Odysseus cleverly hides his identity when the Cyclops shouts out to the other Cyclopes that *Nobody* is harming him. I agree with Cook that in this moment Homer presents Odysseus as the ideal Greek human who uses his wit and cleverness to defeat the monster. If Homer had ended this chapter with Odysseus bravely triumphing over the monster, then perhaps the scholars' views of Homer's

definition would have summed up his definition of the human. However, having Odysseus ambiguously punished through the monster's wishes for vengeance, even though the hero has just saved the rest of his men, challenges the values of Homer's audience.

Homer's decision to have Odysseus carefully plan out his vengeance and escape is noteworthy because he shows that Odysseus is more concerned about the welfare of his men rather than being consumed by wrath and hasty vengeance. Monsters take their vengeance too far, because they view themselves as entitled and are always violent. Unlike his monster's impulsive act of vengeance, Homer emphasizes that humans only use violence to protect themselves in the direst situations. Therefore Homer uses this moment of victory to convey the cleverness and patience of the Greek hero, which was a very important attribute to his ancient Greek audience.

After Homer has Odysseus successfully carry out his vengeance plot, Homer challenges his audience's expectations of the justifiable pride one should take in one's accomplishments. Odysseus is almost off the island, as he and his men have successfully escaped the blinded Cyclops under the bellies of his animals. Odysseus could have run to his ship and set sail, but he decides to reveal his true identity in the name of glory and recognition:

> Cyclops, if any mortal man ever asks you who it was
> that inflicted upon your eye this shameful blinding,
> tell him that you were blinded by Odysseus, sacker of cities.

Laertes is his father, and he makes his home in Ithaka

(*Odyssey* 9.502-5).

Odysseus decides that he cannot resist proclaiming his identity to the Cyclops, so that the monster can spread his name to any other mortals that arrive on the island. As a result of this revelation, the Cyclops prays to his father, the god Poseidon, to punish Odysseus on his journey, and Poseidon ironically answers the monster's prayer. Thus Homer shows the ambiguous nature of what his audience felt were certain human values; following the laws of humanity becomes a moot point if the gods favor the monster.

Human *Hybris*

Homer seals his humans' unfortunate fates when Odysseus boasts of his victory to the Cyclops. *Hybris* or pride, is the *modus operandi* for all heroes, who are expected to celebrate their victory of the preservation of humanity against the monster. This differs from the monster's *hybris*, which is based on pure selfishness. However, Odysseus decides to chide the monster before he's brought his men to safety. Odysseus had his chance to escape the island after carrying out his vengeance in a clever fashion, but he stops to reveal his identity to the Cyclops. Homer has Odysseus take his *hybris* a step too far when he says the gods are punishing Polyphemus for his actions:

Cyclops, in the end it was no weak man's companions

you were to eat by violence and force in your hollow

cave, and your evil deeds were to catch up with you, and be

> too strong for you, hard one, who dared to eat your own guests
> in your own house, so Zeus and the rest of the gods have punished you
> (*Odyssey* 9.475-9).

Odysseus tells Polyphemus that the gods helped him defeat the monster due to his violence and evil deeds, but within this speech, Odysseus is speaking for the gods. Due to events that occur after this passage is uttered in which the gods punish Odysseus and his men, Homer conveys to his audience that the humans cannot know what the gods are thinking; however, this is not a substantial explanation as to why the humans are chastised by the gods.

Cook observes that scholars have searched for various crimes that Homer intended to charge Odysseus with, however, Cook sees that Odysseus's identity is significant to his actions. Cook identifies Odysseus as a "trickster-warrior, a figure who can no longer be characterized by *atasthala* [(one who violates ethic norms)], although he may still occasionally commit them" (120). Like other scholars, Cook believes that Homer does not give the gods reasons for punishing Odysseus and his men. Cook views Homer's Odysseus as a trickster and hero who is not defined by his unethical actions, but occasionally commits them. Though Cook observes that there are myriad ways scholars have attempted to find faults in Odysseus worthy of Poseidon's punishment, he doesn't have a formal explanation of his own. I observe that Homer makes Odysseus's decision to be boastful cause a chain reaction of unfortunate circumstances damning all of his men. Therefore I argue that the

punishment that Homer has created for the humans is not a result of Odysseus being a braggart, but unfairness on the part of the gods.

Like Cook, Reinhardt and Whitman believe that Homer has the gods reprimand the humans in order to reveal a truth about the human condition. According to Reinhardt, Homer makes Odysseus fail to pass a test from the gods through *hybris*. Reinhardt states,

> [The Polyphemus story] leads to the stage where humans and their values, both blameless in themselves, begin to become questionable to each other. As surely as Odysseus represents humanity, and as surely as the man-eater despises all that is right, there is a human element mixed into the judgment, which does not pass the test of the gods: namely *hybris*, although in its most subtle form, *hybris* as moral awareness. Not that this would be made clear (83).

Reinhardt views Homer's decision to have Odysseus use *hybris* as an opportune time to use a lesson for humankind that humans should not have *hybris*. Reinhardt's view is that Homer presents a test created by the gods that Odysseus fails to pass, but must still move forward. Whitman agrees with Reinhardt when he says the epic is centered on "the individual as the measure amid unpredictable experience, and infinite possibility"(297). Whitman takes the view that everything a human faces is part of the human's desire to learn about their humanity. In other words, Homer uses this example to show his audience that *hybris* is a punishable offence.

However, I cannot accept Reinhardt or Whitman's theories, because the act of the human revealing his name to the monster is what happens to set the downfall of the human in motion. Homer never writes anything that would imply that Odysseus's boast is worth the price of suffering continuously at the hands of the

gods. The lesson that Homer is trying to convey to his audience is that piety is not always rewarded, and the gods don't always recognize the hierarchy of humans over monsters.

Homer has a god punish Odysseus and his men due to unusual circumstances that challenge the dominant standing of humans. After Odysseus reveals himself to the Cyclops, Polyphemus asks his father Poseidon to curse Odysseus:

> Hear me, Poseidon who circle the earth, dark-haired. If truly
> I am your son, and you acknowledge yourself as my father,
> grant that Odysseus, sacker of cities, son of Laertes,
> who makes his home in Ithaka, may never reach that home;
> but if it is decided that he shall see his own people,
> and come home to his strong-founded house and to his own country,
> let him come late, in bad case, with the loss of all his companions,
> in someone else's ship, and find troubles in his household
> (*Odyssey* 9.528-35).

Poseidon honors his son's second request, so Odysseus will make it home alone, but his journey will be significantly longer and he will find problems in his own household. Homer has Poseidon side with his son to make the rest of Odysseus's journey home as miserable as possible, but there is much more to this punishment than Odysseus getting a slap on the wrist. Homer has the Cyclops blatantly state that Odysseus will lose all of his men on his way home. This challenges the ancient Greeks' view that humans rank higher than monsters, because Homer has them all killed due to Odysseus's *hybris*.

Homer's audience might have accepted this unsettling notion, if they viewed Odysseus as the prime example of the Greek hero and the other humans as just casualties of the monster's wrath. Homer's decision to allow the humans to die in a continuous onslaught disrupts the social order of humanity and challenges the audience's expectations that the gods should favor Odysseus and not let Polyphemus have his way for the next ten years of Odysseus's life. Homer foreshadows how pious Odysseus and his men will suffer due to Polyphemus's curse. Odysseus sacrifices Polyphemus's ram to Zeus, but Zeus doesn't accept his sacrifice (*Odyssey* 9.551-5). Although Zeus is not the father of the monster, he agrees with Poseidon's decision to punish Odysseus. Homer gives no specific reason why Zeus decides to punish Odysseus and destroy all his men. Homer chose to use this section of his poem to mark the beginning of Odysseus's downfall, which challenged the ancient Greeks' view of the dominant Greek human.

Destroyers of Humanity

Homer defines his monsters as dangerous beings that always say *yes* to fulfill their selfish needs and present a threat to humanity and their piety. The ambiguous picture Homer portrays is of the monster who disregards piety but is still supported by the gods. Homer's monster Polyphemus directly attacks the pious ancient Greek practice of gift-giving. Homer writes that Polyphemus has no respect for Odysseus's wishes for guest-gift exchanges because Cyclopes view themselves as far better than the gods. The desire to be impious prompts Polyphemus to mock the sacred act of gift-giving while eating Odysseus's men. At the conclusion of chapter nine after

Odysseus blinds Polyphemus, the monster chidingly says, 'So come here Odysseus, let me give you a guest-gift/ and urge the glorious Shaker of Earth to grant you conveyance/ home. For I am his son, and he announces himself as my father' (*Odyssey* 9.517-9). The Cyclops knows he has won because his father will avenge his blindness at the hands of Odysseus. Polyphemus describes eating Odysseus's men as a guest-gift to make a final mockery of human practices he will never have to obey, or be punished for desecrating. Thus Homer presents the picture of a pious man being mocked by a monster who is successful in being everything a human is taught to fight against.

Homer's definition of monsters reveals them to be prideful and uncouth, which allows them to attempt to be the dominant species. Polyphemus views himself as a dominant being because he believes that he is much better than the humans or the gods. Homer sets up a society where humans must abide by the gods' laws, but Homer's monster is ambiguously allowed to commit blasphemy without punishment from the gods. According to Cook, Homer created his monsters to attack the values of humanity with the intention of strengthening the greatness of the human race. Cook writes that "The life and death struggle between the trickster and the ogre is thus played out in the internal landscape of the protagonist, and prefigures his eventual success" (118). The essence of Cook's argument is that Homer creates this brawl between Odysseus and Polyphemus to emphasize the success of the human over the monster. Cook overlooks the fact that Homer's gods avenge Polyphemus, rendering the human Greek values as meaningless. Therefore the ambiguity of Homer's definitions is that he's rewarding the monsters for

representing the destruction of the values that the humans abide by and are determined to protect.

Homer's depiction of the monsters destroying the values of the humans and being rewarded by the gods disrupts the ancient Greek belief that humankind will always be above all other creatures. Whitman views Homer's humans as representing "fixity and definition" in maintaining the peace and preservation of values that monsters attempt to destroy. However, Homer disrupts this view when the gods punish the humans, while leaving the monster to have his wish come true. According to Whitman, the monster is a wild antitype that attempts to destroy human order, but he believes that Homer allows humanity to restore this order. Whitman states, "what has Homer done? In the first place, he has envisioned all this experience as a paradox, as something to be both embraced and rejected not alternately, but somehow simultaneously; and secondly he has embedded it in a larger scheme of self-revelation and the restoration of right order" (299). Whitman views Odysseus's journey as Homer's way of exposing the human condition to fantastical monsters, that disrupt order but later allowing humanity to set things right in order to maintain the dominant role of humans. I argue that Homer does not restore the order of humanity, even though Odysseus eventually makes it home to Ithaka. Homer does not allow any of Odysseus's men to survive on this journey because that's what Polyphemus asked the gods to do. Therefore Homer rewards the monsters in his scheme of challenging the values and sanctity of humankind and consequently his own audience.

Concealing Carnivorous Coveting

In Polyphemus, Homer presents a dangerous and covetous monster who wants to consume humans and is beguiling to his prey through his human characteristics. Homer has the first meeting between Polyphemus and Odysseus be very cordial in order to heighten the shock when the monster consumes two of Odysseus's men. Odysseus reveals how foolish he was to trust Polyphemus:

> But after he had briskly done all his chores and finished,
> at last he lit the fire, and saw us, and asked us a question:
> Strangers, who are you? From where do you come sailing over the watery
> ways? Is it on some business, or are you recklessly roving
> as pirates do, when they sail on the salt sea and venture
> their lives as they wander, bringing evil to alien people?
>
> (*Odyssey* 9.252-5).

Homer first introduces Polyphemus as a pleasant stranger who is interested in the humans who have just arrived on his island. Polyphemus asks them what their journey is and doesn't scold them for eating his goods. Homer plans out this plot in order for the monster to trick the humans before he scoops them up and kills them. The despicable monster's coveting of human flesh is disguised as a nice conversation with good company so that the monster may claim the nourishment that he desires. Therefore Homer gives Polyphemus human qualities to disguise his covetous desires for consuming humans.

Homer creates a double standard when Poseidon reprimands the humans after a foolish error, but the monsters are able to use human qualities as a means to carry out their monstrosity. Reinhardt notes that the elements of the Polyphemus encounter are distinct and extraordinary, which makes this part of the poem stand out from everything else. According to Reinhardt,

> The feeling of wonder at the unusual elements, at the careful dairy farming of this ruthless monster, at the love for his animals felt by the man-eater, at the arrangement of the cave and of the world in which he lives and moves, at his transformation from being defeated to cursing demonically—all these qualities rightly make this adventure stand out from the rest (79).

Reinhardt notes the ambiguity and incongruity of Homer's decision to make the ruthless monster a dairy farmer and lover of animals but does not have a significant reason to explain it. Reinhardt overlooks the fact that Homer gave Polyphemus human characteristics as a means to distract Odysseus and his men before he covets their flesh. Homer presents a short moment of sympathy towards the monster when Polyphemus talks of his unfortunate blinding to his only friend, the ram. Polyphemus's temporary moments of humanity do not explain why Homer has the gods listen to the monster and chastise the humans, but they do serve the purpose of giving Odysseus a false sense of security when he first sees Polyphemus doing chores. Homer's decision to have the monsters take on human characteristics as they carry out their coveting of human flesh stresses the ambiguity of his decision to let humans, the former righteous model species, meet with utter ruin.

Vicious Vengeance

Homer further challenges the values of his audience when he has the gods view the impious monster's vengeance against the humans as just. Polyphemus realizes that a prophecy involving his downfall has been fulfilled when Odysseus reveals his real name during his boastful speech. After this occurrence, Polyphemus can directly curse Odysseus to the gods, which prompts the completion of his vengeance plot. Polyphemus groans and says to Odysseus, 'This man told me/ how all this that has happened now must someday be accomplished, / and how I must lose the sight of my eye at the hands of Odysseus' (*Odyssey* 9.510-2). Homer creates a prophecy that can be fulfilled as soon as the human reveals his identity to the monster. In this manner, the monster is easily able to convict Odysseus by name for his wrongdoing, thereby instigating the fall of Odysseus's men. Odysseus is in disbelief that the gods will ever support the monsters and says, '…not even the Shaker of Earth will ever heal your eye for you' (*Odyssey* 9.525). Odysseus's assumption is proved wrong when Odysseus's boast prompts the suffering of him and his men at the hands of both the Cyclops's father Poseidon and Zeus. Therefore Homer challenges the ancient Greek audience's pious beliefs when the gods unfairly reward the impious monsters by smiting the pious humans.

The successful vengeance of the monster illustrates Homer's truth about humanity that he wants to reveal to his audience. Odysseus and his men get vengeance on Polyphemus for eating their comrades, but Odysseus's boasts of victory prompt Polyphemus's curse and causes the trouble on Odysseus's voyage

home. According to Cook, Homer created the monsters as a means to make humanity look good and brave so they could prevail over the monster. Cook takes his argument further when he states that Homer gave Odysseus a divine antagonist because endurance and suffering are important aspects of the human condition (119). Cook's claim that the monster's victory is meant to make humanity look better is questionable because Homer damns Odysseus and his men who practice the highly regarded values of piety, camaraderie, and remorse for their mistakes. Homer wants to reveal to his audience that although humans should stand against the monster, humanity cannot always win. Homer's Odysseus, the epitome of Greek values, finds eventual victory as a means of absolving the misfortunes of this occurrence, but one cannot forget all the men who died due to the vengeance of the monster. Homer wants his audience to realize that humanity does not always triumph over all adversity. This challenges what Homer's audience would like to believe about the gods listening to the pious man's prayer. Homer thus illustrates that the gods are in control and ultimately can do what they want with humanity.

Leveling the Playing Field

Homer allows his monsters to successfully stand against all that defines humanity as a means of revealing life's realities to his audience. Homer's Odysseus successfully blinds the monster, yet he and his comrades are still severely punished at the hands of the gods. The gods fulfill Polyphemus's prayer to make Odysseus suffer and have all of his men perish continuously throughout his journey home. This unfortunate reality is due to Homer's decision to have the gods support the

values of the monster over the human. This assessment is shown when Polyphemus prays to his father Poseidon and he listens to his plea, 'So [Polyphemus] spoke in prayer, and the dark-haired god heard him' (*Odyssey* 9.535). Homer's utilization of the fact that the monster is the son of a god who wants vengeance for his son brings up another human attribute shared by the gods: camaraderie with others, especially family members. Thus bonds important to human society also feature an important way in divine society, and ultimately determine that Odysseus must pay for harming the child of a god. The gods are also allowed to be covetous, practice vengeance, and have *hybris*, but they will not allow humans to have those same qualities. Homer's story shows that the gods do not always want to save humanity: merely being a pious human is not enough to provide one with divine protection.

Homer is telling his ancient Greek audience that sometimes the gods protect us, sometimes they punish us, and sometimes they give victory to monsters. Though it seems unfortunate that human values are disregarded through the gods' favoritism of the monster, this moment reveals the reality that sometimes doing everything right is not enough in life. By leveling the playing field between what is human and what is monstrous, Homer reveals that life presents opportunities for both sides to carry out their missions in life, much to the chagrin of humanity as a whole.

The Cyclops encounter tells Homer's audience that the gods have decided to punish the clever and pious Greek in favor of the impious monster who decides to pray to have them wiped out. Homer concludes this section of his poem with

Odysseus's account of the state of things: "From there we sailed on further along, glad to have escaped death, / but grieving still at heart for the loss of our dear companions" (*Odyssey* 9.565-6). Homer sums up his message very well in these lines by having Odysseus note that he was lucky to escape the obstacles placed in front of him, but realizes it was at the cost of losing some of his men. The ancient Greek audience listening to Odysseus's story and the modern reader both learn that following and preserving humanity's values do not enable one to withstand the hardships of life.

Conclusion

Homer's depiction of the ancient Greek human and monster reveals that his society was ready to realize that humanity cannot always be viewed as the dominant species that defeats all adversaries. Homer humbled his audience with the notion that their ancient Greek hero figure is not always respected by the gods no matter how pious he may be. Homer leveled the playing field through showing how the gods do not view humans as special, so they can be punished or rewarded just like monsters. Homer destroys the premise that humans should always be victorious against the monster through having the monster be rewarded after killing Odysseus's men. Therefore Homer sets the stage for later writers to make humans and monsters have the same flaws and failures in their literary works.

Chapter 2: The Blessed Species

Like Homer, the *Beowulf* poet initially defines humans and monsters as having distinct characteristics from each other. The monsters in both poems seek to destroy humanity, and the humans in both poems practice piety and attempt to stop monsters from killing them. However, unlike Homer's act of having the gods show select favoritism to the monster, the poet defines all monsters as adversaries to God. The *Beowulf* poet describes monsters as large and ambiguously shaped creatures that consume humans, are forced by God to live in remote areas away from humans, and are cursed because they are related to Cain. The contrast the poet creates between monsters and humans supports the Anglo Saxon values of piety, which the monster wishes to overthrow. The humans in *Beowulf* are similar to the humans in *The Odyssey* in that they practice piety, but the poet defines them as being in God's favor, as they live in a society that monsters aren't allowed to enter. In *Beowulf,* God has already removed the monsters from society, and the poet's humans infrequently practice formal prayer.

The *Beowulf* poet also blurs the line between the monstrous and the human, creating ambiguity like Homer does in *The Odyssey*. He points out monstrous qualities within the human characters and human qualities within the monster characters. The ambiguity in the poet's definitions comes from the fact that God has given favor to the human over the monster on the premise of familial relations and not due to their own actions. In *Beowulf,* God curses the monsters only because

they're related to Cain, so they're never given the opportunity to be viewed as anything other than a monster. This differs from the ambiguity in Homer's definitions. For Homer, both humans and monsters have equal rights from the divine. The humans in *Beowulf* take on the monster characteristics of killing innocent people, and the monster shows the human emotions associated with mourning. The ambiguity comes from the fact that the humans allow other humans to kill each other, but God still allows them to be a part of society. Therefore, the parameters that the poet uses to define the God-ruled society in *Beowulf* challenges his distinct definitions of the monster and the human, because the labels that God gives to each group do not necessarily define their individual qualities. Though *The Odyssey* and *Beowulf* present similarities regarding the human value of piety, Homer's ambiguity is that the gods sometimes punish pious humans and help impious monsters. However, the ambiguity in *Beowulf* is that since humans and monsters have already been rewarded and cursed, respectively by God, their actions don't matter as much and they take on each other's roles as a result of this predetermination.

Previous scholars such as W.P. Ker and John Nist have belittled the poet's work by stating that humans are merely monster killers that must battle monsters to preserve humanity. In other words, the scholars have argued that monsters are evil beings that must be defeated by good humans in order to protect the human population. I would challenge this view of the poem because the poet's definitions of monsters and humans would indicate that both beings are driven by the same need for power; they both carry out their desire for power using the shared

characteristics of coveting, vengeance, and *hybris*. The humans' monstrous actions disprove these scholars' views of the poem: God punishes the monster before it commits any monstrous actions and allows humans to commit monstrous actions without punishment. Therefore the poet presents the human characters as dominant over the monster outcasts; however, humans possess the same characteristics as the monster that both species use to selfishly enhance their social standing within society.

The *Beowulf* poet begins his poem without any ambiguity by setting up the distinct parameters that God has created to remove monsters from human society. The humans are immediately characterized as the dominant race because God created the world for them. The poet begins by explaining the story of men through the mind of the monster Grendel:

> It harrowed [Grendel]
> to hear the din of the loud banquet
> every day in the hall, the harp being struck
> and the clear song of a skilled poet
> telling with mastery of man's beginnings,
> how the Almighty had made the earth
> a gleaming plain girdled with waters;
> in His splendour He set the sun and the moon
> to be earth's lamplight, lanterns for men,
> and filled the broad lap of the world
> with branches and leaves; and quickened life
> in every other thing that moved

(*Beowulf* 92-98).

The poet tells his audience that God created the earth for the purpose of serving humanity. The evidence is shown when the poet states that the sun and moon were created to provide humans with light. Since the humans tell the story of their creation every day, it indicates that they're proud of their position, and they enjoy celebrating the fact that the world was created to serve them. The poet sets up this society to give fulfillment and happiness to individuals based on their birth. The monsters that are removed from human society are categorized as such due to their ancestral relationship to Cain, the first human murderer. The poet tells us that God outlawed and condemned all of Cain's descendents as monsters (*Beowulf* 104-7). Therefore the poet is immediately establishing the hierarchy of this setting, in which all humans are part of society and all of the monsters of Cain's clan must live outside society by the orders of God.

The *Beowulf* poet includes stories from the Judeo-Christian Bible about the creation of man and the punishment of Cain to teach a lesson about the importance of human morality to his audience. The poet adds his own interpretation to the Biblical story of Cain to explain how the monstrous acts of a human are the reason why monsters exist in the poem's society:

> For the killing of Abel
> The Eternal Lord had exacted a price:
> Cain got no good from committing that murder
> because the almighty made him anathema
> and out of the curse of his exile there sprang

ogres and elves and evil phantoms

(*Beowulf* 107-12).

The adaptation of Cain's story that the poet presents reveals that Cain is the reason why there are monsters roaming outside of society. The poet presents this story as the foundation of his society's existence; however, the humans in his society do not abide by the story's lesson, since they frequently kill other humans. According to Nist, the Christian practices the poet emphasizes are merely a brief mention in the poem. He writes, "Christian 'coloring' in the poem is not really coloring at all; it is a black-and-white acknowledgment of awe in the presence of a power almighty in judgment and punishment" (258). In other words, Nist states that the *Beowulf* poet believes humans only care about their final judgment day since they have everything they want on earth.

Since the idea of human selfishness is heavily present in the poem, I agree with Nist that the poet uses Christian themes to explain how the structures of his society should work, but emphasizes that these themes do not represent how his society actually functions. The poet depicts the humans as already recognizing themselves as the favored race in this poem, so they do not constantly pray to God, and they often engage in blood feuds with other humans. The poet presents God as the determining factor in whether or not a human will achieve glory in battle or lose his life and just be relocated to a new place. Therefore the poet is providing a free world for the humans to do whatever they like since they already view themselves as the beloved and higher-ranking species.

Human Retaliation and Restitution

The poet expresses the unstable civility of the high-ranking human characters when he reveals the series of actions that must be taken to maintain order between nations and individuals. In the poem, Beowulf, a Geat, comes to Heorot to save the Danes from Grendel, but he is not immediately received as a generous individual. The poet portrays this idea within Beowulf's first encounter with a Dane:

> So now, before you fare inland
> as interlopers, I have to be informed
> about who you are and where you hail from.
> Outsiders from across the water,
> I say it again: the sooner you tell
> where you come from and why, the better
>
> (*Beowulf* 252-7).

The formalities the poet expresses in this exchange reveal that strangers who arrive in other territories must be interrogated before they're allowed to enter the mainland. This is also an interesting exchange because a monster has been terrorizing the Danes for over a decade, but the formalities must still be enforced with human foreigners who could pose a threat. In other words, humans can potentially be just as threatening as a bloodthirsty monster. The poet makes the monstrosity of the human characters apparent through the significant amount of

tension caused by humans crossing the border to another country during a time when a monster should be the only prominent threat.

The poet provides some retribution tactics for his human characters in an attempt to resolve some of the monstrous characteristics presented within the society members. The poet incorporates these tactics to show his audience how society should behave with other societies. Nist notes that as in Homer's *The Odyssey*, the people in the poem believe in gift-giving and the pledging of mutual friendship (258). However, Nist overlooks the fact that the connotations are extremely different in understanding the human characteristics the poet is trying to reveal. King Hrothgar of the Danes states what will happen if Beowulf beats Grendel: 'There's nothing you wish for/ that won't be yours if you win through alive' (*Beowulf* 660-1). In other words, King Hrothgar will give Beowulf many gifts in return for Beowulf's slaying of Grendel, which will help to build bridges between the two nations. Homer's practice of gift-giving was to encourage the pious act of hospitality towards the stranger, but the *Beowulf* poet presents the practice as something quite different. Gifts are only exchanged between two nations if one nation helps the other and in turn will promote better international relations. The poet tells his audience that material possessions ensure that a nation will temporarily cease fighting against another nation, and that people can appease each other with inanimate objects.

The poet not only incorporates material objects to develop good human relations, but also uses them as part of the process of wergild, which attempts to end

blood feuds. In this society, many people practice vengeance killings in which a person kills someone who killed someone else that they loved. In order to stop this ceaseless slaughter, ancient Teutonic and Old English societies established the law of wergild ("wergild"). Under the law of wergild, a person is obligated to pay a fine to the family of a person whom they killed. In this manner, people will not continue to seek vengeance if the debt is paid through money. King Hrothgar views Beowulf's help defeating Grendel as fulfilling a debt that Beowulf's father owed him. King Hrothgar retells what he believes prompted this act of retribution:

> Beowulf, my friend, you have travelled here
> to favour us with help and fight for us.
> There was a feud one time, begun by your father.
> With his own hands he had killed Heathloaf,
> who was a Wulfing; so war was looming
> and his people, in fear of it, forced him to leave
> …Finally I healed the feud by paying:
> I shipped a treasure-trove to the Wulfings
> and Ecgtheow acknowledged me with oaths of allegiance
>
> (*Beowulf* 457-72).

King Hrothgar prevented a war between the Geats and the Wulfings using the practice of wergild through sending a treasure-trove to make up for the death of a Wulfing citizen. King Hrothgar considers Beowulf's aid as a proper repayment for the money he lent on Beowulf's father's behalf. The poet emphasizes the importance of wergild to show how society in his poem would fall apart if this practice were not enforced.

The poet maintains the theme of the unstable relations amongst humans when he describes a solution to unite two nations through marriage. King Hrothgar's daughter, Freawaru is marrying Ingeld, a Heathobard, to end the ongoing feud between the two nations. King Hrothgar believes that the marriage will heal old wounds and previous feuds between the Danes and the Heathobards (*Beowulf* 2026-7). Before Beowulf reveals to the Geats how he defeated the monsters, he explains his concerns with this solution:

> Think how the Heathobards will be bound to feel,
> their lord, Ingeld, and his loyal thanes,
> when he walks in with that woman to the feast:
> Danes are at the table, being entertained,
> honoured guests in glittering regalia,
> burnished ring-mail that was their hosts' birthright,
> looted when the Heathobards could no longer wield
> their weapons in the shield-clash, when they went down
> with their beloved comrades and forfeited their lives
>
> (*Beowulf* 2032-2040).

Beowulf notes that the solution that the Danes have planned is just putting a bandage over a bullet hole. The marriage between two people of different nations will not end the feud between both nations, because the losses from the battles they fought against each other are still in their hearts and minds. Beowulf explains how this marriage will end badly if a Dane or Heathobard sees a weapon that belonged to a loved one attached to the person that killed them. Though the purpose of this

marriage is meant end the ceaseless violent acts between the two nations, Beowulf predicts that this plan will fail due to the loved ones each nation lost at the hands of the other. Therefore the poet presents this digression in the poem to portray a desperate attempt to end the cycle of vengeance that is unlikely to be successful, because humans' inherent monstrosity desires justice through vengeance killings.

Gold Will Never Buy Virtue

The poet reveals through digressions in the plot of the poem that humans are prone to coveting and power, which are the same qualities that compel the monster to commit heinous acts. The poet uses the example of Hygelac, a Geat, who had a neck-ring that he wore with pride, and he provoked a feud with Frisians, while he was searching for treasure (*Beowulf* 1202-4). The Frisians killed Hygelac for his belongings as a result of the king's decision to start a feud due to *hybris*:

> Fate swept him away
> because of his proud need to provoke
> a feud with the Frisians…
> They took his breast-mail, also his neck-torque,
> and punier warriors plundered the slain
> when the carnage ended; Geat corpses
> covered the field
>
> (*Beowulf* 1205-14).

The poet uses this example to explain how a feud that began because of *hybris* was capable of killing many people, yet the poet focuses on the treasures the Frisians take from the Geats' corpses. This digression in the poem tells the audience that

kings are capable of damning their entire nation due to *hybris* and showing off their possessions, while other nations will start a bloody battle just to win a couple of trinkets. Nist notes that the poet's digressions from the central plot are numerous and do not often have transitions to the main focus of the poem (259). Nist fails to note that these digressions are central to the plot of the poem. Besides the terror the humans face due to the wrath of the monsters, there is also the terror they face amongst their own kind. The poet takes this view one step further by making the foundation of these feuds monstrous due to covetous actions and *hybris*. The poet creates these digressions to show how humans can cause mass amounts of destruction to other humans just like monsters.

In the Hygelac digression, the poet reveals that humans covet the objects of other warriors, leading to violence and innocent deaths. This puts them on the same wavelength as the monster, which is an observation that the poet is trying to emphasize to his audience. Later in the poem, the poet allows the character of King Hrothgar to shed light on the unfortunate characteristics of humans. He explains to Beowulf how power for everything is meaningless to life:

> Then finally the end arrives
> when the body [man] was lent collapses and falls
> prey to its death; ancestral possessions
> and the goods he hoarded are inherited by another
> who lets them go with a liberal hand
>
> (*Beowulf* 1753-7).

King Hrothgar is the symbol of hope in the poem because he realizes the flaws within humanity. The king realizes that the material possessions that a person covets for power are rendered useless and insignificant when that person dies. He has doubts about why God chose to favor the humans when sometimes they forget that they're mortal and that their coveting tactics lead to destruction and innocent bloodshed (*Beowulf* 1738-43). He is questioning the very foundation of the constructs of his own society. Therefore through King Hrothgar's inspirational speech, the poet is revealing to his audience that one can gain perspective on society in order to change it for the better.

Although the poet presents King Hrothgar as a character who understands the problems within his society, there are many human characters who do not possess his wisdom because of their monstrous demeanor. Queen Modthryth is one example of a human who is the epitome of monstrosity. The poet explains,

> Great Queen Modthryth
> perpetrated terrible wrongs.
> If any retainer ever made bold
> to look her in the face, if an eye not her lord's
> stared at her directly during daylight,
> the outcome was sealed: he was kept bound
> in hand-tightened shackles, racked, tortured,
> until doom was pronounced—death by the sword,
> slash of blade, blood-gush and death qualms
> in an evil display. Even a queen
> outstanding in beauty must not overstep like that

…she was less of a bane to people's lives,
less cruel-minded, after she was married
to the brave Offa…

(*Beowulf* 1932-48).

The poet does a great job of showing how Queen Modthryth is the prime example of a human character with *hybris*. The queen is so monstrous that she'll have any man who merely looks at her sentenced to death. The tragedy is that she's allowed to present this behavior until the day that she's married, which in turn is used to civilize her monstrous ways. The poet's presentation of this woman reveals that society is wrong for allowing this queen to commit these heinous actions, yet they are able to conform her through marriage. The poet is commenting on the fact that humans with monstrous attitudes threaten to break the constructs of society, but humans need society and structure in order to remove their monstrous characteristics.

The poet provides these monstrous human revelations to emphasize that the internal conflicts within human society are similar to the conflicts that occur when the monsters terrorize their homes. According to Ker, "In construction [the poem] is curiously weak, in a sense preposterous; for while the main story is simplicity itself, the merest commonplace of heroic legend, all about it, in the historic allusions, there are revelations of a whole world of tragedy" (253). I completely disagree with Ker because there is nothing simple about the plot of the poem. The internal bloody conflicts are associated not just with monsters, but also with the tense relations amongst the nationalities of humanity. The poet uses the disasters associated with

both the humans and monsters to emphasize the unfortunate monstrous characteristics found within his human characters.

Monstrous Motives for Heroism

The poet presents the motivations of Beowulf for his heroism as the wrong reasons for stopping the monsters, since he uses characteristics that are shared by monsters. Though ravenous monsters must be stopped in order to protect humanity, Beowulf does it in order to gain glory, which is caused by *hybris*. He arrives in Heorot, eager to kill the monster as his next act on his list of achievements. The poet writes,

> So every elder and experienced councilman
> among my people supported my resolve
> to come here to you, King Hrothgar,
> because all knew of my awesome strength.
> They had seen me boltered in the blood of enemies
> when I battled and bound five beasts,
> raided a troll-nest and in the night-sea
> slaughtered sea-brutes
>
> (*Beowulf* 415-22)

The poet reveals that Beowulf decided to come and was supported by his own nation because they knew that he was a strong warrior. He describes how he battled, raided, and slaughtered many monsters in his life and uses the imagery of him 'boltered in the blood of his enemies.' Though it is not a bad concept that

Beowulf wants to kill this monster, his cocky attitude is capable of leading to bad actions. Above all else, the poet emphasizes that Beowulf covets glory from God and encompasses *hybris* in his actions. He needs to use these two characteristics to function, which as the poet later reveals, will ultimately lead to his demise.

The poet first depicts Beowulf's battle against the dragon that terrorizes his nation as noble, but his motivations are actually driven by violent retribution and *hybris*. Beowulf realizes that the dragon has destroyed his own home and people and demands vengeance through taking on the dragon himself. However, he's now a king and he has to take his nation into account before he attempts to slay the dragon. The poet explains Beowulf's path to vengeance:

> After many trials,
> he was destined to face the end of his days
> in this mortal world; as was the dragon,
> for all his long leasehold on the treasure.
> Yet the prince of the rings was too proud
> to line up with a large army
> against the sky-plague
>
> (*Beowulf* 2341-6).

The poet reveals that Beowulf is selfish for wanting to kill the dragon himself because if he fails, he's leaving his nation unprotected and vulnerable. Beowulf's vengeance plot comes from his *hybris,* since he wants to relive his youth and fight monsters the way he did fifty years ago. The poet is revealing that human vengeance towards a monster has its consequences if it isn't carried out with reason and

patience. The poet wants to warn his audience that any vengeance that's carried out with selfish motive and violence equates to the definition of the monster that humanity must avoid becoming.

A Sum for a Soul

The poet presents ways in which humans attempt to avert disasters after a murder takes place, since they have an inherent desire for vengeance through retaliation. The poet tells the audience that vengeance in this society consists of killing a person that has murdered a loved one unless the original offender reimburses that person with wergild. The humans in *Beowulf* use the practice of wergild as a means to curb the violence that comes from vengeance killings; however, sometimes the human characters must carry out their vengeance with brutal force. When Grendel's mother kills a cherished friend of King Hrothgar, Beowulf says: 'Wise sir, do not grieve. It is always better/ to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning' (*Beowulf* 1384-5). The poet reveals through this exchange that vengeance killings are always the first impulse of the human and wergild is a practice that is meant to keep the humans from ceaselessly slaughtering each other. The poet emphasizes that without the practice of wergild, the humans' desires for violent retribution would lead to a constant chain of killings, which could lead to anarchism. The simple, but unfeeling practice of measuring a human life against a sum of money is the only way that violent vengeance killings end and the ceaseless bloodshed will be stopped. Therefore the poet reveals that it's part of monstrosity to

immediately crave violent retribution for the loss of a loved one though society attempts to challenge this behavior with a business exchange.

Monsters: The False Foils of Humanity

The poet portrays his monsters as echoing the characteristics of the human characters on a larger scale. Though the poet had the monsters removed from society to emphasize their monstrosity, they act upon the same monstrous wills and humane motivations as the human society. The poet's three monsters in his poem pose a threat to humanity due to similar reasons found within human society. The poet first presents the monster Grendel who is tired of being cast out of society and desires to takeover the society that he was unfairly forbidden from entering. After Beowulf kills Grendel, Grendel's mother or dam storms Heorot to get revenge for her son's demise. The third monster presented is the prideful dragon who easily destroys everything in his path to get his stolen treasure back. Therefore the poet would like to point out to his audience that the monsters' actions represent the actions of the humans in order to teach his audience a lesson about how humanity should not act.

The poet ironically decided to make the outcast monsters descendants of a human, which adds to their similarities to the human characters. All of the monsters in the poem are related to Cain, the first human murderer. The ambiguity that the poet presents on both the human and monster side is that both humans and monsters are capable of committing murder. The only difference between the two sides is that God has marked all monsters to be his adversaries, and they cannot live

amongst the other humans. Grendel is the first monster of the three in the poem to address his state of exile. The poet explains that Grendel sees injustice in his position as an outcast and that it pains him to hear the story of the creation of man (*Beowulf* 86-91). Grendel represents the position and feelings of all monsters in the poem who must remain exiled from society because God cursed them. These feelings of sadness and grief are the same as human qualities. Therefore Grendel's mission is to overthrow the constructs of human society, which is similar to the monstrous ways humans take over other nations. The poet presents these similarities to reflect how close monsters and humans are in mannerisms in order to teach his audience how humanity must change their monstrous ways.

The poet features three monsters within his poem that Beowulf must attempt to defeat in order to preserve humanity, while simultaneously earning glory in battle with the monstrous characteristic of *hybris*. Due to the larger part of the poem featuring the antics of the human characters, many scholars have challenged and questioned why the poet chose to put monsters into the poem. According to Ker, this is a flaw in the poem's structure:

> The fault of *Beowulf* is that there is nothing much in the story. The hero is occupied in killing monsters, like Hercules and Theseus. But there are other things in the lives of Hercules and Theseus besides the killing of the Hydra or Procrustes… (252).

Basically, Ker is commenting on the fact that the poet only has Beowulf and the humans fight and die from the monsters that are attacking them. The importance of the monsters that Ker dismisses can be summed up by the way the poet sets up the

human social structure and the monster attacks. I argue that the poet made monsters serve the purpose of echoing the monstrous actions of the humans through coveting, vengeance, and *hybris* in order to warn humans against behaving in this manner. Ker is incorrect in stating that all Beowulf does is fight monsters because he fights Grendel due to *hybris*, which the poet presents as a flaw in his character that is a characteristics found in monsters. Therefore the poet made Beowulf a monster killer in order to emphasize a deeper message to his audience that Beowulf kills monsters for monstrous reasons.

Covetous Cravings

In Grendel, the poet presents a dangerous, covetous monster in order to parallel the flaws amongst the human characters. Grendel covets the social life that God denied him due to his blood relation to Cain. The poet has him covet and later terrorize Heorot for twelve years. The poet explains,

> So Grendel waged his lonely war,
> inflicting constant cruelties on the people,
> atrocious hurt. He took over Heorot,
> haunted the glittering hall after dark,
> but the throne itself, the treasure-seat,
> he was kept from approaching; he was the Lord's outcast
>
> (*Beowulf* 164-169).

The poet addresses the covetous monster within this passage. The first thing the poet addresses is the fact that Grendel is capable of fulfilling his desires, but the war

he waged is described as lonely because he has no one to bask in his glory. The other key point the poet presents in this passage is the fact that God will not allow Grendel to sit on the throne during his reign of terror. This is a significant moment because it reinforces the structures of the poem's society due to the fact that an outcast of God can never sit on a throne divinely given to a king. However, the poet has Grendel continuously wreak havoc on Heorot, which resembles the actions of the humans who covet power and wealth from other nations. The poet has Grendel maintain his terror for twelve years in order to emphasize what could happen if humans possessed the endurance to cause destruction for this huge amount of time.

The poet emphasizes that Grendel serves a larger purpose than giving Beowulf someone to fight in battle, which scholars don't always note in their observations of the poem. According to Nist the presence of the monsters in the poem is significant because they symbolically represent the forces of evil that every human experiences. Nist writes,

> Both the Greek and the Anglo-Saxon genius keep the important things at the center and the less important on the circumference of their worlds…the monsters, symbolizing the forces of evil which every man must battle against in his fallen state of nature, are far more valuable for the dense energy of *Beowulf* than all the historical tragedies alluded to as minor themes (260).

Nist recognizes that the poet made the monsters serve an important purpose, but he overlooks the fact that the purpose is not symbolic of the evils that the Everyman must face. I argue that the poet has Grendel covet and achieve his goal of social rule, which in turn represents the fallen state of nature that Nist alludes to in his essay.

That being said, Beowulf's defeat of the monsters may protect humanity, but it does not reprieve humans of their fallen state. The humans continue to pose threats to each other despite the unity that should develop from fighting monsters together. The poet may have the monsters defeated by the humans, but the humans do not defeat their own covetous natures.

The poet highlights how Grendel's covetous characteristics are extremely dangerous in order to show his audience what humanity's monstrous characteristics could be capable of if a human had the physical capability to practice ongoing monstrosity for twelve years. The poet writes, "…[Grendel] would never/ parley or make peace with any Dane/nor stop his death-dealing nor pay the death-price" (*Beowulf* 154-5). The humans in the poem note that Grendel does not follow any of the rules in society regarding attempts at peace or wergild; however, the humans have revealed that they are guilty of breaking the same rules. For example, the Frisians covet Hygelac's jewelry and they cause a bloody battle in order to obtain what doesn't belong to them. The human characters are guilty of not practicing what they preach when they condemn Grendel for not following their rules. Although Grendel is a horrific monster that seeks to destroy humanity, the poet notes that humanity does a decent job of demolishing its own society through its covetous nature.

A Soul for a Soul

Besides coveting, the poet shows other characteristics that monsters and humans both share and use for the same purposes. The poet has humans and

monsters seek vengeance for the same reasons though humans attempt to curb their violent behaviors with wergild and peace. After Beowulf kills Grendel, Grendel's mother or dam seeks vengeance on Heorot for the death of her kin. The poet explains,

> Then it became clear,
> obvious to everyone once the fight was over,
> that an avenger lurked and was still alive,
> grimly biding time. Grendel's mother,
> monstrous hell-bride, brooded on her wrongs
>
> (*Beowulf* 1255-59).

Grendel's mother seeks vengeance for her son's death, which questions the legitimacy of her monstrous actions due to the fact that humans act in a similar manner when they lose loved ones. According to scholar Dorothy Carr Porter, Grendel and his mother do not have the same rights to vengeance killings as the other people because they are not considered subject to the laws of society due to God's curse upon their heads. I agree with Porter's statement due to the fact that the poet reveals that Beowulf is a strong believer in vengeance killings, and Grendel's mother could never have that same right.

The poet has King Hrothgar state that Grendel's mother is committing a vengeance killing, which shows that the king understands where the monster is coming from. He explains to Beowulf, "this force for evil/driven to avenge her kinsman's death. / Or so it seems to thanes in their grief…" (*Beowulf* 1339-41). Despite the fact that Grendel's mother has caused mass amounts of destruction in

Heorot, the king still realizes her intentions for this violent retaliation. The poet emphasizes this point when he has Beowulf state that it's better to avenge dear ones than to mourn for them, which is exactly what Grendel's mother is doing (*Beowulf* 1384). These passages stress that Grendel's mother is following the same act of vengeance killing that Beowulf lives by, but is not allowed to carry out the same act because of her status as a monster outcast.

The poet includes the dragon as an example of a monster who also has a vengeful reason for his monstrosity. The dragon awakens in anger due to the fact that a slave stole his treasure, so he vengefully plans to get it back. The poet reveals the dragon's vengeance plot:

> So the guardian of the mound,
> the hoard-watcher, waited for the gloaming
> with fierce impatience; his pent-up fury
> at the loss of the vessel made him long to hit back
> and lash out in flames
>
> (*Beowulf* 2302-6).

The dragon is angry that someone stole his treasure, and once he realizes that the man will not come back to face him, he searches far and wide for him and destroys everything in his path. He has no remorse for the destruction he is causing towards humanity and continues to terrorize them as a means of showing how much he wants his treasure back. The dragon is capable of carrying out the most acts of monstrosity due to his vast size and abilities, but his actions are no different than the monstrous characteristics of the human characters. For example, Beowulf notes

that the marriage between Ingeld and Freawaru will end in disaster if the two nations see the treasures of their deceased loved ones attached to the men that killed them. Like the dragon, the humans in *Beowulf* care deeply about their treasures and possessions. The poet uses the dragon's vengeance plot as a means to show humanity that killing others for treasures, no matter how valuable, is never a humane action.

The poet presents the dragon as the worst of the worst in that he is almost impossible to control in any way. In his essay, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, author J.R.R. Tolkien notes the significance of the dragon's presence in the poem. Tolkien says,

> …this dragon is real worm, with a bestial life and thought of his own, but the conception, none the less, approaches draconitas rather than draco: a personification of malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life), and of the undiscriminating cruelty of fortune that distinguishes not good or bad (the evil aspect of all life) (258-9).

In other words, Tolkien is stating that the dragon acts as a living example of greed and destruction, which is the evil force against heroes, and it represents cruelty towards everyone, which represents the evil of life. I agree with Tolkien that the poet designed the dragon to play a highly significant role due to his extremely harsh nature and dangerous desires. The dragon provides an excellent portrayal of greed and destruction, but so do the human characters in the poem that seek vengeance for inanimate objects. Humans are also capable of killing the innocent if they have the power and means to carry out that action. Tolkien states the Dragon's vengeance was undiscriminating in that the Dragon had no idea who he was destroying in his path,

and the poet presents the humans as also being capable of being undiscriminating in their monstrous actions as well. Due to the dragon's vast abilities and size, he serves the poet's purpose of representing what happens if people let their vengeance take over all parts of their humanity until they formally earn the title of monster themselves.

Arrogance Always Leads to Animosity

The poet portrays the humans and monsters as having the same amount of *hybris* that also puts humans on the path of being formally named monsters. The poet uses Grendel as a great example of a being encompassed by *hybris* due to so many years of being subject to living outside of society. The poet writes,

> So Grendel ruled in defiance of right,
> one against all, until the greatest house
> in the world stood empty, a deserted wallstead.
> For twelve winters, seasons of woe,
> the lord of the Shieldings suffered under
> his load of sorrow; and so, before long,
> the news was known over the whole world
>
> (*Beowulf* 144-150).

The poet portrays Grendel as ceaselessly fighting against the people of Heorot due to his immense physical power and *hybris*. Grendel's *hybris* is not just a result of his monstrous terror, but also due to the fact that he chooses to only attack Heorot due to his unhappiness with his social standing. The monster must hear the story of the

creation of man on a daily basis from the people of Heorot, but Heorot is not responsible for his birthright (*Beowulf* 87-92). Though Grendel's actions may not serve a concrete purpose, none of the humans driven by *hybris* seem to have very good reasons for why they choose to behave in the way that they do. Beowulf defeats Grendel and the other monsters to gain glory from God. It's a test for Beowulf to see whether God really sees him as a glorious warrior deserving of praise. Therefore the poet portrays both the humans and monsters as practicing *hybris* for selfish reasons that only benefit the prideful individual.

The poet has the dragon represent the most powerful being whose *hybris* can destroy entire civilizations due to his size and vast amount of power. The dragon has all the *hybris* of Beowulf; however, he's much more powerful in strength, which is how he's able to kill the much older and weaker Beowulf. Tolkien notes how creative the poet is for setting up the characteristics of the poem the way that he did as a means to send a message to his audience. Tolkien notes, "In considering a period when literature was narrower in range and men possessed a less diversified stock of ideas and themes, one must seek to recapture and esteem the deep pondering and profound feeling that they give to such as they possessed" (251). Tolkien is stating that we should give an immense amount credit to the poet for his original and substantial observations that he presents in his work. I believe Tolkien is absolutely correct in giving credit where credit is due through acknowledging the poet's ideas in this poem. The poet came up with the concept of having monsters and humans demonstrate the capabilities of vengeance, coveting, and *hybris*, which was an excellent feat for his time. The poet challenges the social structures of his

audience by showing how monsters like the dragon and human heroes like Beowulf possess many similarities with each other.

The poet concludes his poem with the idea that the shared monstrous characteristics of humans and monsters are unlikely to change in this society's future. The poet shows that there is a continuous representation of *hybris* in the poem and the *hybris* of humanity will continue even after the poem ends. After Beowulf's death, the poet reveals that the Geats stand vulnerable to the Swedes who desire to attack them. The poet writes, "So this bad blood between us and the Swedes, /this vicious feud, I am convinced /is bound to revive" (*Beowulf* 2999-3001). In spite of the numerous digressions depicting humans in battle with each other and the human attempts to stop them, the poet leaves an ominous message that blood feuds will continue to be driven by *hybris*. The only person who notes the importance of recognizing human's flaws with *hybris* is King Hrothgar and he tells them to Beowulf in a speech at the beginning of the poem, which Beowulf failed follow in his own reign as king. King Hrothgar laments to Beowulf:

> [God] permits [man] to lord it in many lands
> until the man in his unthinkingness
> forgets that it will ever end for him.
> He indulges his desires; illness and old age
> mean nothing to him; his mind is untroubled
> by envy of malice or the thought of enemies
> with their hate-honed swords. The whole world
> conforms to his will, he is kept from the worst

until an element of overweening
enters him and takes hold
while the soul's guard, its sentry, drowses,
grown too distracted

(*Beowulf* 1732-43).

The poet has King Hrothgar present this wise observation, which is the poet's main message he is trying to share with his audience. King Hrothgar notes humans take God's gifts for granted through indulging their desires or letting what they covet take over them. King Hrothgar also picks up on *hybris* in humans when he states that humans believe the world conforms to their will and possess 'overweening' attitudes that take over their souls. King Hrothgar knows that the majority of the people in his society forget that life is temporary and that nobody is capable of obtaining everything. The ingenuity of the *Beowulf* poet is that he has another character acknowledge the problems of humanity, yet there is nothing that character can do, but pass on his observations to the next generation with the hope that they'll listen. Though the poet does not have anyone learn from King Hrothgar's message, he includes this speech as a lesson that his audience should learn about not succumbing to the *hybris* that makes monsters of us. The poet makes it clear that *hybris* should be left to the heinous personalities of the monsters.

The poet concludes his poem with Beowulf's funeral as a lesson to what happens when *hybris*, coveting, and vengeance takes over the lives of humans. The poet has a woman lament about the horrible events to come now that Beowulf is dead. The poet writes,

A Geat woman too sang out in grief;
with hair bound up, she unburdened herself
of her worst fears, a wild litany
of nightmare and lament: her nation invaded,
enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles,
slavery and abasement. Heaven swallowed the smoke

(*Beowulf* 3150-55).

Through this intense and emotional plea of this woman, the poet reveals the reality of what happens when humans take on monstrous characteristics. The woman recites this horrific litany about how she predicts her nation will be invaded with mass amounts of casualties and the potential enslavement of the Geats. She recognizes that Beowulf's unplanned death has led to these events, but there is nothing anyone can do to stop them from happening. The poet leaves us with this pessimistic view in *Beowulf* to show what happens when people take God's gift for granted and forget that they're not immortal. As an added emphasis on this view, the poet has the Geats bury the treasures of the dragon, which he refers to as "useless to men now as it ever was" (*Beowulf* 3168). The final lines of the poem that the poet presents indicate that it's too late for society in the poem to rectify their mistakes, but there is still hope for the audience to learn that monstrous characteristics should never be the driving force behind humanity.

Conclusion

The *Beowulf* poet's depiction of his humans and monsters reveals that his society was able to acknowledge the monstrous characteristics that the human

characters possessed. The poet persuades his audience not to follow this society's example between the earlier warnings of King Hrothgar about never taking human life for granted to the woman's alarming plea about what happens when we incorporate monstrous flaws into our lives. The poet parallels humans' desires for glory and power within their society to monsters' determination to take over society, since both species use the same characteristics of *hybris*, coveting, and vengeance killings. The poet places the blame of the tragic ending of the people not on the dragon killing Beowulf, but on Beowulf's irresponsible decision to kill the dragon over protecting the people he reigns over in the name of *hybris* and glory. He is the reason his society is doomed and must face an attack by an invading nation that poses an imminent threat. The poet gives an intense and captivating warning about how humanity must reform their monstrous desires to avoid the potential for their own destruction.

Chapter 3: The Monster Within Us

Homer and the *Beowulf* poet revealed in their poems that humans have the capability of taking on monstrous characteristics in order to warn their audiences that they have the capability to become monsters. Thomas Harris takes the human monstrosity warning from these ancient works and emphasizes that contemporary society did not learn this lesson, and all humans are capable of becoming human monsters. Thomas Harris identifies the distinctions and the ambiguities in his definitions of the human and the human monster throughout his novels *Red Dragon* (1981), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), and *Hannibal* (1999). Harris characterizes humans as people who observe the laws that the government makes to protect them. He defines both humans and human monsters as having the same complexion, having the same occupations, and living in the same society. Like the humans and monsters in *The Odyssey* and *Beowulf*, the humans and human monsters in Harris's series also share the characteristics of coveting, vengeance, and *hybris,* though the humans that share these qualities are acting on their human monster side. The shared flaws in Harris's series can lead to one human monster murdering another human if they're selfish or seek enjoyment from this heinous act.

Like Homer and the *Beowulf* poet, Harris describes human monsters as having horrific capabilities, but in this case, it's a species killing their own species. Though Harris's human monsters consume men, they're also capable of other horrors, such as dismemberment, shooting, and sexual abuse as a means to destroy

other humans. Harris presents two categories of human monsters. In one category, the human monster embraces his or her monstrous characteristics for selfish enjoyment, like the majority of Homer and the *Beowulf* poet's monsters. The other category of human monster that Harris defines is an involuntary human monster who has no control over his or her mental faculties or actions, and therefore is more similar to the dragon in *Beowulf,* who only knows how to destroy. Since involuntary human monsters have no control of their actions, their human mentalities are absent because of the metaphorical presence that has taken over their minds. Harris is making a comment to late twentieth-century audiences that although monsters are no longer huge disfigured creatures, they pose a greater threat in our society due to the fact that they're human.

Harris's society and our own society are controlled by a government that provides a law enforcement to stop the human monsters, unlike Homer and the *Beowulf* poet's societies where human heroes killed monsters for glory. The human monster is defeated by being weeded out of civilized law-abiding society and locked up or being executed after going through the justice system. Harris's definition would not allow humans to commit violence towards each other unless it was for protection. Therefore, the most important human values that Harris emphasizes are civility and morality in a society where human monsters are everywhere and could be anyone.

An Overview of Harris's Series

In his first novel *Red Dragon* (1981), Harris depicts the downfall of a great human protagonist named Will Graham who falls at the hands of an involuntary human monster due to the manipulations of a detained Dr. Hannibal Lecter. In *Red Dragon*, Graham, who previously worked with the FBI to capture the human monster Dr. Lecter, must interview him from his asylum cell for information on Francis Dolarhyde. Dolarhyde is the involuntary human monster who is on the loose. Throughout the novel, Graham struggles with the fact that he and Dr. Lecter are very similar, which makes him fear that he will become a monster too. Harris has Graham allude to the conclusion that humans have dark urges, but potentially that darkness could be used to fight against the monstrosity that plagues our species.

In his second novel, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), an FBI rookie named Clarice Starling must interview Dr. Lecter to find out information about the involuntary human monster, Jame Gumb. Starling reveals information about her childhood to Dr. Lecter in exchange for information on her case. The novel ends with Starling defeating Gumb and Dr. Lecter escaping from custody. Though Starling is victorious in capturing Gumb, the novel begins the unraveling of the stable distinctions between humans and human monsters through the intimate dynamic between Starling and Dr. Lecter.

Harris's third novel *Hannibal* (1999) depicts the downfall of the human condition in that the human and human monster characters are indecipherable.

Hannibal takes place seven years after *The Silence of the Lambs* when Starling's FBI career is beginning to go downhill and Dr. Lecter is still on the loose. A convicted human monster named Mason Verger who is also a victim of Dr. Lecter enlists the FBI's help in capturing Dr. Lecter so he may carry out his own vengeance plot. Eventually, Starling meets up with Dr. Lecter and joins him in a life of cannibalism and monstrosity. Therefore Harris's argument comes full circle from the initial observation in his first novel to the final outcome of the transformation of the beloved human protagonist into a monster antagonist.

The Ambiguity of Modern Society

Harris progressively reveals the ambiguity of the human characters throughout his novels. Harris first alludes to this ambiguity in *Red Dragon* (1981) in which the protagonist Will Graham struggles with the fact that he caught Dr. Lecter because Dr. Lecter told him they're "just alike" (86). Therefore the ambiguity Harris presents is that all humans possess dark urges and therefore are all capable of monstrosity. Harris challenges the idea of humanity's ambiguous dark urges further in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) in which the human protagonist, Clarice Starling must work with the human monster, Dr. Lecter. Starling is the prime portrayal of humanity in this novel, but the ambiguity in her character comes from her monstrous characteristics to covet what she cannot control, to desire success because of a childhood vengeance plot, and to succumb to *hybris* when she has Dr. Lecter working by her side. Harris reveals that humanity is ambiguously capable of taking on the same characteristics as the monster. Harris brings his series full circle

in *Hannibal* (1999) when the distinctions between the humans and human monsters are indecipherable revealing Graham's initial observation that all humans have the capabilities of becoming human monsters.

The Reaction to Harris's Series

Due to the fact Harris's series is only thirty years old, it doesn't have nearly as many critical articles as *The Odyssey* and *Beowulf*. The few essays that address Harris's works are primarily focused on post feminist views of Clarice Starling as a female FBI agent and post queer theory perspectives on the involuntary human monster, Jame Gumb and his sexual confusion. No studies have been done on identifying the progression of the monstrous ambiguity of humanity within Harris's three novels. However, scholar Stephen M. Fuller and author Benjamin Szumskyj each observe Thomas Harris's choices for designing the characters and plotlines in favor of the monster, but don't identify the message he's trying to portray to his audience. Fuller focuses his article on why people were upset about Dr. Lecter and Starling's romantic pairing in *Hannibal* (1999) when Harris foreshadowed it in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) (820). Like Fuller, Szumskyj questions why audiences were upset about the romance between Dr. Lecter and Starling and views it as a stroke of genius on the part of Harris (200). Though both writers actively observe Harris's choices and decisions for the writing the ending of his series the way that he did, neither of them attempts to identify the important message Harris was trying to emphasize to his audience. I argue that it was Starling's transformation into a monster that made audiences unsettled by the fact that it's too simple for a human

to become a monster. Harris's audience preferred his novel, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), in which the distinctions between the human and human monster are more apparent, and the ambiguities of humanity are less prevalent. These twentieth century readers preferred Harris's traditional distinctions between the great human hero and evil human monster due to the fact that there is still a triumph for humanity. This reaction indicates that Harris's audience was not ready to accept the realization that monsters are no longer physically repulsive creatures from epic poetry, but could potentially be any human being.

The Monsters of Our Complexion

Harris's audience was appalled by the conclusion that they could become monsters because Harris's human monsters have the destructive mentalities of the ancient monsters that came before them. Harris's two categories of human monsters create equal amounts of destruction in different ways. The first type of human monster is the category that Dr. Lecter falls into, in which the monster kills people with no remorse and should be punished through life in prison or the death sentence. The other category consists of involuntary human monsters in which a human is taken over by a presence in their minds that they cannot control. Their punishment is to be locked up in an asylum away from society. Their monstrosity is an illness their humanity cannot overcome and hence involuntary. The inherent monstrosity that all of Harris's human monsters exemplify is ambiguous in that they're born into humanity and should act human, but they act upon their threatening natures.

Harris describes the first category of the human monster as beings that have full control of their minds and enjoy the act of killing their own kind by acting on their monstrous sides. The human monster antagonist of his novels is Dr. Hannibal Lecter, a cultured and highly renowned psychiatrist, who is locked up in an asylum in *Red Dragon* (1981) for killing and eating at least nine men. Dr. Lecter's psychiatric skills allow him to cheat the system and be placed in the asylum rather than jail. Harris explains what defines Dr. Lecter as part of the first category of human monster: 'He [killed people] because he liked it. Still does. Dr. Lecter is not crazy, in any common way we think of being crazy. He did some hideous things because he enjoyed them. But he can function perfectly when he wants to' (*Red Dragon* 68). Dr. Lecter enjoys killing and does not show remorse for killing another human. Dr. Lecter acts on his own covetous desires to kill and eat men or to misuse his psychiatric skills to destroy patients whom he does not care for. Harris distinguishes his humans from human monsters through having human monsters receive enjoyment out of committing heinous acts for their own selfish desires.

Harris uses Mason Verger as an example of a human monster who receives pleasure from killing and abusing other humans. In *Hannibal* (1999), Verger was found guilty of his monstrous actions towards children and was sentenced to five hundred hours of community service and therapy sessions with Dr. Lecter. Dr. Lecter gets him high on drugs and convinces him to feed his own face to his dogs. After Verger's disfigurement, the U.S. granted him immunity from prosecution (67). Due to his immense amount of power thanks to money that he gives to the political system, he's allowed to have a day-care facility for children in his home where he is

disgustingly allowed to upset them and put swatches of their tears in his martini glass (75). Since the FBI is obliged to him, he's able to capture Starling so he can lure in Dr. Lecter and have his wish granted of feeding him alive to pigs (117). The characters of Harris's novel have no sympathy for Verger's actions, but instead do what says because they covet what he'll pay them for their services. His disfigurement gave him full range of his monstrous capabilities and he uses them for his own selfish and horrible needs. Harris reveals Verger to be the epitome of a human monster who knows exactly what he's doing and rejects any of the humane characteristics he once had under the façade that his mutilation humbled and cured him of his earlier monstrosity.

Though Verger is the prime example of a human monster with no remorse, Harris created Dr. Lecter to function using both his human and human monster sides simultaneously, thus emphasizing the ambiguity found within all humans. Dr. Lecter is the permeable barrier between the human and human monster sides, and succeeds in converting Clarice Starling to his way of life. He desires to convince humans to give into their monstrous natures and is successful with Starling due to his brilliant and perceptive observations about her character. Harris designed Dr. Lecter to appeal and repulse his readers due to his ability to be a human and human monster simultaneously. Fuller describes the reader's ambivalent feelings toward Dr. Lecter. He writes,

> Lecter embodies all of the ideals that enlightened adherence to rationality has supposedly effected in humans, yet he murders quite instinctively and without detectable scruple, demonstrating a

> seemingly impossible combination—a refined civility and equally developed primitivism *(*823-4).

According to Fuller, Harris designed Dr. Lecter to represent the ideal enlightened human who also has the ability to kill quite instinctively, which Fuller claims is an impossible combination. I agree with Fuller that the representation of Dr. Lecter as equally civilized and monstrous is unique, but Fuller overlooks the fact that Harris presents Dr. Lecter in his novels for the purposes of identifying the ambiguity of how humans can easily become monsters. Through having Dr. Lecter act on both his human and monster sides simultaneously, Harris conveys to his audience that they have difficulty condemning the monstrous acts of this man when he's highly appealing in his civilized manner.

Like Fuller, Szumskyj states that Harris made Dr. Lecter a character whose lifestyle is equally horrifying and attractive to his audience. Szumskyj writes,

> Harris empowers [Dr. Lecter] with a trait rarely seen in serial killers, let alone villains as a whole, so to make him intellectually attractive and in a frightening manner, free of a uncontrollably psychotic nature so to differentiate him from thousands of other killers, real and fictional alike (206-7).

Szumskyj's point is similar to Fuller's in that he notes the attractiveness and fear that Dr. Lecter evokes in the reader, but he also notes that Dr. Lecter is free of a psychotic nature to single him out from other killers in our society and Harris's series. I agree with Szumskyj that Dr. Lecter is equally frightening and alluring and that he's free of psychological ailments, but Szumskyj overlooks the reason why Harris made the decision to create Dr. Lecter this way. Though Harris created him in a way that would make him stand out from other human monsters, he made him

seductive and scary to the audience to resonate the fact that any person can relate to him even though no one would want to admit that they could identify with a cannibalistic monster.

Harris depicts Dr. Lecter as the hybrid form of the human and human monster by giving Dr. Lecter the ability to make one forget that he is capable of being dangerous. In *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), Harris presents Dr. Lecter as a cultured intellectual who lines his asylum walls with books and can paint the Palazzo Vecchio and the Duomo from memory (18). These characteristics of beauty and intelligence make it hard for one to remember that Dr. Lecter is a bloodthirsty human monster capable of great, but terrible things. Harris demonstrates the capabilities of the human monster as Dr. Lecter escapes his cage by biting an officer while listening to J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*:

> The *Goldberg Variations* interested him structurally. Here it came again, the bass progression from the saraband repeated, repeated. He nodded along, his tongue moving over the edges of his teeth…With the leverage twisting [Officer] Pembry's belt tight around him, he hit Pembry in the throat with his elbow and sank his teeth in Pembry's face. Pembry trying to claw at Lecter, his nose and upper lip caught between the tearing teeth (235-8).

The contrast between Dr. Lecter biting this man to death and being soothed by the music brings up a frightful notion that Dr. Lecter can be a human and a human monster at the same time. He can become as monstrous as a human monster can possibly be and uses this classical piece of music to bring him back to a human temperament though his pulse remains at eighty-five BPM. He can become either being with the snap of his fingers. Though humans and human monsters all relate to

at least one half of Dr. Lecter, they cannot just switch their humanity or monstrosity on and off as he does. Humans do not just kill their fellow man and move on, and human monsters don't just calm down immediately after they've committed a heinous crime. Thus, Harris uses Dr. Lecter to emphasize the horrible monstrous ambiguity found within humanity through showing how dangerous, but possible it is to be both beings simultaneously.

Dr. Lecter is able to understand humans and their capability to be monsters through acting on both of his human and monster sides at the same time. Harris uses Dr. Lecter to dissect the layers of the human condition of the human characters in all three novels. Consequently, Dr. Lecter uses his perceptiveness to cause physical and mental harm to humans he dislikes. Dr. Lecter finds out that Graham was formerly institutionalized after killing a human monster for his own protection He tells Graham that the reason he felt guilty about killing the human monster was because he probably enjoyed doing it, thereby revealing a human's worst fear. Dr. Lecter says, 'We don't invent our natures, Will; they're issued to us along with our lungs and pancreas and everything else. Why fight it?' (*Red Dragon* 348). Harris shows us that the ambiguity of the human and human monster is that we're both capable of being either being by our natures. Dr. Lecter tries to convince humans that killing is in our nature and that it is a characteristic that is a part of the human species. He asks Graham why humans try so hard to fight it when it's natural. Graham discovers that humans must act against their inherent monstrosity, just as the human monster tries to reject his or her humanity. Dr. Lecter is the most frightening example of someone who has enacted both sides, can convert others,

and proves that monstrosity is a natural part of every human that they choose not to act upon.

As Harris's symbolic figure that encompasses his monstrous side with human civility, Dr. Lecter uses his psychiatric skills to peel back the layers of the human condition and to convince humans to convert to his way of life. In *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), Dr. Lecter explains to Starling that the connection that humans and monsters both share is coveting, which is evident in Harris's definition of the two beings having the same capabilities. The distinction between the two groups is that monsters act on what they covet and humans merely possess these wanton desires. He explains, 'We begin by coveting what we see every day. Don't you feel eyes moving over you every day, Clarice, in chance encounters? I hardly see how you could not. And don't your eyes move over things?' (227). Dr. Lecter says coveting is a quality that is found within all humans. Starling covets having control over things she cannot control, which begins with her desire to overcome childhood trauma, but later develops into coveting for Dr. Lecter's love. Harris's emphasis on the lesson of coveting through Dr. Lecter's character indicates that coveting is an example of one of the monstrous characteristics within all humans.

Though Dr. Lecter appears only to covet human flesh, Harris's decision to make him simultaneously refined and primitive would indicate that he desires to be both human and human monster—the exception that inverts the order between the two sides. Both Dr. Lecter and Starling are able to obtain what they covet, thereby acting on their forbidden desires and demonstrating the ambiguity of succumbing to

their monstrous urges. Starling becomes exactly like Dr. Lecter in being both a human and human monster thus revealing that it's easy for a human to become a monster if they desire something they cannot have and sacrifice everything to obtain it. Therefore, Harris reveals that obtaining what you covet with the intention to cause harm is the pathway for one becoming a human monster.

The Tragic Involuntary Human Monster

Harris provides a balance between the human and the first category of human monster, which is not the case with the involuntary human monster. The involuntary human monster is what Dr. Lecter is pretending to be so that he may live in the asylum instead of in jail. Their connection to the ambiguity of the human and human monster is that their humanity is completely absent. The only human qualities that these involuntary human monsters have are their appearance and the fact that they were born the same way as the rest of the human population. Involuntary human monsters are victims of their own minds, which are taken over by a metaphorical monster that will not give up its reign. Harris defines involuntary human monsters as having no motive, no informants that are aware of their actions, and the person has no awareness of the actions their body is performing without their consent (*Red Dragon* 8). Francis Dolarhyde is a representation of this type of monster in *Red Dragon* (1981). Dolarhyde thinks that he's become William Blake's painting entitled *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun,* and even goes through his transformation by having the dragon tattooed on his back (356). The Dragon takes over Dolarhyde and makes him murder entire families

while committing heinous acts on their bodies. Dolarhyde follows *its* orders until it takes him over completely, to the point where Harris has the Dragon take over Dolarhyde's point of view. Harris writes, 'He still looked and sounded like Francis Dolarhyde—the Dragon was a very good actor; he played Dolarhyde well' (408). Harris uses this metaphorical dragon as the monster parasite that latches onto Dolarhyde's brain and slowly drains away his humanity to the point where Dolarhyde no longer exists. Harris shows through Dolarhyde that it's extremely difficult for this type of monster to get his or her humanity back, since being taken over removes the human part of one's mind.

By the conclusion of *Red Dragon* (1981), Harris explains that Dolarhyde no longer exists; there is only the Dragon that must be captured by the laws of human society. Though Dolarhyde allows the Dragon to take over his body, he gets in too deep to the point where the Dragon takes over his mind completely. Dolarhyde tries to fight his inner monster when he falls in love with a woman named Reba and wants to make sure that the Dragon part of him does not harm her. He fearfully ponders how to save his love: 'He knew who spoke and he was frightened. From the beginning, he and the Dragon had been one. He was Becoming and the Dragon was his higher self. Their bodies, voices, wills were one. Not now. Not since Reba. Don't think Reba' (357). Harris emphasizes that Dolarhyde wants to save Reba from his Dragon half, but cannot as the Dragon has full control over his mind. Dolarhyde explains to Reba, 'It's all over for me. I can't leave you to Him…You know what He'll do? He'll bite you to death' (420). Harris reveals in this passage that although Dolarhyde loves Reba and wants to protect her from the Dragon, he views the

Dragon part of himself as an uncontrollable and unstoppable monster. Harris defines the solution to stopping this type of monster as putting them in a mental hospital so they can be treated and kept from hurting anybody else (168). Thus, due to the absence of their humanity, Harris reveals that involuntary human monsters cannot be held accountable for their heinous actions.

Harris defines the involuntary human monster as having the same coveting abilities as the other type of human monster, which is dangerous because all they do is covet. The concept of coveting is what turns Dolarhyde into the Dragon. Dolarhyde desired to be more than himself, which made him susceptible to manipulation and thus made it easy for him to be taken over by the Dragon. Jame Gumb, the other human monster in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), allowed himself to be taken over due to coveting as well. As Dr. Lecter notes, Gumb covets what he sees and in turn wants to become something *more* (227). His monstrosity comes from him using women's skins to create a woman suit to resolve his sexual frustrations. He's not just a confused transsexual who happens to be a monster; he desires to go through the metamorphosis of a butterfly or moth to complete his transformation. Harris explains what triggers his monstrosity:

> [Jamb Gumb found] a struggling cocoon that had been thrown in with the [dead] butterflies and it climbed out. There was dust in the air from the butterflies…He watched it pump up its wings. It was a big one, he said. Green. And he opened the window and it flew away and he felt so light, he said and he knew what to do (173).

Harris takes the natural occurrence of the caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly and turns it into an unnatural occurrence, as this disturbed human

monster attempts to go through the process himself using the bodies of other humans. Through coveting to be something that he may never be, Gumb allows the concept of the butterfly or moth's metamorphosis to consume him to the point where the women he murders are referred to as *it*. He has removed the human part of his mind and believes that he may create a skin suit in order to become beautiful. After Starling shoots him, his last words are asking his moth how it feels to be so beautiful (348). By creating a disturbed man who is taken over by his coveting to become a woman, Harris reveals that coveting is a feeling that consumes these involuntary human monsters entirely, to the point where the act of killing is incidental to their selfish needs.

Harris presents both of these covetous characters as less compelling and interesting than Dr. Lecter due to their one-sided portrayal of monstrosity. Harris makes Dr. Lecter the more compelling character due to the fact that he emphasizes the curious ambiguity of being both a human and human monster simultaneously. According to Fuller,

> Neither [Dolarhyde or Gumb] shows Lecter's intellect, his panache, his taste for good wine and food, or his beguiling and winning humor… Harris's ensuring that his audience responds favorably to Lecter and not to Dolarhyde and Gumb assures readers' complicity in dissolving the distinctions that appear to keep these personalities discrete (824-5).

I agree with Fuller that Dolarhyde and Gumb are kept separate from Dr. Lecter, but Fuller overlooks the fact that it's because Dr. Lecter belongs in a different category of human monster. Dr. Lecter has the capacity to understand that he is a human

monster, but Dolarhyde and Gumb do not have the capacity to comprehend that they've become monsters. Harris's audience connects more to Dr. Lecter because they recognize both the human and monstrous characteristics that he possesses, whereas Dolarhyde and Gumb's humane traits are absent. Therefore Harris sets up his novels so that his audience will identify more with the human monsters rather than the involuntary human monsters.

Harris includes other involuntary human monsters who are Dr. Lecter's inmates in the asylum. These men's mental faculties are so far gone that they have no idea that what they've done is monstrous, nor do they comprehend their surroundings. It may be going too far to call these disturbed men monsters, but their *actions* cannot be defined as anything but monstrous. One example of this type of monster is Dr. Lecter's inmate Sammie, who put his mother's head in the collection plate at church. The congregants had been singing 'Give of Your Best to the Master' and that was the most precious thing Sammie had to give. (*Silence* 148). A psychiatrist named Dr. Alan Bloom diagnosed Sammie with Hebephrenic Schizophrenia, a disease where a person has disorganized speech, thoughts, behavior, and emotions and is irretrievably lost. Therefore, Dr. Bloom is indicating that Sammie cannot function on his own and does not belong to the human or the first human monster category. Dr. Lecter realizes that Sammie does have some control over his functions when Sammie sends him a letter that says: "I wan too go to Jesa/I wan too go wiv Criez/I can go wiv Jesa/ef I ac rell nize" (147). This translates into Sammie wanting to go with Jesus Christ and that he can go if he acts real nice. Dr. Lecter concludes that Sammie is really religious, is angry that Jesus is

so late getting him, and due to his structured meter, Dr. Lecter diagnoses him with Catatonic Schizophrenia, which is treatable (149). Consequently, Sammie is an involuntary human monster that just needed someone to help him get his humanity back.

Harris set up his novels so that his audience would have sympathy for the involuntary human monsters in his first two novels, but none for the human monster Verger in *Hannibal* (1999). According to Szumskyj, this is due to the fact that Harris gave Verger control over his own actions. Szumskyj states, "However, while some readers and critics have expressed sympathy toward Dolarhyde and Gumb, none could be given to Verger who, unlike his counterparts, can psychologically stop himself"(202-3). Szumskyj identifies the distinctions between the human monster and the involuntary human monster in that the latter has no control of his or her actions, but Szumskyj doesn't state why audiences all fully condemn Verger and not Dr. Lecter. Harris makes Dolarhyde and Gumb merely involuntary monsters who are horrific, but can't be faulted for their mental instability that drives them to be heinous monsters. Graham and Starling must stop Dolarhyde and Gumb, respectively in order to keep society safe from their uncontrollable and atrocious actions. By targeting both Dr. Lecter and Starling as his enemies, Harris makes Verger a despicable character who we don't want to succeed, and as a result, the audience finds itself cheering for the victory of the monster Dr. Lecter. Therefore Harris presents Dr. Lecter as the audience's exception to despising the human monster.

Harris distinguishes the differences between the two categories of human monsters very well, but also manages to intensely emphasize the merging human and human monster characteristics within Dr. Lecter. Dr. Lecter has the ability to cure and help Sammie as well as Dolarhyde and Gumb, but chooses not to save them. He knows how to stop Dolarhyde and Gumb, but chooses to turn Dolarhyde on Graham and gets into Starling's head in return for giving her information about Gumb. He also has the ability to help Sammie go back to the human category, but will never give him help due to his own selfish needs. Harris created Dr. Lecter in this manner to show how great an asset he would be to the law enforcement and asylum if he were only a part of the human society. If he hadn't enacted his monster side, he would choose to save these involuntary human monsters from being taken over by their monstrous minds and he could catch them before they could kill any more people. Harris created the involuntary human monsters and made them former patients or admirers of Dr. Lecter, whom he refuses to treat or to prevent from causing destruction. Dr. Lecter's refusal to help these involuntary human monsters indicates that he has erased his human emotions, though he possesses an infinite amount of intelligence on the subject of the human condition. Dr. Lecter therefore represents a lost hope for humanity that Harris creates as a fearful revelation for our society.

The Downfall of the Contemporary Human

Harris emphasizes the instability of the constructs of his society where the line between the human and human monster is very frail. He presents the characters of Will Graham, a forensic scientist who must work for the FBI due to his intuitive skills, and Clarice Starling, an FBI trainee who has some background in behavioral science. Dr. Lecter tries to influence each of them by making them doubt that they are not capable of monstrosity. In *Red Dragon* (1981), Graham has retired from his life working for the FBI after sustaining a gruesome wound while capturing Dr. Lecter. His intuitive abilities are the reason that he was able to capture Dr. Lecter and why the FBI asks for his help once again in catching Dolarhyde even after his horrible ordeal. Graham's gift of being intuitive comes at a great cost, as he realizes that he fully comprehends why a human monster commits murder. Special Agent Jack Crawford and psychiatrist Dr. Bloom observe the conflicts that Graham's gift presents. Dr. Bloom explains, "He can assume your point of view, or mine—and maybe some other points of view that scare or sicken him. It's an uncomfortable gift, Jack. Perception's a tool that's pointed on both ends" (194). Graham not only knows how to catch a human monster using his gift, but he also understands how they think and struggles with the idea of how easy it would be to become one. Therefore Graham has the awareness and the realization of the ambiguous monstrosity of the human condition that Harris uses to depict the human monster and human.

Harris provides Graham and Dr. Lecter with the same tool of perception in order to express the thin parameters that separate humans from human monsters.

In that respect, it's easy for Dr. Lecter to play off Graham's insecurities about becoming a monster. The FBI forces Graham to interview Dr. Lecter for information, believing that it takes the brilliant mind of Dr. Lecter to catch the involuntary human monster, Dolarhyde. Dr. Lecter takes this opportunity to further Graham's fears that he and Graham have the same mentality and therefore are capable of the same things (86). Dr. Lecter tells Graham that the reason he was able to capture him is because they're both *alike* and Graham cannot stand to listen to that comment because he knows it to be true.

Harris's decision to have Graham and Dr. Lecter have the same talent, but opposite perspectives on humanity reveals what drives humans and human monsters individually. According to Fuller, "Lecter has a point [that he and Graham are alike] because Graham's talent for arresting serial killers rests on his uncanny ability to project himself and imagine exactly what gratifies the murderer about a particular killing" (825). In other words, Fuller notes that Harris gave Graham the ability to comprehend what makes a human monster commit a murder. I agree with Fuller that Graham and Dr. Lecter have the same ability of perception, but he overlooks the fact that Harris uses this shared characteristic as Graham's drive to remain human. After Dr. Lecter tells Graham they're the same, Graham struggles with his ambiguous dark urges. Harris writes, "[Graham] was numb except for the loss of numbness. Walking with his head down, speaking to no one, he could hear his blood like a hollow drumming of wings…He had the absurd feeling that Lecter had walked out with him" (*Red Dragon* 86). Graham wants to be good, but the power behind Dr. Lecter's intrusive perceptions eats at his mind believing that he may

resemble the monster in more than just appearance. Therefore Harris reveals that although Graham is aware of his ambiguous dark desires, he's driven by fear that he'll someday give in to these desires to become a monster.

Harris further manipulates Graham's insecurities as a human when he discusses the moment in Graham's past when he had to kill an involuntary human monster. Though ancient humans had the power to slay the monster as a means to protect humanity from being destroyed, Harris points out modern humans only kill as a last resort because that's an immoral characteristic of human monsters. Prior to the events in the novels, Graham had to kill an involuntary human monster for his own protection, and checked himself into a mental institution (116). Graham realized that although society would view him as a hero, he committed an action that was meant for monsters and couldn't accept that fact during his stay at the mental facility. When Graham's period in the hospital is revealed by the press, Graham's stepson Willy asks him if killing somebody when there's no other option feels bad and he replies, 'Willy, it's one of the ugliest things in the world' (171). Harris has Graham's drive to remain humane come from his fear of becoming a human monster and therefore Graham dedicates his time to helping the FBI make the streets safe for people (195). The ambiguity of Harris's human characters as determined in *Red Dragon* (1981) indicates that our dark urges have a deep presence within us that we struggle to fight against on a consistent basis.

Harris has Graham conclude that monstrosity is inherent in all humans and that he was correct to obsess over maintaining his own humanity. At the end of *Red*

Dragon (1981), Graham analyzes the human and human monster conditions after he is almost killed by Dolarhyde and sustains a facial wound and internal injuries. As he lies in his hospital bed, Graham describes the ambiguity of monstrosity in all humans. Harris writes, "He wondered if, in the great body of humankind, in the minds of men set on civilization, the vicious urges we control in ourselves and the dark instinctive knowledge of those urges function like the crippled virus the body arms against" (454). Harris has Graham realize that we're one dark urge away from losing our battle against the 'virus' that will change us into a monster. There is a danger in having this knowledge that Graham is aware of because it shows that humans have to attack the darkness within their minds to keep it from coming in to light. Thus, Harris explains that the ambiguity of humans' monstrous urges will always be present, but it is what we do with the acknowledgment of these dark urges that determines if we're humans or human monsters.

Harris's decision to have Graham brutally disfigured is deliberate because Graham never acted upon his monstrous desires no matter how strongly they were connected to him. Harris only gives Graham the purpose of recognizing the reality of humans having the ability to become monstrous. Though Dolarhyde is defeated, Graham ends his role in Harris's series as a brutally harmed and tragically pessimistic figure. Szumskyj addresses Harris's deliberate decision to have *Red Dragon* end with a horribly disfigured Graham pondering about the monstrous capabilities of humans. Szumskyj cites an email by his colleague, author Daniel O' Brian, that questions Harris's motivations for making Graham suffer. O' Brian's email states:

> I'm intrigued by the idea that, far from being redeemed and rewarded for his selfless act, Graham suffers horrible punishment. What is Harris trying to say about the nature of heroism? Why does he not give Graham at least a glimmer of hope…When Hannibal Lecter claims Graham is denying his true nature, is Harris suggesting that Graham damns himself (Szumskyj 209)?

I agree with O'Brian that as the novel's voice of reason, Graham's treatment in the novel is very grim and unfortunate. In other stories, a human protagonist's downfall normally indicates that they represent a martyr that dies for a worthy cause, but Graham does not die, and his message is not heard. Graham's warning regarding the dark urges that humanity must fight against is not a lesson that is followed by any of the characters in Harris's series. Since Graham fully understands the meaning of this message and the truth about humans, he lives his life in both physical and mental pain, understanding too well the tragedy of humanity.

However, I disagree with O' Brian's remark that Harris damns Graham for denying his true nature. At the end of *Red Dragon* (1981), Graham has full comprehension of the monstrous characteristics of humans, yet he does everything in his power not to act upon them. Harris writes, "Graham knew too well that he contained all the elements to make murder; perhaps mercy too" (454). Graham is so afraid that he could become a human monster that he fights to maintain his humanity. Graham never covets to gain anything, he's very humble and does not take on *hybris*, and he never seeks vengeance on anyone including Dr. Lecter who made his life miserable. Graham hopes that because he's intuitive about his own monstrous capabilities that he may counter them with his desire to remain human. Harris has this noble and good man be tragically disfigured in order for his audience

to hear his message about how we're all monsters, but also Graham's determination to hope that he may remain human in his tragic state of being. Harris allows the monster to win and receive everything he wants at the end of the series in an unfortunate and ironic twist that changes the way we've viewed human and monster representations in centuries' worth of literary works.

The Triumph of the Flawed Human Hero

Harris makes Graham's personal pessimistic views concerning his ambiguous monstrous capabilities come true within the character of Clarice Starling. Starling is first introduced in Harris's second novel, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) as an unconventional FBI trainee who is enlisted to interview Dr. Lecter for information regarding the involuntary human monster, Jame Gumb. Though Dr. Lecter did everything in his power to harm Graham within his asylum cell, he develops respect for Starling and helps her with her case in return for personal information about her childhood. Graham represented Dr. Lecter's equal that realized the monstrosity within all humans, but refused to act upon his own dark urges. Dr. Lecter marked him as an adversary that needed to be stopped, which is why Graham is physically harmed at the end of *Red Dragon* (1981). However, Dr. Lecter has positive feelings towards Starling in that he respects the young rube and the two of them have cat and mouse dialogues under *quid pro quo* conditions Dr. Lecter gets a personal account of Starling's childhood and Starling gets to crack Jame Gumb's case by herself (*Silence* 163). Fuller notes that American society loved Starling: "Americans generally responded favorably to Starling's pluck, her self reliance, her violence, and

her holding to a recognizable code of moral simplicity" (822). I agree with Fuller that American society responded positively to the idea of the humble and innocent female hero going into the monster's cell to get information to capture the involuntary human monster, Gumb. However, Harris only allows for Starling's role as a human hero to be temporary as she continually explores the ambiguities of her own monstrous urges with Dr. Lecter's assistance.

Harris's novel *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) maintains some distinctions between humans and human monsters though Harris begins portray some ambiguous flaws within Starling, including coveting, vengeance, and *hybris*. The novel presents a strange relationship between Starling receiving information from a contained Dr. Lecter about her case in exchange for information about her personal life. Without the negotiation that allows Dr. Lecter to give information about Gumb in return for Starling's childhood memories, Starling would never have been able to capture the human monster on her own and have her childhood trauma resolved (167). Starling reveals her deepest secret to Dr. Lecter regarding her childhood desire to rescue the horses from her cousins' farm in order to 'make the lambs stop screaming', but as a child she could do nothing to save them. Dr. Lecter gives her the information she needs to stop Gumb and to finally make the screaming end when she's able to rescue Gumb's victim and kill him (230). Through persuading one monster to receive information to defeat another, Starling proves herself to be both clever and physically strong—a combination of both Odysseus and Beowulf. As a result of this new twist on the traditional hero and monster story, *The Silence of the Lambs* became a very popular novel. According to *Publishers Weekly*, *The Silence of*

the Lambs (1988) sold over ten million copies and had become an award-winning feature film before the premiere of *Hannibal* (1999) (Quinn 1999). Therefore, Harris followed the human hero story tradition of the monster being vanquished by the human for the sake of humanity and received very positive feedback from American audiences.

Harris initially presents Starling as a noble and brave human hero in *The Silence of Lambs* (1988); however, the way in which she is heroic masks her underlying monstrous flaws that she uses in order to be successful in her plight against Gumb. Starling possesses covetous reasons as to why she wants to win her case. She portrays this monstrous desire when she sacrifices her mind to Dr. Lecter in return for his knowledge about her case. Starling had one instruction from Chief Crawford to not put any personal facts in Dr. Lecter's head, but she rejects this rule to fulfill her covetous desires to have control over everything (6). From this exchange, Harris reveals that Starling is haunted by a childhood experience where her cousins' slaughtered horses on their farm, and she couldn't save them (163). Starling reveals to Dr. Lecter that she is haunted by this experience, and she sacrifices the inner workings of her mind to obtain control over this situation.

Starling's dedication to the case is because she wants to rectify childhood woes, so her motivations for winning this case are also driven by vengeance. In other words, she wants to punish Gumb not only for his heinous actions, but because she can receive closure on her childhood trauma through gaining control. Consequently, Starling's desire to have complete control over this situation leads to her *hybris* of deciding to solve the case on her own without the help of other agents

or the SWAT team. Harris writes, "Still, to be so close, to get a hand on the rump of it, to have a good idea a day late and wind up far from the arrest, busted out of school it all smacked of losing…Starling had to think about that a little; her career hopes were twitching like a phantom limb" (325). Harris reveals that Starling is more concerned with solving the case by herself and being successful in her career endeavors than stopping Gumb from killing any more women. Thus Harris reveals that Starling's role as a human hero is selfish because of the monstrous characteristics she incorporates in capturing Gumb.

Harris explains that Starling's monstrous characteristics are what make her a hero, but the close relationship she develops with Dr. Lecter is what drives her to be like him. After Dr. Lecter gives his final advice to Starling, she sees him in a positive light. Harris stresses the affirmative aspects of Starling's last meeting with Dr. Lecter: "And that is how he remained in Starling's mind. Caught in the instant when he did not mock. Standing in his white cell, arched like a dancer, his hands clasped in front of him and his head slightly to the side" (*Silence* 231). Starling's last moments with the monster provide her with only positive characteristics of him. He cured her screaming lamb neurosis, by giving her the information she needed to stop Gumb and gain her status as a formal FBI agent. In this moment, Starling does not view Dr. Lecter as 'Hannibal the Cannibal', but instead as a fellow human who helped her heal from her childhood trauma. She forgets that Dr. Lecter is a human monster due to his ability to use his human qualities to help her. This event leads to the permeability and eventual disintegration of the monster and human distinctions in *Hannibal.*

Destroying the Pillars of Humanity

Harris's third novel in the trilogy *Hannibal* (1999), interchanges the human and human monster's roles a great deal that by the novel's conclusion, it's unclear if a character is a human or a human monster. The ambiguity that Harris presents is emphasized greatly, since the humans and human monsters choose to act on both of their sides at the same time. Harris sets up this chaotic truth at the end of *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), when Dr. Lecter escapes and promises that he won't come after Starling. Seven years later, he's still on the loose and Starling's reign as the FBI's hero begins to collapse after a drug raid goes bad and she has to kill an armed woman holding her baby in her arms. Though normal protocol would have Starling undergo a formal investigation, the FBI wants to help Verger capture Dr. Lecter using Starling as bait.

Harris tarnishes the FBI's role as the law enforcement against the human monster by having them give into their monster sides: they help the politically connected and wealthy human monster Verger. Verger is a convicted sadistic pedophile who wants the FBI to capture Dr. Lecter, so he can personally kill him. John Lanchester of the *London Review of Books*, wrote this about the FBI in the novel: "The FBI of *Hannibal* is…a poisoned, dysfunctional institution" (Fuller 828). I agree with Lanchester's observation due to the fact that the FBI is supposed to be holding up the constructs of human society, but they instead follow the orders of Verger due to their covetous desires for a large sum of money. Since Verger corrupts the motivations of the FBI, their viability as a source of human heroism is ruined and

they no longer promote the stability of human society. Harris destabilizes the FBI to promote Starling's eventual transformation from human to human monster.

Harris's monstrous FBI acts as a domino effect for Starling's transformation from human to human monster. The covetous officers create confusion as to who is trying to defeat whom, since it's unclear who is a human and who is a human monster. Starling wants to capture Dr. Lecter before the FBI, claiming: "I'd be glad if he got back in custody without anybody else getting hurt—including him" (*Hannibal* 274). This is the dynamic portrayed in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) that she'd like to go back to, because it allows Dr. Lecter to be not only the human monster kept behind bars, but also a confidant who helped put her at ease after a life taken over by childhood trauma. This ending would have restored order for the ambiguous monstrous characteristics of the human characters, but Harris decides that he must bring his trilogy full circle by making Graham's conclusions about humanity project through Dr. Lecter and Starling.

All hope for the stability of human and human monster distinctions in Harris's trilogy is challenged by Starling's actions at the conclusion of *Hannibal* (1999). She's captured by Verger's men, but is saved by Dr. Lecter and he surprises her with a dinner for two with the main entrée of a monstrous FBI agent's brain. Starling dines on Dr. Lecter's feast and cracks jokes: "See if I sound like Oliver Twist when I ask for *MORE*" (542). Thus, in a disturbing twist of fate, Harris merges Starling with Dr. Lecter, which leads to the beauty becoming the beast, the villainous FBI agent being feasted upon, and the monster saving the day. Dr. Lecter cured

Starling of her childhood trauma, but that trauma was the foundation of what made her a hero. When that's removed and she is cured of any lingering fears, she entrusts herself to the monster and takes on his lifestyle.

Scholar L. H. M. Ling views Harris's conclusion as Dr. Lecter remaking Starling to be like him and writes, "Ultimately, the mad psychiatrist remakes Clarice in his image…a bejeweled cosmopolitan who attends opera around the world with that cannibal of exquisite taste, Hannibal Lecter" (392). According to Ling, Harris had Dr. Lecter make Starling in his image, which implies that he takes on the role of God in a horrific manner. I agree with Ling that Harris has Starling become like Dr. Lecter, but Ling overlooks the reason why Harris made this decision. Harris is telling his audience that not only do we have the capabilities to be monstrous, but also it's a transformation that can occur easily to even the noblest individuals. Starling has been influenced enough by Dr. Lecter to become a human monster like him, rather than allowing him to accept her for being the human hero Harris's audience believed her to be. Harris confirms the horror of what happens when humans and human monsters simultaneously act on both their human and human monster sides.

Harris concludes *Hannibal* (1999) with a summary of Starling and Dr. Lecter's lives together as a monstrous couple, which acts as the fulfillment of the observations of human monstrosity that were made by Graham in *Red Dragon* (1981). Harris warns his reader in the last two sentences of *Hannibal* to be wise and never approach the couple, stating: "For either of them to discover us would be fatal. We can only learn so much and live" (544). In these concluding sentences, Harris

places himself and the reader as individuals who are in danger of meeting Starling and Dr. Lecter. She has now become like him and she supports his love of culture and dines on people. The latter half of the quotation relates to the characters of the novels who tried to understand Dr. Lecter, but failed miserably. Starling gets to *know* Dr. Lecter and in turn she becomes like him. Harris's horror story becomes a love story, and the human and human monster have a fairy tale ending.

Harris's decision to make Starling a monster in order to have her run off with Dr. Lecter is a plot that was innovative to Harris's audience because they didn't see it coming. Szumskyj observes that Harris's decision was unique to prior themes in literature, but that he made this decision for the devotion that he had towards Starling. Szumskyj states,

> To the well read individual, one could cite numerous heroic figures from literature whose fate—determined by god or human alike—did not forebode well… Harris so loved his creation of Clarice Starling, he seemingly was unable to kill her and wanted her to live, though not through a stereotypical ending of defeating Lecter. He worked hard to create a fate where she could both live and go through a metamorphosis, into a new state of being. Harris succeeded (208).

The essence of Szumskyj's argument is that Harris had a couple decisions regarding the fate of Starling, but he chose the one in which she could live and change who she is completely. Szumskyj states that Harris could have killed her off like previous heroes in order to make her a martyr, or Harris could have had her be victorious over Dr. Lecter, which is the other common theme for the human and monster story. I agree with Szumskyj that Harris had all of these choices at his fingertips, but there is a particular reason that he chose to conclude Starling's story in this way and not

in the other two. If Harris had killed off Starling, then she would remain a tragic protagonist, and although monstrosity would prevail, the audience would not receive the message that they are capable of monstrosity. If Harris had killed Dr. Lecter then audiences would be angry due to their secret admiration for the human monster. Though audiences were shocked by Starling's transformation, this was the only conclusion that Harris could use that would emphasize his message that we all possess the capabilities to be monstrous.

Harris challenges the mindset of his audience by concluding *Hannibal* (1999) with a shocking twist that confirms that all humans can become monsters. In the middle of *Hannibal*, Harris asks his audience what they can handle as monstrous and foreshadows the shape of things to come. He writes, "Now that ceaseless exposure has calloused us to the lewd and the vulgar, it is instructive to see what still slaps the clammy flab of our submissive consciousness hard enough to get our attention" (144). Harris is asking his audience where their limits lie in what they're able to handle. After the release of *Hannibal*, Harris got his answer from his audience's negative reviews regarding the end of his novel.

The Monster in the Mirror

American society did not react positively to the events Harris presented at the end of *Hannibal* (1999). They couldn't believe that Starling would just drop everything she has worked for as a good human to become a monster who is incapable of remorse. One reader's review said: "Not even one star, what a horrible ending…I can only say that this ending was the biggest disappointment…I wish I

hadn't wasted my time and excitement on this book. Please don't waste yours—read 'Silence' again." Another reader similarly responded: "Harris's worst I have to say I loved it until the last 100 pages, but the end killed me. [Starling] would never give into [Dr. Lecter] like that!" (Fuller 819). The consensus of the readers' negative reviews blame Harris's ending as the reason that they did not like the novel. Their comments generally condemn Harris's book because of Starling's transformation into a human monster and romance with Dr. Lecter.

Harris's dedicated readers attacked him for his decision to end the series the way he did, and they went so far as to question his writing capabilities. One reader who entitled his comment: 'Surely this is a joke' wrote, "the last 50 pages or so where the plot goes cuckoo land will finish you off. I got my copy for free and was still ripped off" ("Customer Review" 9/22/00). Similarly, another reader entitled his comment: 'A major let down; don't bother' and wrote, "What was Harris thinking, or not thinking, when he 'penned' the last chapters?" ("Customer Review" 1/21/00). A more recent reader who gave the novel a good review still couldn't help, but note his anger with Harris's ending: "Admittedly, the only part of the book I would go as far to say I hated it, I didn't like the ending. I feel it didn't stay true to the character of Clarice Starling that had been so tediously laid out for the reader in the series" ("Customer Review" 9/26/09). Harris angered his fans by having Starling suddenly change into a monster. Harris's audience only focuses their anger on the ending because they didn't want to believe that Starling's transformation could be possible. Harris made Graham's early observation of humans and human monsters in *Red Dragon* (1981) foreshadow what he would do to Starling's character in *Hannibal*

(1999); the American public hated that he turned her into a monster. Harris therefore proved that the American public could not handle the truth about how simple it is for a human to become a human monster if they give into their monster side.

The aspect of Harris's novel that angered the American public the most was not only the fall of their beloved hero, but also an ugly truth about humans that they just couldn't bear to think about without resentment. Readers felt that Harris betrayed them. They preferred that Starling and Dr. Lecter's relationship should exist with a cage in between them—a barrier that would keep the line between human and human monster intact. When Ridley Scott made the film Hannibal (2001) he ended it with Starling handcuffing herself to Dr. Lecter to capture him and Dr. Lecter chopping off his left hand to get away from her. Scott created an ending in which a line is made between the human and human monster and equilibrium is restored. Starling is able to stay a good human, while Dr. Lecter does not hurt her when she tries to capture him and he escapes from her grasp in a monstrous way. Harris's converging definitions of the human and human monster proved to be too much for his audience to handle, which shows that people of the late twentieth century desired for there to be distinctions between their literary humans and monsters.

Confirming the audience's fears about how we all have the capabilities to become a human monster, author Stephen King described Harris's novel as: "One of the most frightening popular novels of our time, the other being *The Exorcist* by

William Peter Blatty" (*New York Times*). King puts two distinct novels against each other that he describes as being the most frightening. The difference is that *The Exorcist* is about a monster that uses a human body as its vessel, while *Hannibal* concludes with a woman who suddenly decides to become a monster. King, who is a renowned author of the horror genre, probably took this idea into account when he uttered this statement. He knew how frightening it is that a levelheaded person could just turn her life around for a life of cannibalism with another cannibal. The most frightening concept is that a character that America loved and trusted sacrificed her humane characteristics to be the lover of a human monster. Thus, Harris sheds light on a new level of monstrosity in which even the most trusted hero could suddenly become the most sadistic monster.

Harris pushed the limits of what he thought his audience could handle, but King claims *Hannibal* (1999) is only meant for the eyes of a select audience. King writes, "Hannibal is a balloon Harris bats steadily onward, probably with a grin on his face. The balloon happens to be full of poison and bad dreams, true, but as was previously suggested, Harris is not writing for everyone. This is authentic witch's brew, eye of newt and haunch of redneck, not chicken soup" (*New York Times*). King is stating that Harris succeeds in launching the concept of monstrosity within humanity, but that the message is only meant for an audience who can accept his truth. Though I agree with King that *Hannibal* is definitely not for the fainthearted, the question that remains is clear: who is capable of hearing Harris's message and who is not? There is no rational reason why Harris would write his third installment of his series for a select few readers after the success of *Red Dragon* (1981) and *The*

Silence of the Lambs (1988). The audience's general consensus about the ending of *Hannibal* (1999) indicates that Harris attempted to challenge his audience with Starling's transformation, but that the audience wasn't ready for such a groundbreaking truth. The individuals who accepted the novel's ending are what King would refer to as above 'chicken soup' literature and are willing to accept the monstrous capabilities of every human. However, Harris had to accept the fact that he upset some of his dedicated readers because they didn't have the will to admit that all humans do have the potential to become monsters themselves.

Conclusion

Over the course of three novels, Harris uses his two human protagonists to reveal how easy it is for a human to suddenly switch sides and become a monster. In *Red Dragon* (1981), Graham realizes how humans must resist their dark urges in order to avoid becoming monsters, and although he remains human, the involuntary human monster Dolarhyde, tragically and permanently wounds him. In *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), Starling is able to stop the involuntary human monster Gumb, but her relations to Dr. Lecter make her become like him. They simultaneously act on their human and monster sides, posing a very dangerous threat in a pleasant and cultured human guise. America's uproar after Harris's novel *Hannibal* (1999) revealed that society disliked the reality of their beloved hero suddenly changing from a human protagonist to a human monster antagonist. Thus they revealed that society was not ready to look that far into their true selves. Harris pushed the mindsets of his audience a bit too far with the events in *Hannibal* (1999). Today his

novel, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) remains to be the most popular of his novels and an award-winning classic feature film because it maintains distinctions between the human and human monster.

Harris's depiction of modern day humans and human monsters reveals that society has come a long way since the eras of the epic human hero and monster. Homer and the *Beowulf* poet had humans and monsters as two separate species and showed that the distinction between them shrinks when each being takes on the other's traits or is manipulated by a higher power. Harris however, shows his ambiguity as the inherent monstrosity within all humans, and progressively reveals this monstrosity from the initial observation in *Red Dragon* (1981) to an actual example in *Hannibal* (1999). Harris is revealing the ugly truth that not only does the monster walk among us, but that anyone has the potential to act on their monster side. Dr. Lecter and Starling embrace this ambiguity by acting on both sides simultaneously, which makes it extremely dangerous to know who is a human and who is a human monster. Therefore, Harris is telling us that humans and human monsters are both unstable and undetectable revealing a whole new perspective on life that Homer and the *Beowulf* poet only considered to be a small ambiguity in their definitions of humans and human monsters. Harris changed the playing field for human and monster literature, but his novel, *Hannibal* was met with a sudden shock from his audience who wasn't ready to handle the truth. It's quite possible that Harris's conclusions were too ahead of their time because audiences couldn't accept that if one of the most endearing human characters could suddenly become a monster then it's possible that it could happen to any human in their own society.

Conclusion

As a part of humanity, we expect that we're the most dominant species on earth. We have the power to stand tall in the world amongst other creatures because our physical and verbal features give us that right and privilege. With this perspective, it would be a reasonable assumption that writers would create anti-human beings that threaten our abilities as a means to show the greatness of the human race. My preconceived notion before I began this project was that tales about monsters always featured a triumphant hero who did everything in his power to restore order and maintain humanity. However, after I read the human and monster themed works written across the literary timeline, I realized that the intention of these works was not to make us feel good about our species, but to warn us about what our species could become. Though many scholars would like to believe that writers create these stories in favor of humanity, the themes and examples presented by Homer, the *Beowulf* poet, and Thomas Harris reveal that for almost three thousand years we've been warned about the potentially monstrous tendencies of the human condition in popular literature.

The ambiguities noted between the monstrous behaviors of the human characters and the human characteristics of the monster characters contribute to the idea that monsters are representations of our species' worst capabilities. Homer, the *Beowulf* poet, and Harris tried to emphasize this fact to their original audiences through examples in their literary works. Due to the continuous popularity of *The*

Odyssey, *Beowulf,* and Harris's series, it's apparent that their lessons are relevant today and have evolved over the centuries of the written word.

At the beginning of the recorded written word, Homer knew that humans could not always be the dominant and flawless species. Homer demonstrates this view when Polyphemus succeeds in punishing the humans, and Homer reveals that humans and monsters have equal opportunities to succeed. Homer's early account of leveling the playing field between humans and monsters led to a shattering view that humans are not always deserving of praise. He expresses the fact that sometimes piety does not lead to reward and protection when faced with the worst hardships in life. Homer challenged the sacred Greek law of piety in order to reveal the truth that sometimes humanity cannot be consistently attended to no matter how diligent and civilized they behave.

Consequently, the *Beowulf* poet added onto this concept of human and monster equality by defining the human society as blessed and the monster society as cursed. However, he reveals that these established constructs are obsolete because of the actions of each species. The humans have trouble refraining from murdering one another using their own sets of rules like wergild, and monsters are only cast out of society due to their births and not their actions. The poet wrote this poem in order to emphasize the need for morals and civility in society. Though all people in *Beowulf* are given the right to live in society, they have the ability to make mistakes, and they are constantly feuding with each other, causing as much destruction as the monster invaders. The poem depicts how humanity struggles to

maintain civility and faith using laws like wergild, but the ugly truth is that it's within the nature of humans to kill in this society, and they must fight against that nature. The poet is stating that it's very easy to slip up and that it's especially easy if humans forget their existence is a gift from God.

Harris's trilogy incorporates the ideas that Homer and the *Beowulf* poet presented millennia. He revealed that the monster and human are one and the same, and he emphasizes that any human can become a monster. Our society now recognizes that humans can be monsters, but the uproar from Harris's novel *Hannibal* revealed that we're not ready to recognize that good people can suddenly drop their humanity for a life of monstrosity. The progression of the monster in literary works has led to the conclusion that all humans *can* be monsters whether they choose to recognize this fact or not. The monsters come from us because they're a part of us, and they've been created by us.

What Binds Us Together?

Throughout my study, the three writers presented similar themes that revealed what characteristics primarily connected the human characters to the monster characters. The concept of coveting is an example of a characteristic that humans and monsters possess or experience throughout all three works. Homer presented coveting as the downfall of the humans, but the definition of the monster. The *Beowulf* poet has monsters and humans equally covet material possessions and power, which leads to destruction and their own demise. Consequently, Harris agrees with the *Beowulf* poet's theory when he draws the conclusion that humans

and monsters covet what they see every day. Therefore all humans and monsters throughout literature have the capabilities to covet, which is an unsettling notion. This discovery leads to the conclusion that our deepest desires have no limits.

These desires can also take the forms of vengeance and *hybris*, which also unite humans and monsters throughout literature. Homer demonstrated the equality of humans and monsters by having the humans attempt proper vengeance and fail, although the monster's heinous vengeance is successful. The *Beowulf* poet took this initial equality of human and monstrous vengeance and made it central to his poem. He presented the idea that humans must fight against the urge to kill those who have killed their loved ones. On the other hand, monsters seek vengeance for either the same reasons or for power and social standing in society. For both species, their attempts at vengeance fail. Harris also reveals that vengeance involves a human using their monster side to carry out their plot and emphasizes that all humans are capable of using the three flaws simultaneously to get what they desire. All three authors reveal that vengeance for selfish reasons automatically leads to a downfall due to the presence of monstrosity. Similarly, the concept of *hybris* also leads to the downfall of the human and monster characters within these three works. Like vengeance, it leads to the downfall of humans in *The Odyssey*, emphasizes the desire for material possessions and power for both species in *Beowulf*, and results in humans acting on their monster sides in Harris's series.

What Do These Findings Say About Us?

The monsters in this study reveal more about the human condition through a progression of the literary works' themes of the realization of our flaws and capabilities. Homer's monster revealed that although people are pious beings, sometimes the hardships of life allow monsters to win, which demotes our view of human dominance. This teaches us a lesson on being thankful for every moment and every day. In *Beowulf*, God blessed humanity with the gift of living in a society, and he cast out the monsters due to their blood relation to Cain, the first human murderer. However, humanity struggles to maintain civility within their society, not just with the monster attacks, but also amongst other nations of people. Practices like wergild and retribution through services and marriages attempt to maintain civility in the society that was meant to be humanity's reward. However, these constructs of society fail due to humanity's monstrous desires for power.

Harris takes these ancient concepts from Homer and the *Beowulf* poet to apply to contemporary society. He reveals that not only can humans be monsters, but also that we all have the capabilities of being monsters ourselves, which differs from the *Beowulf* poet's view because Harris's audience openly condemns humans as monsters. However, many people in contemporary society do not want to accept that they could become a monster. The themes throughout literature indicate that the concept of the human and monster similarities is not a recent discovery, but in fact a progression throughout the ages that has always been present. The monster is not just a being we created, but also a being that we created in our image. The

monster serves as a constant reminder of what can happen if we don't strive for a world of stability, civility, and peace.

The problem that remains is where literature featuring humans and monsters will go from here now that humans have been presented with the idea that they can be monsters. The progression of the human and monster slowly resembling each other from Homer to Harris shows the great deal of time that it took to finally accept that humans could be monsters. Though contemporary society recognizes that humans can be monsters, a little over a decade ago, readers were angry by Harris's revelation that they could easily become a monster. It seems unlikely that this idea of humans choosing to become monsters will be pushed further considering that humans have been warned through literature for thousands of years. However, the monster still stands for our worst capabilities and can therefore continue to be used as a model for humanity to learn about their own monstrous behaviors. Perhaps there is a writer who will be able to push Harris's message even further through sending an even more horrifying message through his or her monster characters, or perhaps writers will create monsters in a more sympathetic and humane manner in order for humanity to identify the human qualities within the monster. Either of these scenarios can be achieved with a great writer who has something to say about the human condition and a big imagination to dream up horrific or sympathetic monsters that will help deliver a message about humanity and push their audience's limits.

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