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# Monomaniacal Monstrosity in Hawthorne and Poe

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**Monomaniacal Monstrosity in Hawthorne and Poe**

By

Johnathan Steven Woelfel

A Thesis

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Thesis Committee:

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## Abstract

Monsters hold a special place in literature and storytelling in cultures all around the world, so much so that every culture, in any time or place, has its own stories involving some type of monster or another. American culture is no exception, but the movement towards monstrosity in literature is nothing new in American culture. This project examines the monstrous traits exhibited by the characters in various short stories by 19<sup>th</sup> Century American authors Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe. Through the lens of David Gilmore's Monster Theory, presented in *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*, this project shows how Hawthorne and Poe's monomaniacal characters fit into academic theories of monstrosity as well as the cultural implications of monsters in early American Literature. These implications include, but are not limited to, commentary on American culture, religion, the individual, human nature, human psychology, and human sympathy.

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research project is to discover and assess how the characters of Nathaniel Hawthorne's short stories fill the role of literary monsters due, in large part, to the excessively cruel and beast-like actions they display because of their monomaniacal personalities. It is the monomaniacal aspect of Hawthorne's characters that leads them to indulge in monstrous activities and inhumane cruelty. That is, this project seeks to show how Hawthorne's monomaniacal characters possess the same traits, behaviors, characteristics, manners and conducts as other monsters of the literary variety. As a result, this project seeks to argue that one potential, and reasonable, interpretation of Hawthorne's stories is to view them as horror pieces, evidenced by the use of elements that coincide with monster theory and monstrosity in a historical and literary sense, before, contemporary with, and after Hawthorne's time. Research suggests that Hawthorne was commenting on the contemporary culture of his time, 19th century America, or commenting on the cruel and unrelenting hatred exhibited in America's past, such as at the Salem witch trials. Hawthorne viewed his culture as the product of the cruel and grotesque American past. Hawthorne's reasons for presenting his short stories as horror stories is to show the potentially destructive and hateful nature mankind is capable of exhibiting.

More importantly, Hawthorne is warning against his contemporary American culture, where self-reliance and individualism helped to produce a culture that was perhaps less empathetic than cultures of the past, or, for that matter, in other parts of the world. However, although Hawthorne specifically addresses American Transcendentalism as a major cause for the

decline of sympathy in American culture, going as far as to depict Transcendentalism as a monstrous giant in his story "The Celestial Railroad," the lack of sympathy and compassion Hawthorne addresses can also be correlated with many of the historical events happening in early American society, most of which started before and continued throughout Hawthorne's lifetime. For example, war was a constant in Hawthorne's lifetime. America had gone from Revolution, to fighting the Barbary Pirates, to the War of 1812, to the Mexican-American War, and then to the Civil War in less than 100 years. Moreover, Americans committed numerous massacres and atrocities against Native Americans during Hawthorne's lifetime, including the Trail of Tears in 1838. Furthermore, there were numerous rebellions and slave revolts in America throughout the early 19th century. Additionally, slavery was still legal in the United States during Hawthorne's lifetime, and the Constitution of the United States of 1787 still contained the three fifths clause within Article 1, Section 2 ("Charters of Freedom"). These events and cultural norms effected the apparent decline of sympathy in American culture that Hawthorne comments upon in his stories and is one reason so many of Hawthorne's works focus on America's past.

Additionally, this project means to show the potential impact and importance of viewing Hawthorne's characters as monsters in both the literary field and in terms of the history of horror. This impact would include a more horrific and grotesque reading of Hawthorne's works, which are largely viewed as Romantic, not horror, fiction. Reading Hawthorne's characters through the lens of monstrosity would also allow for a new, and perhaps better, understanding of the history of horror fiction and provide another means of comparison between Hawthorne's work and the work of Edgar Allan Poe, who is largely considered a writer of the horror genre.

Therefore, reading Hawthorne's characters as monsters, due to their monomania, which causes them to act in monstrous ways, would allow for a more horrific reading of Hawthorne's work, thus allowing for a comparison and conversation between the works of Hawthorne and writers like Poe and Stevenson.

Hawthorne's tales are not strictly morality tales, and so we cannot take a simplified approach to interpreting his work. The use of supernatural or magical elements in Hawthorne's stories seems to go beyond a strict sense of religious commentary or representation. For example, Hawthorne uses monsters in "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" in order to help achieve a religious commentary on Puritans, like Endicott, and comment on their severity towards more humane and moral, albeit physically grotesque, beings. This is one example of the reason Hawthorne uses monsters in his stories; other examples are provided in the following section concerning Chapter One, which is where the explanation of how and why Hawthorne uses monsters will be addressed.

When one thinks of literary monsters they are apt to let their mind wander to figures such as Grendel, from the English epic *Beowulf*, or Mary Shelley's Frankenstein monster, or even, perhaps, Arthurian giants, ogres, and dragons. Where monsters are concerned one would rarely, if ever, think of the literary figures created by Hawthorne— but this is to do both Hawthorne and monsters, in their literary incarnations, an injustice. Hawthorne's characters possess traits, aspects, qualities, and characteristics which fit into many existing theories concerning the literary formation of monsters. Monster theories will be utilized to support the claims being set forth in the argument. David Gilmore's theory, presented in *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and*

*All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*, is the backbone of the theory being utilized for the study of Hawthorne's literary monsters. This theory will help to show that Hawthorne's characters, unexamined in the light of literary monstrosity, are examples of literary monsters in the views of modern monster theory. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque, from his work *Rabelais and His World*, will also be used to supplement and reinforce the argument being presented.

These works both contribute to the study of monstrosity in literature across time and space, and they are not limited by time periods, geographical locations, or cultures. Gilmore focuses his attention and research on both the physical and psychological attributes of the monsters used in his study. The mental aspects of monstrosity presented in Gilmore will be important to this study, however, it will also be shown that Hawthorne's human characters still exhibit the physical aspects of Gilmore's monstrosity. Gilmore's theory relies on the meaning of specific body parts, their use and form, and the fear and boundary crossing exhibited by monsters in literary works. Gilmore's theory is ideal for interpreting Hawthorne's work because the theory deals with the exhibition of an excessive human trait, such as monomania, and the monsters Gilmore deals with are metaphorical, as are Hawthorne's.

Additionally, in Gilmore's work the monster is a cultural figure and embodiment. The monster both warns and informs and represents something other than itself; it serves, almost always, as some sort of commentary or warning against the culture it is excluded from. For this reason, more than any other, the monster was a perfect motif and literary theme for Hawthorne's work. The monster is difficult to classify, not falling completely inside or outside of cultural norms and acceptance. The monster who incites fear is a sort of forbidden desire, as

they have a cultural agency closed to the conformist and regular member of a society or culture. Gilmore focuses much of his theory on the warnings and signs, or metaphors, which monsters stand for. Gilmore relies mainly on the symbolic expressions of cultures that monsters represent, which ties very nicely into the work being presented in this project, as they coincide with Hawthorne's own use and reasons for having monsters in his stories, to serve as signs, warnings, and metaphors for cultural depravity. Such a theory allows for a deeper and more inquisitive questioning of what makes a monster a monster, thereby allowing more room for a more liberal interpretation of characters such as Hawthorne's.

Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* will also be used, however, it will be applied sparingly. The theory of the grotesque will be taken from this work by Bakhtin. This theory is strongly connected to the ideas of horror and human depravity, and to the idea of "otherness." Much of the focus of the theory is on the body, and much of the focus taken from this theory will focus on the mouth, eating, drinking and speaking; however, it has merits outside of those restraints. There is much merit in the concepts of excess and rebellion to authority, both of which tie into Hawthorne's works, however, the focus of the theory of the grotesque will be used mainly because of its ties to the idea on carnival, which is used by Poe in "The Cask of Amontillado." In Bakhtin's work on the grotesque, things such as exaggeration, hyperbole, and expressiveness all play important roles. This theory could be used to a further extent, however, for the purpose of this project it will be limited to its focus on carnival and laughter.

Furthermore, the case for monstrosity also ties strongly into the literary concepts of "other" and "otherness," especially in a literary sense. To provide a sense of clarity, for this

paper, the term “other” is defined as referring to any member(s) of a group that is different from a larger accepted group, such as an outcast, social pariah, or grotesque being. The “other” is a being that is distinctly different or alien from society, an outsider who is dissimilar to the collective social conscience, or the self. “Otherness” refers to any and all characteristics associated with the “other,” or a state of being that is separate from a collected social identity. “Others” and “otherness” in literature are often associated with monstrosity or monstrous characteristics. The subsequent sections provide descriptions of what each chapter of the thesis will address.

In the first chapter of this thesis project I will focus largely on using existing monster theory for the examination of several of the characters present in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short stories. These theories are, in many ways, the limiting and evaluating factor for Hawthorne’s characters. This project is not trying to create a new theory, but the project seeks to show how the characters can be read into existing theories or be interpreted through the lenses of current monster theory. The argument will center on reading Hawthorne’s characters as literary monsters based upon the criteria that the theories of Gilmore and Bakhtin associate with the monster. The simplest explanation for the application of theory is to show how Hawthorne’s characters line up with the utilized theories, and, then, to show the similarities in the actions and cruelty exhibited by the monsters and the monomaniacal characters Hawthorne has created. The argument will start with an evaluation of Hawthorne’s characters in comparison to monster theory.

This chapter seeks to show how Hawthorne’s characters fit into those theories, the

limitations and interpretations available from each theory, and to provide examples and traits of Hawthorne's characters for comparison in chapter two. Hawthorne uses monsters for a variety of reasons, depending on the story. In "The Birthmark," Hawthorne uses monsters like Aylmer to comment on the dangers of science in his increasingly secular culture, and the potential dangers of purely scientific, not moral, knowledge. In "Endicott and the Red Cross," Hawthorne uses Endicott as a monster, due to his monomaniacal nature, to warn against cultures that have no room for growth or differences of opinion and cultures that accept only one standard of living, thought, and lifestyle. Likewise, Ethan Brand's limestone heart is more than a simple hardening of the heart that represents one man's loss of sympathy and compassion for mankind; it is also a commentary on the declining nature of brotherhood and family in modern society and a warning against the dangers of a society full of persons who care solely for themselves, and are not concerned with how their actions affect others. Furthermore, Hawthorne uses the snake living in a man's bosom in "Egotism" as a symbol of and warning against Satan and pride, the seemingly unquestioned acceptance of sinful arrogance in American society in his time. Finally, the giant Transcendentalism present in "The Celestial Railroad" serves as a cultural commentary on the religious nature and spirituality of American Transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau, which differed greatly from Hawthorne's own views of religion. Although the monstrosity presented in each tale stems from a different excessive human trait, the monstrosity always stems from some monomaniacal obsession that influences the characters' personas and actions.

This chapter is fundamental to arguing for the comparing and placing of Hawthorne's characters into the horror genre, and the chapter unifies monster and cultural studies theories

with textual evidence from Hawthorne's works to help build and support the case being put forth, which, in short, is that the monomaniacal obsessions of Hawthorne's characters lead them to commit heinous and inhumane acts that lead the characters into a state of monstrosity. This, in turn, allows for Hawthorne's tales to be read in the light of horror fiction, not just Romanticism.

However, Romanticism is still important. As a Romanticist, Hawthorne has a love and reverence for the past. Such is the case in "The Birthmark," as the work has a very medieval feel to it. For example, Romanticism has been described as, "the revival of the life and thought of the Middle Ages" (Agrawal 1). Often Romantic pieces incorporate medieval elements. Unsurprisingly, Romantic literature has much in common with the medieval genre chivalric romance, such as Chrétien de Troyes's *Arthurian Romances*. Both types of romances tended to focus on nature, and monsters and alchemy were not uncommon tropes. Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" has a heavy focus on the individual intellect and talents of Aylmer. Likewise, Aylmer attempts to use science to rationalize, and subsequently control, nature. The story also depicts the beauty, awe, and reverence for nature while also incorporating a sense of horror.

Although Hawthorne makes reference to the discovery of electricity and the Royal Society in the story, "The Birthmark" still has a Medieval feel to it. Aylmer's experiments feel more like alchemy than science, and he is still working to produce the philosopher's stone, a common theme in literature throughout the Medieval period and the Renaissance. The story even references Roger Bacon, and Aylmer's library is filled with the works of medieval philosophers whose works mirror his own. It follows, then, that Hawthorne may also have wished to make

connections with tropes and ideas of the past in his writing; I am specifically speaking of monsters and grotesque beings.

This could also help explain Hawthorne's subtle use of monsters in "The Maypole of Merry Mount," "Rappaccini's Daughter," and "Egotism; or, The Bosom-Serpent." Moreover, Hawthorne writes about witchcraft and magic, often associated with monsters. Henry James even acknowledged that "Egotism" influenced his own work "The Jolly Corner," which could be said to be a piece of literary horror. The comparisons and connections here are not meant, at least at this point, for deep analysis, but comparisons between the nature and characteristics of the characters as they pertain to, and coincide with, the elements of monster theory presented in chapter one. Comparisons may be made to the Frankenstein monster, Grendel, Arthurian giants and ogres, and even the Green Knight. These comparisons are not meant to derail, but rather reinforce, the monstrous characteristics presented in Hawthorne's characters.

Several of Hawthorne's characters possess traits that would signify them as monstrous, and, although there is little written about the subject, there are more than a few comparisons to be drawn from Hawthorne and other writers of his period. In chapter two, comparisons will be drawn in regards to works by Edgar Allan Poe. In chapter Two, several of Poe's stories will be assessed similar to the way Hawthorne's stories were addressed in Chapter One.

Hawthorne's characters are not decidedly mad; they are, however, obsessive and compulsive, driven, often, by one idea or goal, one purpose, and their monstrosity lies, in part, in the actions associated with that monomania, not necessarily the madness of their mental state. The monstrosity, associated with monomania, presented in the stories stems largely from a

psychological need for release and immorality in an increasingly secular society. Hawthorne and Poe are critiquing the declining morality and sympathy within their society. The two authors, in their stories, offer psychological representations of men who lack moral guidance and the effects of such men on the world around them. This monomania is the key feature and driving force behind the monstrosity that is manifested and exhibited by Poe and Hawthorne's characters, and it is the monstrosity that stems from the monomania that leads to characters that are severe, cold, and pitiless towards their fellow men. Monomania and monomaniacs are not new discoveries in the works of Hawthorne, but interpreting monomania through a lens of monstrosity is a new concept in studying his work. Comparisons of monstrosity connected with the mental state will be made with characters from the works of Poe, namely, Montresor, in "The Cask of Amontillado;" Egaeus, in "Berenice;" and the unnamed narrators, in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat." All four pieces are horror fiction, and the characters' obsessive nature connects well with the nature of many of Hawthorne's characters due to their clearly obsessive and monomaniacal behavior, which is what drives their acts of madness. Moreover, "The Cask of Amontillado" takes place amidst Carnival, a theme inextricably linked with the theory of the grotesque presented by Bakhtin.

The project will close with a conclusion after chapter two. Thus, the project will start with analysis of the works of Hawthorne and then transition into an analysis of the works of Poe. Following the second chapter on Poe, the project will then transition into a concluding section which will reiterate the main points and tie together the significance and importance of this project, as well as its potential impact. The concluding section will complete the project.

## Chapter One: MONSTERS AND THEORY

“Man Differs More from Man than Man from Beast”- John Wilmot

Nathaniel Hawthorne is perhaps the best known of America’s Romantic writers.

Hawthorne’s novels and short stories have been a rich and rewarding source of research for literacy scholars for decades, but, like all great writers, the research concerning his works is far from exhausted. The purpose of this paper is to expand the research regarding a yet underdeveloped and marginalized theme in Hawthorne’s writing, the theme of monstrosity. This essay therefore argues that in his short stories Nathaniel Hawthorne develops a theme of metaphorical and psychological monstrosity based on the actions and beliefs of his monomaniacal characters; more specifically, the characters’ monstrosity stems from their obsessive natures, ability to induce fear, excessive cruelty and unmitigated hatred or indifference towards humanity, and moral degeneracy rather than their physical appearance.

To argue that Hawthorne develops a theme of monstrosity in his short stories it is first important to define what a monster is. From the giant in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Dragon in *Beowulf* to the Vampire in *Dracula* and the Basilisk in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* monsters take on many different forms and appearances. Often, however, the greatest monsters in literature are overlooked due to their simplicity. Those monsters are men.

A monster can be any creature, though typically found in legends, myths or horror literature, who is repugnant and may cause or induce either fear or physical harm due to their

unsightly appearance or their actions; the word itself, "monster," comes from the Latin term *monstrum*, which means an aberrant, or anomalous, occurrence, usually biological, though not always, that was often seen as an indication that there was something wrong, or immoral, with the natural order (Wardle 102; Beagon 127; Staley 109, 113). Monsters are, in most cases, "dangerous objects of fear" (Gilmore 6). This is no doubt the case with the monomaniacal characters of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Typically, the word monster suggests something that is evil, malevolent or malignant. In most cases monsters are morally and ethically objectionable, or disagreeable. The physical appearance of monsters is often hideous or freakish; sometimes these distasteful or shocking traits stem from a psychological root rather than a physical one, which is the case in Hawthorne's short stories. A person who is excessively obsessive or cruel can be as monstrous a character as Grendel or Harpin of the Mountain. Gilmore argues that "The organic components constituting the monster are symbolic manifestations of emotions displaced, or projected in visual form" (Gilmore 190). In Hawthorne's case, the emotional monstrosity of his monomaniacal characters is manifested psychologically rather than physically. Hawthorne's monsters are metaphorical monsters, and "the monster is a metaphor for all that must be repudiated by the human spirit" (Gilmore 12). This metaphorical monster is precisely the type of monster Hawthorne develops in his short stories, and the aforementioned moral and obsessive standards are the basis of evaluation for the characters in this essay.

Another important term that needs to be defined for this project is monomania. Monomania is, by definition, a "mental illness especially when limited in expression to one idea

or area of thought,” or an “excessive concentration on a single object or idea” (“Monomania”). For the purpose of this project, monomania will cover any obsession or neurosis categorized by a single thought or an excessive or compulsive fervor or interest in a single object or idea, or the like. Monomania is a common trait which possesses many of the major characters within both Hawthorne and Poe’s short stories, although only Poe uses the term directly. However, Hawthorne uses language to indicate singular, all-consuming obsessions without room for other ideas or attentions within his characters’ minds. The source of monstrosity in both Poe and Hawthorne’s literary characters is connected to their monomania and obsession.

## Chapter Two: THE MONSTEROUS CREATIONS OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

The monsters Hawthorne presents are not always physically grotesque or deformed, they are, rather, what one might call monsters of the mind who exhibit debased human traits, such as wrath, cruelty and obsession towards idealism and indifference towards humanity. Throughout his short stories, the monomaniacal characters Hawthorne has created can easily be seen as metaphorical monstrosities that serve to both warn and instruct his audience, as well as serve as signs and commentaries on Hawthorne's culture. Throughout his short stories, Hawthorne's monstrous villains are continually found to be in obsessive endeavors, which is what tends to drive the monstrous elements of Hawthorne's characters. This is certainly the case for Hawthornean characters such as Ethan Brand, Richard Digby, and Aylmer.

According to David Gilmore, "Monsters occupy 'peripheral space' in all cultural traditions" (192). Much like monsters in mythological stories, or even in the tale of *Beowulf*, monsters in the physical world of Hawthorne's short stories are not at the center, rather they are the outliers, the others. Hawthorne's monsters, like the monsters of literary tradition, occupy a space between what is real and unreal and what is, more importantly, permitted and forbidden (Gilmore 192). However, it isn't just about monsters, but what those monsters mean, especially within a given culture, and why and how the monster and the culture are important. Due to the importance of culture, the theories of Cultural Studies will also be used in interpreting and assessing Hawthorne's literary works.

As a field, Cultural Studies rejects absolute and universal accounts of cultural practices,

meanings, and identities. Instead, Cultural Studies focuses on theoretical, political, and empirical cultural analysis as it concentrates on the, often political, dynamics of contemporary cultures. Cultural studies scholarship studies how human history, human traits, and human conflicts affect and create culture over time. Additionally, cultural studies focuses on how practices within a culture relate to other, wider, systems of power and influence. Examples of such systems include class, sexual identity and orientation, ethnicity, ideology, religion, gender, and national formations. Instead of viewing cultures as fixed, stable, or unchangeable, Cultural Studies examines the fluidity and inconstancy of the interacting and ever-changing practices and processes that make up, and occur within, cultures.

Many of these issues, such as history, religion, conflicts, and practices become increasingly important when examining and interpreting Hawthorne's literary artwork. Reading Hawthorne's characters as cultural monsters allows one to see his characters as resisting and negotiating with Western hegemony, and more specifically nineteenth-century American Culture. The resistance to and negation of a dominant cultural hegemony implies further ties to cultural studies (Appadurai). Hawthorne's work is deeply embedded with cultural issues, blending history, psychological themes, and symbolism to comment on the past and present culture in New England society (Howe 633). Like all writers, Hawthorne is commenting on his culture, but some issues are more personal for Hawthorne, such as religion and America's Puritan past. Hawthorne was a descendent of John Hathorne, the only judge who never repented for his actions and involvement in the Salem witch trials, and it is likely that the "w" in Hawthorne's name was added in his early 20s in an attempt to dissociate himself with his

infamous forbearer (McFarland 18).

As a result, many of Hawthorne's short stories address issues involving New England Puritans and their effect on his contemporary American culture (Bell 173). Moreover, Hawthorne's later writings, for example, "The Celestial Railroad," depict and reflect Hawthorne's negative view of the Transcendentalist movement in America, an issue present in several of Hawthorne's works, and a cultural issue Hawthorne depicts as a monstrous giant in "The Celestial Railroad" (Galens 319). Commentary on cultural issues, such as Transcendentalism, can be found in abundance throughout Hawthorne's literary works. Gilmore argues that the monster represents all that humanity must reject, all that humanity must be warned against, and thus, the monster serves as a perfect symbolic warning. As such, it is easy to see why Hawthorne uses monsters in his literary works, because monsters often serve as symbolic cultural warnings.

In the preface to *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, James McIntosh, the editor, writes that Hawthorne "worked across the biases of his own vigorous New England culture" (xi). That is, Hawthorne's writing was often contradictory to the writings of other New England authors and essayists, such as the Transcendentalists. Hawthorne's writing differs greatly from the writing of the Transcendentalists like Emerson, Fuller, and Thoreau. Although this, in McIntosh's opinion, affected the level of Hawthorne's popularity, it also makes his work that much more lasting and important, because Hawthorne was able to engage with the cultural issues of his time. Moreover, Hawthorne, through his writing, was always engaging in communication with his audience and readers, a theme that has proved, at times, to be problematic for him and his popularity among audiences (xi). The monster was the perfect literary device for engaging

cultural issues. The monster is cultural, always challenging cultural norms and limits of morality and acceptance.

David Reynolds adds that Hawthorne “sought to assert artistic control over popular themes,” adding that the major themes and concepts Hawthorne used included “allegory, history, symbol, tight structure, [and] tonal restraint” (249). Hawthorne was, after all, a master of the binary, of bringing together cultural opposites (Reynolds 115). This matters even more because the monster is, by nature, a challenge to cultural binaries, especially in terms of morality. Moreover, the monster is naturally symbolic and tests our cultural understanding of the past and the self. The monster intrinsically brings about the clashing of cultural dichotomies and is an important cultural symbol, as monsters have existed in all known cultures throughout history.

Sadly, literary theory is not scientific theory, and, unfortunately, it is not possible to understand the social sciences by simply imitating or mimicking the processes of understanding used for natural sciences. There is no scientific method for observing and reproducing cultures or social experiments. This matters because it leaves more room for error and misinterpretation. In short, literary and critical theories are not perfect or absolute. However, there is still much to be learned from cultural studies and social sciences. Although cultures cannot be reproduced like scientific experiments, they can be reproduced, or replicated, and Rivkin and Ryan argue that “The social system thus tends to reproduce itself through culture and through schooling” (1234). Although Hawthorne’s works did not become staples in American schools until after his death, his works and writings were popular in his time as well, and Hawthorne’s audience would have

been considerably sizable. Thus, Hawthorne's works could have helped to either reproduce or challenge his contemporary social structure, or, more likely, both.

Literature, like all art, can "assist the reproduction of the social system by allowing only certain kinds of imagery and ideas to gain access to mass audiences" (Rivkin and Ryan 1234). However, by attempting to reproduce social systems and systems of power there is always room for dissonance and disruption. Where there is room for reproduction there is room for subversion and challenge. Through his short stories, Hawthorne shows the existence of this open space and room for discord. For example, "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" may reassert the need for social restrictions and authority, but it also exposes the rigid and difficult prospect of living under such regimes. Living as the Puritans did may be the "right" way to live, but there is little joy in it, and while the Merry Mounters may be viewed as heathens, they are capable of a joy and freedom unbeknownst to the Puritans. It is one thing to live in a cultural that provides little room for joy or freedom and another altogether to destroy or exterminate other cultures that do, which is, it would seem, what Hawthorne is hinting at. Such hatred and destruction is, perhaps, a result of living within a culture that provides little or no room for the release of repressed feelings and desires.

As a field of study, "Cultural studies often concerns itself with agency at the level of the practices of everyday life" (Grossberg). What exactly is implied by those everyday practices is open to interpretation. As Hebdige argues, when it comes to literature, "it may say what it means but it does not necessarily 'mean' what it 'says.' In other word, it is opaque" (Hebdige 1264). Moreover, in Cultural Studies "What is counted is *what* is used, not the *ways* of using" (de

Certeau 1251). For example, what matters most is that an author uses monsters, not necessarily how the monsters are used. That is, it does not matter if monsters are used ironically, seriously, or humorously, only that monsters are used. This is because the use of the monster in literature signifies certain cultural expectations regardless of how they are used in a story. Of course, de Certeau's quotation is a simplification, because how tropes, motifs, or figures are used does matter, that fact that they are used matters more, because they signify. That is, cultural figures, or symbols, signify by their very presence. What is more important than what is said is what is used, and why.

For example, monsters imply certain aspects within a story, and they bring their own meaning, history, and interpretation with them. Gilmore and Cohen have both gathered theories of monstrosity, and monster literature has certain implications. Furthermore, Cultural Studies itself has its own implications and means of defining and interpreting literature. Therefore, the combination of the two is bound to hold certain meanings and signify certain expectations from literature. Interpreting the two together can allow for a cultural commentary, a deeper understanding of people and culture, an understanding of the purpose and intent of the literary work itself, and a richer and deeper interpretation of the style and genre of literary works, in this case Hawthorne and Poe's short stories.

Hawthorne's literary monsters all find their roots in their monomaniacal behavior. For example, like many of Hawthorne's other characters, Ethan Brand is a monomaniac. He is obsessed with one idea, the unpardonable sin. We learn very early in the story that Brand, before his journey to find the unpardonable sin begins, lives a "solitary and meditative life"

(Hawthorne 254). The idea of the unpardonable sin becomes Brand's sole obsession, it is the idea that drives and controls him. In short, it possesses him. One might argue that people have ideas or concepts that develop into obsessions for a time, however, Brand's obsession is exceedingly possessive as he searches eighteen years for the unpardonable sin before returning to his kiln (Hawthorne 257). Brand's obsession, however, is only the beginning of his monstrous character.

In accordance with Hawthorne's other monster-like characters, Brand induces the people to fear him. Bartram, and especially his son Joe, are struck by the look of Brand, and the son asks his father to shut the kiln door because "there was something terrible in the man's [Brand's] face which he was afraid to look at, yet he could not look away from" (Hawthorne 256). Monsters often possess this particular characteristic in which they appear both repulsive and yet retain a certain attraction or curiosity. Duality is a common characteristic of monstrosity, and prominent examples can be seen in Shelley's Frankenstein monster, who exhibits a strong desire for both love and hate, and in Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, who exhibits a struggle between good and bad. Likewise, Brand is both repulsive and attractive to his companions.

Moreover, Brand causes fear through his laugh, which is a wild, screaming laugh without mirth. The sound of such a laugh, Hawthorne writes, "we sometimes tremble to hear, and would always willingly forget" (257). Correspondingly, Brand's laugh shakes the nerves of Bertram the lime-burner, but there is more to it than only this. The laugh is a sound evinced through the mouth, an important aspect and distinguishing factor of monsters. The mouth of a monster is often a key identifying feature. Many monsters, from the Greek Cyclops, who ate sailors, to the

French Tarasque, with its voluminous maws, use their “Big Mouths” as weapons (Gilmore 178). The mouth of a monster, even when it is of a normal size, like a vampire’s, is often utilized as a tool or weapon, and in the case of Ethan Brand it is used not to attack but to induce fear, whether intentional or otherwise. Hawthorne himself tells us, “Poets have imagined no utterance of fiends or hobgoblins so fearfully appropriate as a laugh” (257). Thus, we see that is no accident that Brand’s laugh solicits fear from those around him. By the same token, when Brand, in the presence of the townsmen who have come to see him upon his return, breaks into that “awful laugh, which, more than any other token, expressed the condition of his inward being” the gaiety and cheerfulness of the visitors is ended, and the townsmen quickly hastened homeward (Hawthorne 264).

Aside from his obsessive search for the unpardonable sin and his fear-inducing laugh, Brand’s monstrosity goes further into the realms of the human psyche. Brand is a cruel and unsympathetic man, and he psychologically tortures and destroys his victims. Such is the case of the circus-performer, the daughter of the man who inquisitively asks Brand if he has news from her. At the old man’s imploring Brand recalls his interaction with the daughter, “the very girl whom, with such cold remorseless purpose, Ethan Brand had made the subject of a psychological experiment, and wasted, absorbed, and perhaps annihilated her soul, in the process” (Hawthorne 261). Brand shows no remorse or regret at what he has done to the man’s daughter, and his mind returns immediately to dwell upon the subject of the unpardonable sin. Similarly, Brand dismisses the men of the town, his old friends, who come to see him upon his return to his former kiln. As they having nothing to add or provide to Brand’s purpose and

obsession, he screams at them to leave him. Brand displays a complete lack of sympathy for his fellow man, for their sufferings, or for the harm Brand himself has done them. Brand shows no compassion for his victims. Quite simply, Brand is an excessively cruel individual, a brute and a beast, by nature.

Accordingly, this coldness towards his fellow man connects with the next aspect of Brand's monstrosity, his outsider attitude and otherness. Hawthorne writes that Brand "had lost his hold of the magnetic chain of humanity," and "he was now a cold observer" (265). Brand had purposefully removed himself from mankind and its influences. Instead of finding his place among his fellow man, Brand became a border-dweller, an outsider who was incased in an awful solitude. This self-imposed aloneness is what stunted Brand's heart, which in time hardened and eventually withered away (Hawthorne 265). Brand viewed mankind as only objects and subjects of his experiment, without sympathy or remorse; he did not see himself as one of them, and he was unrepentant of his crimes (Hawthorne 265).

Finally, there is Ethan Brand's moral obnoxiousness. Brand's moral behavior is abhorrent. Not only is Brand cruel and vile in his actions towards his fellow man, but his entire search for the unpardonable sin, the singular obsession of his life, is also morally questionable at the most basic and fundamental level. Perhaps Brand, like Poe's unnamed narrator in "The Black Cat," is seeking to challenge and assume the power of God, a great wickedness. Additionally, Brand not only shows no regret or guilt for his sins, but he also intentionally seeks out sin in order to discover what may be the most unforgivable of all sins. Brand's entire journey and pursuit in life is morally deplorable and appalling. Hawthorne himself tells us, "Ethan Brand become a fiend. He

began to be so from the moment that his moral nature ceased to keep the pace of improvement with his intellect" (265). Hawthorne's character seeks to continually develop intellectually, but, as a result Brand's moral development is stunted. When he forsakes the notion of morality, the concept of right and wrong, in favor of knowledge, Brand essentially allows himself to become a cold and solitary creature, without care or concern for his fellow man. Knowledge without any moral limits or boundaries has nearly limitless potential, especially for malicious and cruel behavior. If there is no price a person would not pay, and nothing a person would not do, just to develop intellectually then there are no boundaries or consequences that can curb or influence that individual's actions. That person, like Brand, would be more than willing to hurt others in order to achieve a deeper sense of intellect and understanding. Thus, Brand is able to produce the unpardonable sin within himself because the knowledge and understanding of the unpardonable sin is his sole purpose for existing. The sin was ingrained, rooted, in his own withered heart.

Additionally, as if to mock his own monstrosity, Brand enthusiastically declares that the unpardonable sin is the sin of intellect's victory over morality and brotherhood as well as man's reverence for God, and it is a sin that Brand admits he would willingly commit again and for which he would readily accept the recompense (Hawthorne 259). Brand's desire to discover the unpardonable sin undoubtedly correlates with intellect. As stated, Brand sees the unpardonable sin as the intellect's victory over morality and brotherhood. It is Brand's search for the unpardonable sin that drives him, and Brand's monomania stems from his all-consuming purpose to discover the unpardonable sin. As Brand sees the unpardonable sin as an intellectual

victory over morality, and because he associates the unpardonable sin, the very object of his monomaniacal obsession, with intellect, the connection between monomania and intellect becomes much clearer. Whether Brand sees the connection or not does not matter, because Hawthorne's audience can see the connection. The reader becomes aware that intellect alone, without limits or controls, is dangerous because it accounts little in the way of consequences or harm to others and is completely unconcerned with right or wrong. The more obsessed Brand becomes the more he views himself as intellectual, and the more intellectual Brand becomes the more he believes he has found the unpardonable sin, the root of his monomania. Therefore, monomania is what drives Brand to seek intellectual victory over morality. Thus, in the end, Brand, like many other monsters, is "the spirit that says 'yes' -to all that is forbidden" (Gilmore 12).

Hence, Ethan Brand displays the monstrous elements and characteristics of obsession, cruelty, removal or banishment from mankind, and moral depravity inherent in monsters from the Minotaur and Medusa to St. George's dragon. It is the metaphorical and moral monstrosity that Brand displays which results in his heart being turned to stone, which is the physical manifestation of his monstrous actions and psyche that are corresponding themes throughout Hawthorne's short stories.

Of course, the obvious question is, why does it matter? Establishing that Brand is a literary monster is one thing, but what that means is another. Like all literary themes, tropes, or motifs, monsters have meaning. For one thing, like all authors, Hawthorne uses his literature to comment on his culture. As such, many of Hawthorne's works, and many of his monstrous

characters, can be viewed and interpreted through the lens of cultural studies. Additionally, cultural studies provide an excellent lens for interesting Hawthorne's monstrous characters because monsters are, by nature, cultural figures.

As such, Hawthorne's Ethan Brand can be viewed as a warning of the increased isolation of individuals within his society. That is, Hawthorne can be read as commenting on the dangers of the separation of men from their fellow man, a warning against the rise of individualism and self-reliance, the increasing lack of sympathy and compassion in American society, and the dangers of the loss of religion. Ethan Brand is a symbolic representation of the forces that worked within and through the people in Hawthorne's culture. According to Rivkin and Ryan, "Culture comes from below, and while it can be harassed in profitable and ultimately socially conservative ways, it also represents the permanent possibility of eruption, of dissonance, and of an alternative imagination of reality" (1234). While American culture continued to transform and adapt in Hawthorne's time, and while focus on the individual was on the rise, the dangers of individualism and exile left room for disruption and discord, which Hawthorne was able to expose, to some extent, in "Ethan Brand."

As a monstrous figure viewed through the lens of cultural studies, Ethan Brand represents the power dynamic within Hawthorne's contemporary society. With cultural figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Roosevelt advocating for self-reliance and rugged individualism, Brand's character symbolizes both the power and desire to be free from the restraints of society, to be free from the obligations of their fellow men and, also, the dangers of removing one's self from society, from disengaging from the sentimentality and sympathy of

society, and the potentially dangerous results of crumbling religious practices in the United States. What makes Hawthorne so effective is his ability to use cultural forms and expectations to create his stories. Cultural Studies tells us that “The tactical use of cultural forms can allow one to elude structural determination,” and Hawthorne was able to use his short stories and American expectations to help question and potentially undermine the security of established cultural customs (de Certeau 1247).

Therefore, the beauty of Hawthorne’s work is threefold. By utilizing monsters, the implications of monster theory and cultural studies as a theory, Hawthorne’s work is able to subvert the cultural expectations that coincide with American culture. Hawthorne’s work, like many works cultural studies focuses on, is filled with “sentences that remain unpredictable within the space ordered by the organizing techniques of systems” (de Certeau 1251). Monster theory and cultural theory, and culture itself, demands structures and types, but even within those structures Hawthorne’s tales retain the ability to subvert those expectations and refuse a singular and expected interpretation. Additionally, as Cultural theorists would argue, although forms and structures create style, there are always “subversive implications of style,” and it is these implications that Hawthorne utilizes and exposes in his stories (Hebdige1258).

Moreover, Hawthorne’s tale provides insight into the substructure of society. For example, Hawthorne focuses more on the mundane, or realistic, view of human nature and everyday life as opposed to a super structural story, which would be expected to focus more on the institutions, political power structures and government within a society, which are made up mostly of small, powerful groups within a given society. That is, Hawthorne’s story allows for a

more accurate view of human nature rather than serving as an exposure of misrepresentations that may be depicted by a more powerful societal group, as is a common goal in critical theory and cultural studies. As is evident in many of Hawthorne's works, the agency of subordinated peoples runs counter to the agency of the ruling class. Thus, Brand, like many literary monsters, derives his power and agency from rebelling against, or being an outcast from, society, from conformity. However, because the substructure influences the superstructure, and vice versa, Hawthorne's stories cannot avoid being influenced by and addressing issues related to the superstructure of society.

Unlike theories in other academic fields, cultural theory, like all literary theories, does not hold to purely scientific or observational modes and always deals with humanizing literature. This means that by using cultural theories Hawthorne is not seeking to establish rules or laws about society, or create generalizations about mankind or culture, but, rather, to provide insight and warnings about aspects within society. Hawthorne is seemingly aware of the idea presented by Horkheimer, that social experience is individual, even when experienced by large groups within a society, because social experience is perceived through the "historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ" (213). So, Hawthorne's monster serves as a warning to issues he has seen or experienced within his culture, as a potential danger to those issues, yet not as an absolute, but rather as a cultural possibility. As de Certeau argues, "Human agency has some leeway to "err" or wander from the lines prescribed by the overarching structure of society," therefore, there is some room or disruption, change, or possibility within culture (1247). In Ethan Brand, the more solitary lifestyle

of the limestone burners and kiln owners may coincide with the growing idea of individualism in American society, but that individualism also allows for the dangerous possibilities of characters like Ethan Brand, and therefore serves as a danger to cultural institutions that help maintain social order and human sympathies and thus serves as “the ability of agents to undo the power of social determination” (de Certeau 1247). In short, individualism can come to undermine basic social concepts like the social contract and mankind’s compassion.

“Critic R. P. Blackmur argues that Hawthorne’s short stories are the ‘daydreams which edge toward nightmare’” (qtd. in Guerrero). What makes Hawthorne’s work borderline horrific is not just the use of monstrous characters but also how it exposes the potential dangers evident within American culture. The fear of what could happen by simply following social codes is both chilling and intriguing, much like monsters themselves are. Moreover, like many literary monsters, Ethan Brand evokes an extreme sense of pity, sorrow, isolation and destruction from the reader, and, moreover, Brand highlights several growing concerns evident in American culture, which Hawthorne also comments upon, and expands, in his other short stories. Dick Hebdige argues that cultural studies has the ability to turn “crime into art,” but, in Hawthorne’s case, like Jean Genêt’s, these “‘crimes’ are only broken codes” (1258). Hawthorne’s “Ethan Brand” provides an excellent example of a literary monster and cultural commentary. The tale aligns well with monster literature, which, as “Ethan Brand” does, combines concepts of good and evil while evoking sensations of both horror and terror. Moreover, “Ethan Brand” may serve as a symbolic warning against the lack of sympathy in Hawthorne’s America. Likewise, “Ethan Brand” can serve as a warning against the dangers of isolation. Finally, “Ethan Brand” can serve

as a warning against the obsessive psyche mankind is capable of. While serving as a cultural warning, "Ethan Brand" is also an example of transforming broken codes into literary art.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Man of Adamant" continues the theme of monstrosity demonstrated in "Ethan Brand." Much like Brand's character, Richard Digby is an outsider, a recluse, who leaves society of his own accord. Digby purposefully secludes, or removes, himself from society and means to have no communion with a society of supposed sinners whom he believes are destined to perish in righteous judgment (Hawthorne 136).

Additionally, Digby is an intolerant and self-centered man who has no concern for the state and well-being of his fellow man. In fact, Digby displays a sense of hatred and vehemence towards mankind. Hawthorne describes Digby as "a man predisposed to stoniness of the heart," and a "stony-hearted man," which is clearly seen throughout the story (133-134, 135). However, much like *Beowulf's* Grendel, Digby's seclusion from society leaves him lonely and melancholic. Yet instead of seeking a cure for his loneliness and disposition, Digby secludes himself all the more from mankind, and his hatred for them increases dramatically. So concerned is Digby with his seclusion and separation from mankind, as well as his complete lack of sympathy for their well-being, that when he departs the town he brings with him "a sword and a gun, to smite and slay any intruder upon his hallowed seclusion" (Hawthorne 132).

Digby believes the rest of mankind to be unworthy sinners, and yet he does not intend to help them, but rather to harm them, if they intrude upon his abode in the wilderness. Digby's hatred for his fellow man is reiterated by Hawthorne when Digby expresses his disappointment at the lack of an ominous threat or sign of immediate judgement upon the town when he

departs it. Moreover, Hawthorne makes a point of stating that Digby reads his Bible aloud in the wilderness because there were no others around who might benefit from hearing it (134). Digby, when he is not being incensed or dismayed at the lack of vengeance being employed upon mankind, is completely indifferent to the sufferings or conditions of his fellow man. Thus, Digby's monstrosity is much like Brand's, in that neither man has any care or concern for the rest of mankind and at times express a desire for, or pleasure in, the sufferings of their fellow persons. Although Digby, unlike Brand, does not express excessive cruelty towards his fellow man his desire for cruelty to be wrought upon mankind is excessive and therefore monstrous.

Perhaps the best example of Digby's indifference, and possibly hatred, for mankind is exhibited when he attempts to send away Mary Goffe. When Mary entreats him to leave the cave, lest he be destroyed, he replies by saying that destruction is set apart for the rest of mankind outside of his cavern, and he tells her she should "Get thee hence speedily, that thou mayst have thy share!" (Hawthorne 135). Here Digby not only rejects Mary's offer to help save him, but he also attempts to send her away to what he believes is her doom. A great deal of the monstrous and evil nature of Richard Digby is found in his absolute disgust and loathing for mankind and his indifference to their supposed fate, but this is not the sole source of his monstrosity.

Like other monsters, including Ethan Brand, Richard Digby is a source of fear. When Digby's frozen visage was discovered by a group of children, the entire group screeched simultaneously (Hawthorne 136). In addition, Digby's stone remains "wore a forbidding frown," and his personage is described as "repulsive" (Hawthorne 137). The Man of Adamant was so

frightening and upsetting that the entrance to Digby's cavern is covered with stones and soil. Even at the story's end, generations after Digby's passing and the covering of the cavern, adults still avoided the spot where Digby was buried and children still refused to play there (Hawthorne 137). The great fear of those who only eyed Richard Digby's stony form is just one more example of the monstrous persona Digby displays in the story.

Furthermore, Digby is a morally deficient and distasteful character, much like Ethan Brand. However, Digby's moral depravity comes not from his search for the unpardonable sin but from his extremely disproportionate religiosity. Digby became so self-centered and self-righteous that, as Hawthorne writes, exclusive bigotry so enfolded him "with such an iron grasp that no other sentiment could reach his bosom" (134). Digby developed such a narrow minded religious creed that he failed to exhibit the most basic of religious practices: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (*King James Version*, Mark 12.31).

Additionally, Gilmore argues that one of the defining traits of a monster is that "the monster unifies the moral opposites that comprise human comprehension" (192). Such is the case of both Ethan Brand and Richard Digby. Brand exhibited wholly the moral lacking mankind is capable of, and Digby, who believes he possesses an exclusive monopoly on the only true Biblical interpretation, is a religious zealot and fanatic who actually exhibits all the horrible and misinterpreted understandings of the Christian religion. Digby is rather the opposite of what he believes himself to be. In a theme that is to be further explored in both "The Birthmark" and "The May-Pole of Merry Mount," Hawthorne's Digby finds the opposite of what he seeks. So adamant is Digby that he is the sole possessor of truth that he utterly and indignantly rejects

Mary Goffe's pleadings to help him and to cure his stony heart. Digby and Goffe perfectly represent the binary opposites of the moral and religious spectrums of mankind. The more Mary pleads with Richard the more livid and malignant he becomes. The sadder Mary's countenance becomes the more wickedness Digby displays, and the culmination of their encounter leaves Digby completely transformed into stone while Mary's visage dissolves into the sunshine and returns to heaven. Richard Digby's intolerant and self-absorbed search for idealism leads to a moral depravity that could not be any better exhibited by any foul or deformed creature than by this human psychological monster.

In monster theory and literature, it is the monster's response to overcompensate for his lack of learning and then shun all human contact except when necessary. This is exactly what Richard Digby does in "The Man of Adamant," and it is as if Shelley's Frankenstein monster is speaking directly to Digby's monomaniacal character when he shouts "'Man . . . how ignorant art thou in thy pride of wisdom!'" (Shelley "Chapter 23"). However, the self-imposed exile and obsession with Digby's own correctness of religion also have cultural implications in addition to its harkening to monster literature of the past. Cultural Studies tells us that the simple use of monsters signifies certain meanings, so Hawthorne must have had a purpose for creating such a character, and, even if Hawthorne didn't, Hawthorne's culture would apply some superimposed meaning on the figure, or read some interpretation from the character's existence.

An obvious reading of the story would indicate a possible warning against the dangers of religious extremism or exile from mankind. Reynolds argues that Hawthorne had a tendency "towards experimentation in the symbolic style and provocative moral historicism" (118). During

Hawthorne's lifetime, the Mormons moved to Utah, the American Unitarian Association was established (1826), the Second Great Awakening occurred (1830), and the Southern Baptist Convention was established (1845). All of these religious events would have questioned or challenged the religious foundations and culture in American society, at least in regards to the historic Puritan religion of America's past.

Thus, Hawthorne was very concerned with history, moral ambiguity and corruption, and warning against religious extremism or spreading of false religions would be a major concern for Hawthorne. Hawthorne's interest in the past is seen in several of his tales and novels, including: "Endicott and the Red Cross," "The Maypole of Merry Mount," "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," "The Grey Champion," "The Ambitious Guest," "The Minister's Black Veil," "The Birthmark," and *The Scarlett Letter* all include some element of America's Puritan past, real historical characters, or are based on real historical events. These tales tend to romanticize America's past while raising complex moral questions or concerns. Likewise, Hawthorne was very much aware of his family's own ties to Salem witch trails. However, he not only displayed a reverence for the past in his writing, but Hawthorne was also able to write about contemporary concerns and modern issues during his lifetime. This is especially true in regards to his Transcendentalist contemporaries and his views of socialist communities like Brook Farm. The latter issue of social communes is addressed in Hawthorne's 1852 novel *The Blithedale Romance*.

For these reasons, it would be of little surprise to see such warnings in his literary works. Such extremism could be as dangerous as following any doctrine or teaching blindly, without

questions. Both “The Minister’s Black Veil” and “Young Goodman Brown” are genuine and definitive examples of such moral ambiguity, as both can be read in various ways and can be confusing and foggy in their interpretation. While “The Man of Adamant” has a less than sympathetic protagonist, Digby’s struggle with morality, sympathy, and religion would all be real issues for Hawthorne in his lifetime, especially in regards to contemporaries like Emerson, Fuller and Thoreau.

In his famous 1841 essay “Self-Reliance,” Emerson argues that “Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist.” Additionally, in *Walden*, Thoreau writes, “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away” (“Conclusion”). Moreover, the concept of Social Darwinism began to rise in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and there was a very clear move away from the Puritanical religion of the past in favor of a more open and interpretive religious ideology in America. Although Hawthorne was not known to read scientific or philosophical books, it is likely that Hawthorne had at least heard of works and discoveries of Charles Darwin (Stearns 368). The issues of individualism and the dangers of the changing religious atmosphere were issues Hawthorne had to see and address in his real life, and, therefore, such issues would easily transition into issues he would address while writing.

Many ideologies contemporary with Hawthorne’s own were focused on self-centeredness. While tempting, these ideologies provided little in the way of understating or growth in regards to education and interaction with others. Unlike many of his contemporaries,

Hawthorne seemed to focus more on mankind's relationship with one another rather than man's relationship with the self alone. That is, Hawthorne sought to expose the dangers of the self-centered and selfish ideologies cropping up in his contemporary society, which is why so many of Hawthorne's self-centered and isolated characters have unhappy endings and serve as cultural warnings against the dangers of isolation. While the self is important, it is clear that self-improvement also requires interaction with others, at least in Hawthorne's opinion. In the preface to *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne writes that "It contributes greatly towards a man's moral and intellectual health, to be brought into habits of companionship with individuals unlike himself, who care little for his pursuits, and whose sphere and abilities he must go out of himself to appreciate" ("Preface"). Unlike the self-centered ideologies of his companions, Hawthorne's ideas of self-improvement come from improving others as well, a concept that seems perfectly clear in "The Man of Adamant," as all of Digby's woes are self-inflicted and could be cured by engaging in the society of his fellow men. As such, it becomes more clear that Hawthorne is warning against the idea of individualism and the break from mankind, as it almost inevitably leads to a loss of sympathy, compassion and understanding for the rest of mankind.

If, as theorists argue, culture consists of "forms of life and social expression," then literature would be an important factor in creating, maintaining, and changing culture (Rivkin and Ryan 1233). Therefore, it was important for authors like Hawthorne to address real world issues, like challenges to dominant ideologies and a sense of common community among men, in their literary works. Hawthorne challenged boundaries, ideologies, norms and values abundantly

through the use of his literary monsters, like Brand and Digby, as cultural figures and warning signs.

According to Janice Lasseter, "Hawthorne's figures express themselves in a language that doesn't signify, that has no rational meaning at all." The characters in Hawthorne's stories live in a very rational world. Nonetheless, Hawthorne's characters are not only connected to magical or fantastical elements, but, often, they are also the most fantastical elements of the stories. These particular characters, like Digby and Brand, are fantastical on purpose, and like many cultural figures, they are chosen, or used, for their shock value. Therefore, literary characters can serve as role models, warnings, or moral standards, depending on the context and the way the characters are used. Using a monstrous character like Digby would help to highlight and address the rising cultural issues with morality that Hawthorne would have seen within his own culture. By using larger than life characters, Hawthorne is able to focus his attention clearly on specific and, at least in his opinion, important issues. Religious extremism and individualism clear identifiers of Digby's character in "The Man of Adamant," and Hawthorne shows the dangers of possessing such character flaws, and they are themes Hawthorne returns to in his other stories as well.

According to Hebdige, culture issues, presented in artwork, such as literary figures, or graffiti (as is the example he uses), take on a special meaning, they become "an expression both of impotence and a kind of power – the power to disfigure" (1259). In Hawthorne's case, these cultural figures are presented as literary monsters, and these characters do possess a power and

agency to disrupt and disfigure. Digby scares his fellow men, in some ways he does possess a power over them, and they possess little power over him, but his power lacks any ability to inflict change on others, to overturn or change society. Digby's is a power to disrupt and cause alarm, but ultimately it has to have cultural agency in order to fundamentally alter society or culture-- such is the case with many literary figures and monsters. In fact, in the end, the only thing Digby is able to really disfigure, besides himself, is the face of the religion he is claiming to represent; he is of greater harm than good to it, and because of him its very name would be soiled with contempt. It becomes increasingly clearer that in none of his literary work does Hawthorne abandon or escape the cultural issues facing his contemporary society, but rather returns to issues of culture over and over again.

However, Richard Digby no more holds the monopoly on monstrosity than he did on religious truth. In actuality, all men who seek to create the ideal become monsters. The journey to perfection ruins the heart and abolishes reason; as such, those who seek to become gods find they have transformed themselves into devils (Dolis 142). Such was the case of Richard Digby, whose heart was turned to stone and so was he. Such poison of the heart does not always leave a physical mark upon its prey. Such is the case of Aylmer. In Hawthorne's "The Birthmark," Aylmer's monstrosity derives from his nature, which is unscrupulous, obsessive, and monomaniacal. Psychologically, he is unsatisfied with even the most beautiful woman which nature can offer him, his wife Georgiana. Like Hawthorne's Ethan Brand and Richard Digby, Aylmer's obsession poisons him, leaving him unreasonable and unempathetic towards his victim, his wife. Also like Digby and Brand, Aylmer's psychological monstrosity manifests itself in a

physical form. That is, it leaves a physical marking, however; unlike Digby and Brand, who become the most severely stricken sufferers of their monstrous ways, Aylmer's monstrosity manifests itself in the physical slaying of his wife Georgiana.

Hawthorne tells us that Aylmer had devoted himself "too unreservedly to scientific studies to ever be weaned from them by any second passion" (152). It is not long after Aylmer's marriage to Georgiana that his obsession with perfection leads him to inquire of his wife whether she believed her birthmark might be removed from her cheek. In discoursing with his wife, Aylmer tells Georgiana that she "came so nearly perfect from the hand of Nature that this slightest possible defect, which we hesitate whether to term a defect or a beauty, shocks me, as being the visible mark of earthly imperfection" (Hawthorne 152). From the first page of Hawthorne's story, we encounter Aylmer's obsession with perfection, despite his own imperfections. Georgiana is deeply hurt by her husband's words, and many persons, including Aylmer's assistant Aminadab, admired the birthmark. In fact, in speaking to himself, Aminadab states that if Georgiana were his wife he would never part with the mark upon her cheek. The slight imperfection, however, becomes intolerable for Aylmer as "he found this one defect grow more and more intolerable with every moment of their united lives" (Hawthorne 153). The mark comes to torment Aylmer and causes him more irritation and anguish than Georgiana's beauty ever caused him pleasure or delight (Hawthorne 154).

So obsessed did Aylmer become with the birthmark that though "Trifling as it at first appeared, it so connected itself with innumerable trains of thought and modes of feeling that it became the central point of all" (Hawthorne 154). Aylmer's wife was so affected by his behavior

that she began to shudder at his very gaze. Aylmer was so disturbed by the mark of imperfection that when he kissed his wife's cheek he was sure to kiss her right cheek, not the cheek bearing the birthmark. When, during the process of its removal, Aylmer impulsively kissed the mark, his very soul recoiled. Such was the obsession of Aylmer; he made the birthmark the solitary fixation of his time and energies. This is the first mark of Aylmer's monstrosity, his excessive obsession in the pursuit of earthly perfection at any and all costs.

Another mark of Aylmer's monstrosity is his ability to cause fear in his wife Georgiana. When Georgiana witnesses Aylmer at work in his lab and he recounts to her his work on creating the equivalent of the philosopher's stone Georgiana reacts in "amazement and fear," stating that "it is terrible to possess such power, or even dream of possessing it" (Hawthorne 159). Aylmer, however, is not concerned with the fear his wife exhibits, nor is he worried about its effects upon himself, as his sole purpose is perfecting beauty. The only joy Aylmer truly seems to exhibit in the story is in his work; he delights in the birthmark only because he believes it will be a blissful and ecstatic experience to remove it from his wife's cheek (Hawthorne 158).

A final marker of Aylmer's monstrosity is the attitude he demonstrates towards mankind, even those closest to him. Although Aminadab is Aylmer's assistant, and a man whom we can assume Aylmer must spend a great deal of time with, he refers to Aminadab as "thou human machine" and "thou man of clay," but even in speaking these words his attention is more on himself than on his assistant, and we see Aylmer is a very self-absorbed and conceited person (Hawthorne 162). Even when speaking to his wife, Aylmer shows little real affection or concern, referring to Georgiana as a "lofty creature" when giving her the draught which is meant to

remove her birthmark permanently (Hawthorne 164). When he does speak to her sweetly, Aylmer's words serve only as a precursor to remind Georgiana to have faith in his power and ability to remove her accursed mark of imperfection. Likewise, when remembering his dream, which Hawthorne alludes to as potentially holding deeper truths and passions than reality, Aylmer recalls attempting to remove the birthmark with a knife. However, in his dream, when Aylmer's knife catches hold of Georgiana's heart he does not stop, instead he is resolved to purge Georgiana of the mark's imperfection (155). Thus, we see Aylmer is not only obsessive and frightening, but he is also morally objectionable and perverse. Even when Georgiana dies, though the story ends quickly after, we see no remorse or repentance in Aylmer's character. Aylmer's psyche has turned him not merely into a cold and severe man, but furthermore into a monstrous being. Aylmer is obsessive, he is cold and indifferent towards mankind and he induces fear in those around him. Thus, Aylmer displays the characteristics that could be found in many monsters, such as Stevenson's Mr. Hyde or Lovecraft's Cthulhu.

One might, like Holden, argue that, on some point or another, everyone is a monomaniac (263). This may in fact be true. From time to time, and during certain periods of one's life, a person may display especially obsessive interests in one thing or another, however, if monomaniacal behavior is "normal," than surely Brand, Aylmer and Digby display a sense of double monomania. Brand's monomaniacal behavior is excessive even by extreme standards. Brand's obsession consumes nearly 20 years of his life and leads him to jump into an open kiln. Aylmer is likewise extraordinarily obsessed. Aylmer not only dreams of killing his wife in an attempt to remove her birthmark, but the obsession also interferes with his daily life and

eventually he projects his obsession, which displaces itself on his wife Georgiana, and she is willing to risk face death to have it removed, which she does and dies. Similarly, Digby is so obsessed that even when an angelic-like woman pleads and beseeches with him to return to his fellow man he becomes indignant and turns to stone. All three characters display a temperament which is beyond even “normal” monomaniacal tendencies, if such a normalcy exists.

Monsters in literature were often written in response to an increase in foreign immigration, urban crime or the fear of scientific research. One such reason was because science was often considered unholy. Additionally, although ghosts were not uncommon in literature before Hawthorne’s time, as cultural concerns and dangers changed so did responses in monster and horror literature. Creatures like vampires, mummies, zombies and scientific creations, like the Frankenstein monster, were responses to cultural issues and fears. Like cultures and cultural issues, both literature and how literature responded to culture changed over time, and Hawthorne’s blend of monster and cultural theories makes his work particularly interesting and rich for interpretation. “The Birthmark” is one of many fascinating examples of Hawthorne’s work of cultural commentary and monster literature. In this case, Hawthorne is commenting on the dangers of: the human psyche, the growing faith in science, the loss of trust in faith, isolation from mankind and the search for earthly perfection.

Monster theory and literature often focuses on the influence of science and its effects on morality and the supernatural. For example, Dr. Frankenstein lives during the Age of Enlightenment, and, as such, the doctor is inspired to give up everything in the pursuit and

passion of science. Likewise, Aylmer, though he is not creating a supernatural being, is enthralled by science and its potential, by his many experiences, many successful, many more failures. Dr. Frankenstein creates a monster that is capable of destroying human life, but Aylmer's experiment, while more focused, proves just as dangerous, as it leads to the death of his wife Georgiana.

Furthermore, it is no coincidence that Hawthorne's genius scientist Aylmer is accompanied by an assistant named Aminadab, "a man of low stature, but bulky frame" ("The Birthmark" 157). Often in Cultural Studies, cultural figures are "treated at different times as threats to public order and as harmless buffoons" (Hebdige 1259). In this case, Hawthorne has separated the danger and buffoonery into two separate characters. Hawthorne tells us that Aminadab "seemed to represent man's physical nature," while he understood nothing of the scientific experiments of his master ("The Birthmark" 157). Meanwhile, Aylmer was "no less apt a type of the spiritual nature" ("The Birthmark" 157). The juxtaposition of the characters, the genius and the fool, serves as a cultural warning of the potential dangers of science, and the unwitting willingness of uneducated followers who accept scientific practices without question or understanding. In *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Dr. Jekyll uses science as the means of his transformation. Dr. Jekyll is able to change both his physical and mental appearance, so much so that his alter ego, Mr. Hyde, is an entirely different and monstrous being. While Mr. Hyde is not a complete buffoon, he is a danger to society. In fact, Mr. Hyde is a murderer, and he does not seem to be capable of the mental prowess of Dr. Jekyll. The dangers of science are not uncommonly warned against within Romantic literature, and this is doubly

true of monster literature and theory. Science, like religion, hate, love, or pretty much anything else, can be dangerous when taken to extremes. Extremes then, more than anything, seem to be what Hawthorne is warning against. For example, Aylmer is obsessed with the birthmark on his wife's cheek, the idea consumes him, it is the cause of his nightmares, and it drives him to eventually, though accidentally, kill his wife to rid himself of it. Aylmer's science may have had benefits, and his genius may even have been deserving of renowned, but once it became an obsession it became destructive. Eventually Aylmer's obsession with science and perfection led him to kill his wife. There was always a potential for good and bad, but, in Aylmer's case, bad wins out.

Moreover, in cultural studies images and signs are known to "take on a symbolic dimension, becoming a form of stigmata, tokens of a self-imposed exile" (Hebdige 1259). This is the reality Georgiana faces in "The Birthmark," she becomes so ashamed of her birthmark that she cannot even stand to be in Aylmer's presence, though it is his obsession and fixation that is the real reason for fear and, later, danger. Although these images and signs are not necessarily a fixture in monster literature, symbols are a common theme within the field of cultural studies, and because, in Hawthorne's case, they are associated with the monstrous figures in these stories, they potentially have elements of monstrous interpretation associated with them. Hebdige argues that these symbols, like Georgiana's birthmark, are "mundane objects which have a double meaning" (Hebdige 1259). Other examples of such symbols in Hawthorne's literary works include the scarlet A in *The Scarlet Letter*, the pink ribbon in "Young Goodman Brown," the limestone heart in "Ethan Brand," and the maypole in "The May-Pole of Merry

Mount.” As Hebdige argues, these symbols are not confined to a singular meaning. In the case of Hawthorne’s stories, these images and symbols are always associated with some aspect of the monstrosity that Hawthorne presents in his tales, and, as such, they are intrinsically connected to the cultural commentary Hawthorne is creating.

Georgiana’s birthmark is the cause of Aylmer’s obsession, and it initiates his descent into a state of mental monstrosity that cannot be sated by anything but the removal of the mark itself. Brand’s limestone heart is the effect of his obsessive hunt to discover the unpardonable sin, the result of his monstrosity that is the consequence of his break from mankind and his inability to empathize with his fellow man. The Maypole is the symbol of the unacceptable behaviors and lifestyle of the Merry Mounters that Endicott is obsessed with destroying. The Maypole represents everything that Endicott despises, and he cannot accept it or allow it to remain.

It is common to see in many theories, cultural studies included, the repetition of symbols and objects until such “objects are made to mean and mean again as ‘style’ in subculture” (Hebdige 1259). Forms and theories are recognized through formulas and patterns, and in Hawthorne’s case, symbols like the birthmark, the maypole and stone creates a style that coincides with, and plays into, the monstrous elements and interpretations within Hawthorne’s work. However, as Hebdige notes, these symbols and objects that create a style do not create a style of conformity, but rather of discontent (Hebdige 1259). Cultural studies interprets literature that “ends in the construction of a style, in a gesture of defiance or contempt, in a smile or a sneer. It signals a Refusal” (Hebdige 1259). All of Hawthorne’s stories highlight characters and

elements which are unwilling, or unable, to conform to acceptable cultural norms. Of course, the form of agency and cultural disruption available to Hawthorne's characters is dangerous, and whether the characters are successful in their disruption of culture or not, there are always drastic consequences: Brand commits suicide, Georgiana is killed by Aylmer, Endicott destroys an entire, though small, society, and Digby turns to stone.

Within monster literature, and through the lens of cultural studies, "the forbidden is permitted, but only by the same token, nothing, not even these forbidden signifiers . . . is sacred and fixed" (Hebdige 1264). Hawthorne's characters are monsters, but they are monsters in their own ways. Each character possesses some type of cultural agency and elicit fear from their fellow creatures, but each character manages such agency and fear in separate ways. The monsters are permitted to exist, but how they exist, and why, depends on the individual story, and the interpretation and meaning of each character varies, they are not fixed or immovable.

The faults of Hawthorne's Aylmer are likewise the faults of Hawthorne's Endicott. Both men sought perfection, Aylmer through his wife's physical appearance and Endicott through sweeping away the sinful ways of the Merry Mounters. Likewise, both men exhibited a cruelty and severity in inflicting excessive injury upon their victims. Where each character sought to manifest the power of God they were soured by the sins of Satan. For, as Pascal tells us, "Man is neither angel nor brute, and the unfortunate thing is that he who would act the angel acts the brute" (qtd. in Adler 145).

"The May-Pole of Merry Mount" is distinctly different from the previous stories examined

heretofore. This difference is two-fold. Firstly, John Endicott is a real historical figure. Secondly, Hawthorne presents physical monsters in this tale, and likewise uses the term monster to describe them. However, despite these differences, and despite Hawthorne's presentations of the physical incarnation of monsters, John Endicott is still the most severe and monstrous character in the story.

For starters, although Hawthorne refers to the Fauns, Nymphs, and other various creatures present at Merry Mount as monsters, they display no monstrous behavior. Many of these creatures are hybrid in their appearance, part man and part beast, but their behavior appears as nothing but jovial and humane. Among these Merry-Mounters are Edgar and Edith, the Lord and Lady of the May, who are simply described as youth and maiden. Hawthorne says that among the Merry-Mounters the English priest "seemed the wildest monster there," and he was quite obviously a man, and a priest at that (Hawthorne 112). Here we see that Hawthorne is quite aware of the potential for monstrosity in his human characters. Yet, in their behavior there seems nothing dangerous or frightening about the Merry-Mounters. The Merry-Mounters present no physical threat to the Puritans and seem content to live in jovial harmony in the wilderness.

Contrastingly, the Puritans in "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" are a stern and severe people. Hawthorne describes the Puritans as "most dismal wretches" whose "weapons were always at hand, to shoot down the straggling savage" (115). Additionally, Hawthorne says the Puritans put bounties on Indian scalps, and that the only dancing in the Puritan community was around the whipping-post. Moreover, Hawthorne describes the Puritans as "men of iron" who,

in turn, refer to the Merry-Mounters as a “fiend, and his bond-slaves” (116). The Puritans are a harsh and violence-inclined people far worse in their behavior than the Merry-Mounters.

If the description of the Puritans alone is not enough to establish their monstrous identity, the Puritan monstrosity also manifests itself in the personae and actions of John Endicott. When Endicott appears among the Merry-Mounters the bells of the dancers “tinkled with tremulous affright,” and “the rout of monsters cowered around him” (Hawthorne 117). Endicott’s very presence excites fear, not only in men but in monsters as well. Endicott, the “Puritan of Puritans,” whose “whole man, visage, frame and soul, seemed wrought of iron,” and who is described as an “immitigable zealot,” frightened the very beasts known to solicit fear in men, and his actions prove his terrible personae (Hawthorne 117, 119). Endicott cuts down the May-Pole and only regrets that action because he believed the May-Pole would have made a fine whipping post (Hawthorne 118). After capturing them, Endicott has the Merry Mounters bound and whipped with additional punishments, to include both branding and cropping of the ears, to be imposed at a later time. Furthermore, Endicott has the dancing bear shot in the head. The bear’s only crime was being *suspected* of witchcraft. Considering Hawthorne’s own connection to the Salem witch trials, and his connection to the Puritan past, it is unsurprising that Hawthorne would use a Puritan leader as a symbolic warning against religious fanaticism, intolerance, and cruelty-- as well, perhaps, as a way to acknowledge and apologize the wrong doings of Hawthorne’s own ancestors.

It appears that in “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” Hawthorne is, more than ever, contrasting the physical with the psychological and emotional. It appears rather obvious that,

although physical monsters appear in the story, the true monsters of the tale are the Puritans, specifically John Endicott. It is the actions of characters, much more than their appearance, that implies their true state of monstrosity. In Hawthorne's tale, the Puritans, and Endicott more than any other, strike fear into the Merry-Mounters and treat them with a savage cruelty. Endicott causes both fear and physical harm to the Merry Mounters. Moreover, Endicott's Puritan practices allow for no morality outside his own; there is no room for tolerance in Endicott's Puritan community.

Contrastingly, one might argue that Endicott is in fact forgiving and humane towards the Lord and Lady of the May. Hawthorne tells us that Endicott is softened by the young couple, that he even smiles, and this is true--however, this does not excuse nor overshadow his previously cruel and obstinate behavior. Moreover, Endicott's pig-headed and adamant personality and religious zeal remain unyielding. Endicott still forces Edgar and Edith's hair to be cut and forces them to accept the Puritan lifestyle. Endicott forces upon the young couple all the toils and trials of life. Likewise, Endicott says he will see how the young couple takes to their new life and trials before passing any additional judgement upon them; however, there appears to be nothing in Endicott's behavior that would indicate that if Edgar or Edith resisted the Puritan's iron-will that they would go unpunished, and it is clear that Endicott has no intention of letting the couple go; the couple is essentially forced, or rather imprisoned, in the Puritan community henceforth. In addition, Hawthorne ends the tale by reminding his audience that despite Endicott's seemingly benevolent actions towards Edgar and Edith, "even so was their home of wild mirth made desolate amid the sad forest. They returned to it no more" (Hawthorne 120).

If the monstrosity of Endicott is not as clear as that of Ethan Brand or Richard Digby, it is only because Hawthorne veils it in a sense of ambiguity and opposition. Endicott is as cruel as Aylmer or Digby and as unforgiving as Brand. Unlike Hawthorne's other tales, "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" presents physical monstrosities to contrast the monstrous psyche and behavior of John Endicott. The language, though specifically calling the Merry-Mounters monsters, is clear in defining the treacherous and wretched behavior of Endicott as far worse than that of the peaceful "heathens" of Merry Mount.

As aforementioned, in the section covering "The Man of Adamant," one of the defining traits of a monster is the unification of the moral opposites that encompass mankind's understanding (Gilmore 192). Of Hawthorne's short stories which comprise this study, no story so clearly shows the difference in the binary opposites that bind mankind's morality than "The May-Pole of Merry Mount." The tolerant and contented Merry-Mounters are oppressed by the zealous and cruel Puritans who will allow for no morality save their own. Thus, the Puritan society, and John Endicott explicitly, displays a sense of monstrosity equal to mythical monsters and fabled fiends.

Reynolds writes that in Hawthorne's works we see the "fusing [of] modern sensationalism with bygone Puritanism" (264). This fusing and connection and reverence of the past only reaffirms the idea of a Romantic and Cultural approach utilized by Hawthorne. Reynolds clearly argues that, "Hawthorne's works belong to romanticism or, more specifically, dark romanticism," but Hawthorne's work is just as important from a cultural studies viewpoint (524). The fusing of modern cultural issues and America's Puritan past is evident in many of

Hawthorne's tales, but it may never be more evident than in "The May-Pole of Merry Mount." "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" is a depiction of the clashing of cultures and a warning against religious zealots and fanatics, but it is also a reminder of the fundamental moral standards America was built upon.

According to Rivkin and Ryan, "engaging in ritualized social behavior such as family gatherings, and the like constitute a culture," and a "Culture is both a means of domination, of assuring the rule of one class or group over another, and a means of resistance to such domination, a way of articulating oppositional points of view to those in dominance" (1233). This is evident in "The May-Pole of Merry Mount." On a small scale, the story depicts the complete destruction of an outside culture. John Endicott, the monstrous Puritan leader, completely erases the Merry Mounters culture and practices and imposes the practices and beliefs of his stricter and more dominant Puritan culture. Endicott's fanaticism leads to the destruction of anything that would threaten or challenge his moral code of beliefs. However, as cultural studies would reaffirm, the dominant ideology is also subverted and changed in some ways, as Endicott is somewhat moved and softened by the Merry Mounters joy, but not enough to stop him from annihilating their culture or imposing his own. However, like Poe's stories, Hawthorne's "The Maypole of Merry Mount" serves more as a form of release for readers who feel stifled by cultural institutions. That is, symbolically the story allows the reader to experience the subversive process of challenging cultural hegemony while still be warned against the reassertion of power by cultural institutions and the need for order. In short, through the story the reader is able to experience the way the subculture influences and changes the

superstructure as well as how the superstructure responds and reasserts dominance, influence and change over the subculture.

In addition, culture also includes “the regularities, procedures, and rituals of human life in communities” (Rivkin and Ryan 1233). In “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” we are given two separate cultures to juxtapose against one another. In fact, per cultural studies theories, we can view the Merry Mounters as either a subculture or a counterculture. Hebdige defines a subculture as “the expressive forms and rituals of those subordinate groups” (1259). Thus, in a general sense, “In so far as culture is a common whole way of life, its boundaries are largely locked” (Barker 30). However, subcultures and countercultures exist as contentions to the dominant culture, as is the case in “The Maypole of Merry Mount.”

In the story, the Merry Mounters perform the role of a counterculture. As a common rule, “The idea of a counterculture refers to the values, beliefs and attitudes, that is, the culture, of a minority group that is in opposition to the mainstream or ascendant culture” (Barker 36). The Merry Mounter’s culture, their very existence, is a threat the dominant Puritan culture. Although the Merry Mounters could possibly be considered a subculture they really are more of a counterculture. The difference being, “a counterculture is articulate and self-conscious in its opposition to the values of the governing culture in a way that distinguishes it from a subculture” (Barker 36). Although the Merry Mounters are not exactly attacking the Puritans, the lifestyle of the Merry Mounters is directly contradictory to the Puritan culture, a fact that both groups are aware of.

Therefore, the culture of the Merry Mounters could be considered a counterculture, as it exists within Puritan New England until Endicott eradicates it, and the rituals and practices of the Merry Mounters is a clear expression against the strict ideological views of the Puritans and their cultural beliefs and practices. The existence of this subculture becomes important within art and literature because “The creation of counter-hegemonic rituals and stylistic practices allows for an element of nonsense and play in an otherwise purely deterministic social universe” (de Certeau 1247). The subculture within Hawthorne’s short story allows for a way to challenge and question the dominant cultural ideology in a way that feels safe and nonthreatening but is still able to reach a wide audience.

It is true that by the time Hawthorne was publishing, and certainly before his death, the Puritan culture in America was diminishing, the effects were far from past, but trading one religious zealot or fanatic for another, or trading one abusive and restrictive authority for another, is no improvement. Religion was still a major influence in Hawthorne’s lifetime, and religious extremism or fanaticism was still an issue worth addressing, especially for someone like Hawthorne who was aware of his own family’s involvement in the Salem witch trials, a lasting and impressionable cultural movement that was the result of an overzealous religious community, just like the one Hawthorne depicts in “The May-Pole of Merry Mount.”

Of course, the May-Pole, and the rituals and practices associated with, and practiced around, the May-Pole are shocking to the Puritans, and to the audience if they would consider themselves morally pure. However, as Hebdige argues, “symbols are chosen because they

shock” (1265). The actions of the Merry Mounters must shock and challenge the cultural expectations of the readers, the heathens’ actions must be a treat to the dominant moral ideology of the Puritans, and Hawthorne’s audience, in order to serve as effective cultural symbols and effective cultural figures.

While Endicott and the Puritans are disgusted by the carefree and seemingly unorganized and heathenous lifestyle of the Merry Mounters, it is not quite so unorganized as it might appear. “In *Profane Culture*, Willis shows how, contrary to the popular myth which resents subcultures as lawless forms, the internal structure of any particular subculture is characterized by an extreme orderliness: each part is organically related to other parts and it is through the fit between them that the subculture member makes sense of the world” (Hebdige 1263). Ultimately, then, subcultures are nothing if not consistent, and symbols may, in fact, lose their natural or original meaning in favor of something new.

The May-Pole may at first appear as a symbolic challenge and undermining of Puritan morality and community, but it may also be a symbol of cultural identity and unity for another group. The May-Pole could serve as a sign of freedom and unity, tolerance and joy, or even, as Endicott hoped, a whipping pole and sign of oppression, not freedom. Such symbolic meanings would completely change and transform the initial symbolic interpretation of the pole itself, but that does not make them any less correct or plausible. Hawthorne’s tale never tells us, and we can never really know, what the May-Pole might symbolize - what it might be like if the Merry Mounters were the dominant cultural figures, not the Puritans. That is, although the Merry Mounters appear to be free and without worry, we know their lifestyle cannot last within Puritan

culture, but we do not know whether Puritan culture could last within the society and culture of Merry Mount. The society of Merry Mount may be as oppressive and intolerant of outside ideologies as the Puritans' own, but we can never know that because they are a counterculture that doesn't last. Therefore, the May-Pole is both symbolic and mysterious, because we can never fully understand it, but it still serves as a cultural image of dissonance and subversion. Ultimately, the May-Pole serves as a challenge to good and pure Puritan morality.

Finally, Hawthorne's works, knowingly or not, serve as cultural studies pieces because, as Giddens argues, in order for hegemony to develop and exist within a culture there must be some sort of active, critical capability of a subculture, subordinate group, or subordinate people. This is exactly the case in "The May-Pole of Merry Mount." In order for a group or ideology to maintain power and control, there has to be a threat to challenge order, or else there is a question for the need of order in the first place. The subculture or subordinate group must be influential enough to function and reaffirm the need for order and control without ever truly threatening or possibly overturning the actual dominant structure of society. In many ways, the subordinate group, whatever its practices and principles, still serves a purpose within the process of maintaining cultural hegemony and expectations, if for no other reason than to show what is not normal or accepted within a culture, as is the case in "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" and many of Hawthorne's other short stories. In other words, there must be some form of disruption or dissidence in order for cultural hegemony to be created and maintained, or else it would become lax and fall apart.

Despite Hawthorne's use of monstrous characters, monstrosity is not just about specific

characters, it is about theme, theory, style and genre. William Jewett, Lawrence Wilson, Elizabeth Ammons, Magnus Ullén, John C. Stubbs, John Michael, Armin Paul Frank and Elissa Greenwald, have all written academic works pertaining to Hawthorne's use of the Romantic genre, Romantic elements, and Romantic concepts. Without a doubt, Nathaniel Hawthorne's works include elements of Romanticism. His writing has all of the elements associated with the Romantic Movement: emphasis on individualism, glorification of the past, especially the medieval, glorification and beauty of nature, stressing of emotion, a sense of heroic individualism and sublimity. From the Medieval alchemy of Aylmer in "The Birth-Mark," and the near stoicism of Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, to the focus on and awe of nature in "Young Goodman Brown," and the arguably heroic nature of the minister in "The Minister's Black Veil," Hawthorne embodies all that is Romanticism, even if it is in a darker and stranger way than his contemporaries. However, Hawthorne's works can also be seen through the lenses of many other schools of literary criticism, scholarship, and research.

It would be a mistake to always take an author at their word. An audience should question an author's purpose and intent, and readers should realize that the author is not the only one who brings purpose or intention to a piece of literature. Writers are influenced by society, readers have their own responses, and critics use a variety of lenses to interpret and make determinations about an author's works. According to Rivkin and Ryan, in his piece *Television Culture*, John Fiske argues that "audiences regularly take away different meanings from those intended by the producers of television programs" (1234). That same could be, and probably more often is, said of literature. Moreover, cultural studies tells us that, despite the

intent or purpose of a work of art, “Audiences can ‘decode’ cultural messages in ways that allow them to think resistantly about their lives” (Rivkin and Ryan 1234). Thus, literature can serve to reinforce or upset cultural norms and expectations, and sometimes both.

That said, Hawthorne’s position in regards to the genre of his works seems as important as anyone else’s. In the preface to his novel *The House of Seven Gables* Hawthorne calls himself a romantic, or at least he calls this work one of Romanticism. Hawthorne writes: “The point of view in which this tale comes under the Romantic definition lies in the attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us” (“Preface”). However, even Hawthorne is not overly convinced of his success, or if he is he is coy about it, even mocking, writing: “In the present work, the author has proposed to himself—but with what success, fortunately, it is not for him to judge—to keep undeviatingly within his immunities” (*The House of Seven Gables* “Preface”).

Due to Hawthorne being a romantic, or, more precisely, a dark romantic, there is little surprise that his works often display metaphors and warnings, and his works are often cautionary tales which propose that attributes such as guilt, sin, and evil are among the most inherent and natural qualities of mankind (Reynolds 524, Wayne 140). Hawthorne had an aptitude for coalescing historical romance laden with symbolic imagery and metaphors with profound psychological themes, approaching surrealism (Howe 633). This combination of romantic metaphor and psychological refrains is one of Hawthorne’s greatest and most auspicious leitmotifs. Hawthorne’s portrayals of the past create a style of historical fiction which is used as a mode of expression for the common themes of ancestral sin, guilt and retribution

(Crews 28-29). Hawthorne displays these themes through his monomaniacal characters, which serve as both symbols of warning and instruction. These symbols are presented in no stronger manner than through the lens of monstrosity.

In the introductory section of this paper I mentioned that the word monster derives from the Latin term *monstrum*, and the root of the Latin *monstrum* is *monere*, which means to warn but also to instruct (Kearney 34). Throughout its history and development, the word monster and its derivatives have meant everything from a human or an animal with a birth defect, to a repulsive character or persona, to a person who exhibits callous cruelty or mischievousness (Bennett 55). Thus, Hawthorne's characters easily fit into the historical category of monstrosity, especially when considered metaphorically.

Similarly, monsters, according to Saint Augustine, "are called 'monsters,' because they demonstrate or signify something; 'portents,' because they portend something" ("Chapter 8"). Hawthorne, like Augustine, appears to have seen monsters as a part of the world, natural in their occurrence, which offer instruction as well as warning. Connecting the idea of monstrosity with the metaphors already present and plentiful in Hawthorne's tales is no stretch, and what better way to present metaphors than through the use of metaphoric monsters?

Additionally, Hawthorne's monsters work on the psychological level as well. The author Henry James applauded Nathaniel Hawthorne, saying of him that, "he cared for the deeper psychology, and that, in his way, he tried to become familiar with it" (qtd. in Porte 97). Likewise, often times a monster, like psychology, will "encourage us to confront our deep fears" (Gilmore

190). Hawthorne does this by forcing his readers to consider the inherent, or at least potential, sin and wrath in the subconscious mind of man.

Monsters, as previously stated, take many forms, but the most basic and natural form monsters can assume is that of a human. Monsters, like most academic areas of study, have been widely researched, and, like most areas of scholarship, there are varying degrees of accord and disparity. For some, humans will never constitute a form of monstrosity, while for others there is no greater monster than man. In adding the final period to this chapter, I will again to turn to David Gilmore.

I have oft quoted Gilmore throughout this chapter; however, perhaps his most imperative and relevant point concerning the study of monstrosity is that “Characterologically speaking, monsters are fully human: their unmotivated malice and destructiveness are human, not animal traits” (193). That is not to say that all humans are monsters, but, rather, the traits exhibited by monsters are only human traits manifested in an excessive degree, and, therefore, it stands to reason that when a person displays to an excessive degree their base human qualities, such as depravity, they can easily become as monstrous as any physically atrocious incarnation of monstrosity. It is only right to remember that although these characters exhibit monstrous behaviors and psyches, they are still human, and although they are human they still retain the potential to demonstrate monstrosities. The key point being, monsters can be human; they exhibit human traits, and “there is always a non-fixed boundary between men and monsters . . . there can be no clear division between us and them” (Gilmore 191). It is not possible to say where exactly monstrosity begins in the individual. We recognize only that there is a point when

we can see that monstrosity has occurred within an individual or character.

Hawthorne plays with this idea in his short stories, delving deeply into the human psyche and human sensibilities. Hawthorne's monsters, with a few minor exceptions, are not the typical dragons or giants that we think of when we hear the word monster, but their destructiveness and unmotivated malice mark them as others just as much as Tolkien's Smaug, Homer's Scylla, or Carroll's Jabberwocky. Hawthorne's characters are, perhaps, even more dangerous monsters due to their human form, which allows them to weave in and out of society at will, unquestioned, while their obsessive psychology and apathy towards humanity and its survival makes them exceedingly dangerous to mankind. Their traits are solely human, but excessively so. One cannot simply *look* at one of Hawthorne's monomaniacal monsters and *see* their monstrosity, they appear human, and their border is ambiguous and undefined exactly because, although we can see they are monstrous in their mindset and actions, we cannot say exactly where their humanity ends or their monstrosity begins.

Rarely, as Hawthorne's own work would show, are binaries absolute; rarely does either black or white win out, which is a theme also related to monsters. Life and literature are much more complex than that, and so, perhaps, it is best not to seek the one correct answer but rather to measure the possibility and practicability of the many potential interpretations of literary pieces, and weigh them accordingly. Hawthorne's works are Romantic pieces, without doubt, but they also have left room for many scholars to interpret elements of Magic Realism, Surrealism, and, I would argue, Monster and Cultural Studies theories as well. Whatever Hawthorne's aim, it doesn't matter; what matters is what has been written and what can be done with what has

been written, not the author's intentions, whatever they might have been. Hawthorne may or may not have intended to create literary characters whose nature and mentality aligned with literary monstrosity, but, nonetheless, his characters possess the traits and characteristics of literary monsters, and, moreover, the reading and interpretation of Hawthorne's short stories seemingly coincides with both the accepted interpretations of Monster Theory and of Cultural Studies theorists.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon to see cultural studies theorists considering the impacts of sociology and psychology, since cultural sociology, as a field, is home to many practitioners of Cultural Studies and Cultural Theory. While this project does not seek to incorporate the many aspects of cultural psychology, the mindset and mental state of characters, like Aylmer or Digby, is always in question. The psychological state of Hawthorne's, and Poe's, characters are always in question. Their motives are often questionable, their obsessions rarely make logical sense and their diminished sense of sympathy makes it hard to commiserate with them.

Despite the permanence and importance of Hawthorne's literature, some authors, including Edgar Allan Poe, have accused Hawthorne of mere allegory, but Borges, in his 1949 essay, defends Hawthorne against such a claim (Zamora and Faris 509). Borges argues that Hawthorne is trying to establish some type of symbolic significance in ordinary life, which may account for his use of the fantastical or magical elements in his short stories and some of his novels (Zamora and Faris 509). Moreover, Brenda Wineapple also notes that "Contemporaries respected Hawthorne, they admired him, reviewed him, and they recognized him as one of the

most imaginative and strangest writers in America” (155). However, even though he harbored a distaste for tales of mere allegory and morality, Poe would go on to write: “The style of Hawthorne is purity itself. His tone is singularly effective—wild, plaintive, thoughtful, and in full accord with his themes ... We look upon him as one of the few men of indisputable genius to whom our country has as yet given birth” (qtd. in McFarland 88-89). Whether or not Poe admired Hawthorne as much as he says he does here, Poe’s works align closely with Hawthorne’s in regards to their monstrous elements, monstrous and cultural figures and cultural studies interpretations. These elements of monstrosity and culture are evident in Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “Berenice,” “The Black Cat” and “The Cask of Amontillado.”

### Chapter Three: THE LITERARY MONSTERS OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

Hawthorne was not the only American writer crafting tales of horror and monstrosity in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. In fact, Edgar Allan Poe is even better known for his tales of horror than Hawthorne is for his. “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Black Cat,” and “Berenice” are just a few of the many examples of Poe’s ability to create literary monsters and tales of terror. However, like Hawthorne’s characters, the monstrous qualities of Poe’s characters can also be traced to their monomaniacal behavior and mental instability.

For instance, in “The Tell-Tale Heart” Poe’s narrator is, like the narrator’s in many of Poe’s stories, of questionable reliability. Although the narrator’s mental state seems unsure, the narrator is insistent that he is not mad. In fact, the narrator is adamant that the narrator’s senses have been sharpened by obsession. Moreover, throughout the entire story the narrator possess an overwhelming sense of calm. Poe writes of the narrator, “observe how healthily – how calmly I can tell you the whole story” (Poe 281).

Poe’s narrator, like most monsters, directs attention towards a specific object of obsession and seeks only to destroy it, without regard for consequences or possible side effects of such an action. Objects of obsession don’t need to be large in size. Much like Hawthorne’s Aylmer, whose obsession is a tiny birthmark on his wife’s cheek, Poe’s narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart” obsesses over the strange eye of an old man, one the narrator says is like a “vulture” (281).

Eventually, the narrator’s obsession becomes too much to bear, and, though the narrator

cares for the old man, the narrator kills someone for which the narrator harbored affection and a sense of closeness. In fact, Poe's narrator admits to loving the old man. The narrator discloses, "I loved the old man. He had never wronged me" (Poe 281). Nevertheless, the narrator kills the old man without repentance because of his manic obsession. Additionally, the narrator's obsession with the eye grows worse throughout the story, until the very sight of it maddens the narrator. On the night the narrator kills the old man, the sight of the eye angers the narrator immensely. The narrator says of the eye: "It was open – wide, wide open – and I grew furious as I gazed upon it" (Poe 283).

One could write Poe's narrator off as mad, but Poe's narrator has a detailed and intricate plan that is developed slowly over a substantial period of time. Not only does the narrator plan to murder the old man, but the narrator is also aware enough to lure the old man into a sense of calm and trust, saying, "I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him" (Poe 281). Actually, like many literary monsters, the narrator enjoys the process of harm and destruction. When initially thinking up the plan to kill the old man, and thinking about the old man's fear, the narrator "fairly chuckled at the idea" (Poe 282). Moreover, when the narrator kills the old man, before dismembering and hiding the body, the narrator "smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done" (Poe 284). So, Poe's narrator kill the old man with the ghastly vulture eye, and that with joy. Then, after committing the heinous crime, the narrator meticulously hides the body. After hiding the body of the old man, the narrator shows no remorse for the actions, even during the process of admitting the crime to the police. By the end of the story, the narrator has become morally numb to actions of atrocity or brutality.

Like most monsters, Poe's narrator thrives on an ability to induce fear in others. The first night sneaking into the old man's room the narrator admits, "Never before that night had I felt the extent of my own powers – of my sagacity" (Poe 282). The narrator adds, "I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror" (Poe 282). The old man's fear only builds. From the first night the narrator sneaks into the old man's room until the night of the murder, the narrator knows the old man's "fears had been ever since growing upon him" (Poe 283). Finally, on the night the narrator murders the old man, the narrator declares, "The old man's terror must have been extreme!" (Poe 283). However, the narrator's ability to inspire fear dies along with the old man.

Much like in "The Black Cat," once Poe's narrator destroys the old man and his vulture eye, the object of his obsession, the narrator loses all sense of meaning and focus. Along with losing a sense of focus and obsession with the old man's eye, Poe's narrator loses a position in the cultural power dynamic. Like Grendel and the narrator in "The Black Cat," and many other literary monsters, when the monstrous character loses its ability to stimulate fear the character begins a downfall towards defeat or discovery. Poe teases at a complete understanding of this concept of fear and power. Once Poe's narrator no longer has the ability to terrorize the old man, the dynamic flips and the narrator becomes the one who has cause to fear. However, the narrator initially rejects the idea of fear. When the police first knock upon the door, the narrator says, "I went down to open it with a light heart, - for what had I *now* to fear?" (Poe 284). Only a few lines later the narrator adds, "I smiled, - for *what* had I to fear?" (Poe 284). Yet, though the narrator does not show fear, the narrator becomes manic and worried and eventually admits to

the crime of murder because of the belief that the police are simply mocking the narrator.

Poe's narrator possesses no sympathy or remorse for his actions, but the narrator does possess an ability to control and understand the actions the narrator is committing throughout the story, as well as the ability to plan out a complex murder plot. The line between man and monster is never clear, and there is a "common interchangeability of human and monster" (Gilmore 193). This is clear in several of Poe's tales, such as "Berenice," and probably never more than in "The Tell-Tale Heart." Poe's character embraces his repressed desires in order to subvert cultural norms and partake in horrifying fantasies. Within a society where moral standards guide everyday life and order protects against chaos, stories like "The Tell-Tale Heart" challenge ideas of conventional morality, human desire and basic understandings of human nature. Stories like "The Tell-Tale Heart" are not only able to question human psychology, but they also serve as an outlet for forbidden wishes and desires that cannot be acted out safely in real life.

Although "people do not always act out their impulses, which nevertheless represent a mixture of wishes and fears percolating just beneath the surface," those impulses still exist (Gilmore 186). When it comes to monsters, there is "no clear division between us and them, between civilization and bestiality" (Gilmore 191). It is when men cross those lines and indulge in impulses of evil that they enter the realm of monstrosity. After all, "Coping with our dual impulses, murderous and compassionate at the same time, we make a deity of the good within us and a monster of the bad" (Gilmore 192). Poe's tales, like Hawthorne's, focus more on humanity's potential for bad than good. Nonetheless, these tales suggest the unspoken truths that humanity possesses great potential for good, and all humans have hidden desires that they

are either ashamed of or afraid to indulge in because of cultural expectations. Stories like “The Tell-Tale Heart” allow for a temporary suspension of cultural restrictions and boundaries in favor of indulgence and release.

Just as cultural studies scholars would argue that race and gender don’t actually exist but, rather, are organizational concepts and beliefs people have created to maintain cultures and societies, so would they argue that morality, religion and ideas of acceptability and the forbidden are cultural constructs people have created to define and maintain order within civilized societies. Thus, these concepts, though they develop into cultural norms, are not absolute, and they are challengeable and changeable, as Poe and Hawthorne are able to show through their stories. Moreover, although people create social systems, outside of social systems these cultural concepts and constructs have no meaning at all. Stories like “Berenice” and “The Tell-Tale Heart” challenge the social constructs that maintain our sense of order and morality. Literature is one way to challenge or reinforce cultural hegemony, and sometimes both. Poe’s stories help to create and challenge identity as well as social order and social norms. “Berenice” provides a fantastic example of the use of literature as a form of release and suspension of the cultural codes of morality and acceptable human behavior.

“Berenice” is unique among both Hawthorne and Poe’s short stories in that it identifies, specifically, the source of the monstrosity of the story’s main character: monomania. Twice Poe addresses the fact that Egaeus suffers from monomania. Monomania is the source of Egaeus’s obsessions and atrocities, and, as a result, monomania is the source of Egaeus’s monstrosity. Egaeus himself states, “This monomania, if I must term it, consisted in a morbid irritability of

those properties of the mind in metaphysical science termed the attentive” (Poe 100). In short, although he may have been aware of his so-called disease of monomania, the obsession still overwhelms and drives Egaeus’s actions through the rest of the story. Likewise, although he does not specifically mention the term monomial in his tales Hawthorne makes statements that correlate with the concept of monomania. For example, Hawthorne’s Aylmer “had devoted himself, however, too unreservedly to scientific studies ever to be weaned from them by any second passion” (152). There was no room for anything else in Aylmer’s life, and he even sacrifice’s his wife in the name of science. Likewise, Hawthorne writes of Ethan Brand that the unpardonable sin was “the one thought that took possession of his life” and that it was “The idea that possessed his life” (254, 265).

Still, as Gilmore argues, “there is always a non-fixed boundary between men and monsters” (191). Though it is easy to identify Egaeus as a monster, and it is easy to see the before and after effects of his monomania, when exactly Egaeus crosses the line into monstrosity is unclear. This is, in part, due to the fact that the story has gaps in time, but, more importantly, the problem lies in identifying where the line between man and monster falls, and, again, that line is never clear.

Like the narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart,” Egaeus’s reliability as a narrator is disputable. Egaeus’s mental clarity and state of mind should be in question throughout the story, but his actions seem more than clear. For one, Egaeus is aware that this is “a tale which should not be told” (Poe 99). Moreover, although he is affected by visions and daydreams, Egaeus is aware of the effects they have upon him. Egaeus is also aware of that actions have consequences, stating,

“as in ethics, evil is a consequence of good, so, in fact, out of joy is sorrow born” (Poe 98).

Though this is not always true, it is true in the case of Egaeus and Berenice, and Egaeus’s understanding shows, if nothing else, a sense of self-awareness and control over his actions, at least subliminally if not consciously.

Nonetheless, Egaeus is still obsessed and monomaniacal. Egaeus fixates on his cousin Berenice, and, more specifically, obsesses over her teeth with an “*intensity of interest*” (Poe 100). Egaeus tells the audience that his obsession with Berenice is not due to feelings of love or emotion, stating, “I had never loved her. In the strange anomaly of my existence, feelings with me, *had never been* of the heart, and my passions *always were* of the mind” (Poe 100). Egaeus’s obsession stems from his mind, and he longs for Berenice’s mind. At least that is how Egaeus’s obsession starts. However, Egaeus’s obsession with Berenice’s teeth grows both intensely and rapidly. Upon first witnessing Berenice’s dramatic change, due to her unnamed disease, Egaeus notes that, “*the teeth* of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to my view. Would to God that I had never beheld them, or that, having done so, I had died!” (Poe 103). Egaeus’s intense interest in and torment by Berenice’s teeth only worsens after this initial sighting.

After initially witnessing Berenice’s teeth, Egaeus’s mental monomania develops swiftly. In the space of a single paragraph after first seeing Berenice’s changed teeth, Egaeus confesses, “I saw them *now* even more unequivocally than I beheld them then. The teeth! – the teeth! – they were here, and there, and everywhere, and visibly and palpably before me” (Poe 103). Egaeus goes on to say that, “I had no thoughts but for the teeth. For these I longed with a frenzied desire” (Poe 103). Poe writes of how completely the obsessions with Berenice’s teeth

overpowers and masters Egaeus and his mental state: “They – they alone were present to the mental eye, and they, in their sole individuality, became the essence of their mental life” (103).

Egaeus’s obsession is more than just a mental infatuation, as Egaeus assigns a sense of power and morality to Berenice’s teeth along with his mental fixation. Egaeus says of Berenice’s teeth that he, “assigned to them, in imagination, a sensitive and sentient power, and, even when assisted by the lips, a capability of moral expression” (Poe 103-104). All of Hawthorne’s monstrous characters displayed symptoms of monomania, but Egaeus’s obsession with Berenice’s teeth is more obsessive and driven than any of their obsessions. Egaeus’s mental state is highlighted more by Poe than any of Hawthorne’s characters’ mental states are in his stories.

Mental monstrosity is much more at work in “Berenice” than in any other of Poe’s, or even Hawthorne’s, tales. Though many of Hawthorne and Poe’s tales have worse endings than “Berenice,” the level of mental monstrosity and depravity are never more highlighted or displayed than in “Berenice.” Gilmore claims, “The monster then represents all that is beyond human control,” and this is very clear in “Berenice” (Gilmore 19). Egaeus’s temptations and desires, his mental state, the object of his affection and obsession and his mental state and psyche are all beyond his control, as they are beyond the control of all people. “Berenice” is a model illustration of literary monstrosity and its cultural importance.

Egaeus’s mania becomes so complete that he affirms that he must have Berenice’s teeth, and he even forgets the atrocious acts he commits to acquire them for himself. As for the teeth,

Egeus states that, “I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason” (Poe 104). However, Egeus does not recall his actions, even in later recollections, saying that, “I had done a deed – what was it? I asked myself the question aloud, and the whispering echoes of the chamber answered me – ‘*What was it?*’” (Poe 104-105). Even in his later recollections, Egeus’s memory of the events is unintelligible, and it is in vain that Egeus attempts to recall the events that led to the possession of Berenice’s teeth. However, due to his comments throughout the story, and his desire to possess Berenice’s teeth, there seems little reason to question whether Egeus knew what he was doing when he dug up Berenice’s grave and ripped her teeth from her mouth.

Egeus digs up Berenice’s grave, rips her teeth out as she struggles against him, leaving nail marks on his arms and shrieking in the darkness of the night. After, Egeus returns to his room to sleep in his muddy garments without remorse, or even recollection, of the violent acts he has committed. Nevertheless, Egeus has longed to commit these acts, any acts, so long as they would allow him to obtain Berenice’s teeth. Egeus never shows concern for Berenice, though he is told she is still alive, and he never shows regret or concern for what he has done. Additionally, Egeus places all 32 of Berenice’s individual teeth in a box on his bedroom table and can’t even recall tearing them out of her mouth. Egeus’s obsession is so strong that it possesses him even when he cannot recall his actions.

Gilmore argues that monsters are, “the spirit that says ‘yes’ – to all that is forbidden,” adding, “As projections of inner conflicts, these terrible images reflect both repressed desire and their opposites: guilt, awe, and dread” (Gilmore 12, 18). Egeus is a representation of indulgence

into the repressed desires of mankind. Regardless of harm, of impurity and of moral degradation, Egaeus indulges in the dark and forbidden corners of human desire, giving into all the weird and suppressed cravings of his depraved mind. Egaeus is not sorry for what he does to Berenice, and although what Egaeus does is disgusting it holds a sense of awe and wonder, even if the reader possesses some feelings of guilt.

These feelings of guilt may reflect the reader's own need or desire to indulge in some sort of forbidden or culturally unacceptable action or actions. The reader may simultaneously feel a sense of admiration and contempt for Egaeus. This may be because Egaeus can subvert the norms of acceptable behavior, which the reader may also desire to do, but he goes too far with it, which may make the reader feel disgusted at Egaeus's actions and guilty for having some similar suppressed desire within him or herself. Thus, the reader may experience the freedom from everyday constraints that he or she longs for while still realizing or reaffirming within themselves the need for cultural boundaries and codes.

All monsters, including those of Hawthorne and Poe, possess debased human traits, such as wrath and cruelty (Gilmore 29). In Egaeus's case, the traits that are debased are compassion, morality, and clarity. Monsters are always "'un-natural,' threatening, and impure" (Gilmore 19). Egaeus is all three. Egaeus's lifestyle and obsessions are unnatural, his thoughts and actions are dangerous and threatening and his disturbance of Berenice's grave, as well as the removal of her teeth, is both impure and immoral. At the start of his tale, Egaeus seemingly has very acute senses, and is far from mad, but, as the story progresses, Egaeus descends into complete obsession and monomania, which ties back to the blurred line between humanity and

monstrosity. The story does not offer an exact moment when Egeus crosses the line into monstrosity, only that he has clearly crossed that line before the story ends.

It is clear that Poe is aware of the monstrous traits he is imposing upon his characters. For example, in an ironic yet purposeful way, Poe creates his monster Egeus with an obsession for the mouth, more specifically for teeth. Typically, monsters have a cavernous mouth, fangs, or some kind of fearsome teeth (Gilmore 176). In a twist, Poe turns this monstrous trait on its head. Poe has his character suffer from an obsession with a generally monstrous trait of physiognomy instead of possessing said trait. Monsters that use their mouths as weapons are seen in almost every culture in every time and place. For example, Dracula has his fangs, as do other vampires, the shark in *Jaws* has his giant teeth, and the Japanese serpent woman is a voracious eater. Celtic Mythology, Chinese tales, Native American folklore, European stories and many other cultural tales contain monsters with large and malicious teeth. In Egeus's case, instead of possessing a monstrous mouth or maw himself, Poe's character is obsessed with his cousin's mouth. Instead of using his mouth to attack or destroy his prey, Egeus uses Berenice's teeth to indulge in his culturally unacceptable behaviors and adulterated desires. Thus, Poe uses the normalized monster mouth as a tool in his own story, but Poe is able to make teeth the monster's obsession instead of his weapon.

The line between man and monster is blurred, as is the line between order and chaos. In a literary sense, monsters serve as "a perfect metaphor not only for the limitless power of evil, but also of dissolving of the boundaries that separate us from chaos" (Gilmore 19). Egeus is capable of committing terrible evils in order to fulfill his strange desires; Egeus is also capable of

subverting acceptable social norms and cultural expectations, specifically in term of graveyards, in order to obtain the object of his obsessive longing. Therefore, “monsters expose the radical permeability and artificiality of all our classificatory boundaries, highlighting the arbitrariness and fragility of culture” (Gilmore 19). It is not just the line between man and monster or order and chaos that is blurred; all of the classical lines and boundaries of culture are blurred when culture and humanity are told through the lens of metaphorical monsters.

Besides serving just as metaphors, monsters are important to culture because they fundamentally help in “expressing the same hopes and fears of human beings since the dawn of history” (Gilmore 36). Such actions and fears may include sexual desires, death, being buried alive, the release of forbidden desires or acting out impure thoughts. As people grow more intelligent and complex so do their desires and fears. The need to express, act out, or indulge in fundamental desires and fears become more and more real as civilization moves further and further away from the natural state of man.

In addition, according to Freud, “The history of human civilization shows beyond any doubt that there is an intimate connection between cruelty and the sexual instinct” (qtd. in Gilmore 181). This is seen in Poe’s “Berenice” through Egaeus’s attraction, and arranged marriage, to his cousin. In Poe’s “The Black Cat,” the narrator is excessively cruel to, and eventually kills, his wife. Likewise, in Hawthorne’s “The Birthmark,” Aylmer kills his wife Georgiana due to his monstrous obsession. While none of these stories are overtly sexual in nature, each story connects an emotional or physical desire with the cruelty of the monstrous character that kills its beloved. Thus, the monster, as a literary trope, is connected strongly to

cultural and human desires, and, thus, the monster serves as a perfect symbol for the hidden and forbidden desires of humankind. Like cultures, monsters are complex and abstract, and monsters “offer a richly variant perspective into the cultural order” (Gilmore 19).

Like the narrators in “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “Berenice,” Poe’s narrator in “The Black Cat” is insistent that he is not mad. Actually, the narrator in “The Black Cat” is probably the sanest of Poe’s narrators, but perhaps also the cruelest. The narrator tells us at the story’s start that “mad I am not,” and “My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and with comment, a series of mere household events” (Poe 319). The sense of calm and carelessness about the atrocious actions the narrator admits to committing in his tale, and the amount of detail he provides, suggest he retains his sense of reason and sanity, just not his compassion. This calm and careless manner and lack of sympathy towards others is a common theme within each of Poe’s tales, and many of Hawthorne’s too.

In addition to his sense of calm, Poe’s narrator in “The Black Cat” also embraces monstrous elements, including a lack of pity and compassion towards others and a willingness to embrace forbidden and suppressed desires. However, besides possessing certain traits, monsters also serve as moral lessons (Gilmore 11). Unlike some of the more ambiguous and hazy lessons presented in Hawthorne’s tales, the most important moral lesson in Poe’s “The Black Cat” is very clearly the warnings against drunkenness and alcoholism, as inebriation is the stimulant for the monomania and violence displayed by Poe’s narrator in “The Black Cat.”

Throughout the tale, the narrator’s financial position and alcoholism worsen and, as a

result, so does his state of mind; as the narrator's dependency on alcohol increases so does the level of his obsession and violence. On the tale's first page, the narrator tells us that his "tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions" (Poe 319). Poe writes that his narrator grew, due to his intemperance, "day by day, more moody more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others" (320). The narrator soon begins to verbally and then physically assault his wife. All of these actions, even the obsession he takes with Pluto, his pet cat, he blames on his addiction to alcohol. The narrator knows his actions are terrible but he continues to commit them nonetheless, due in part to his addictions. After all, even the narrator admits, "for what disease is like Alcohol!" (Poe 320).

However, according to Frushell, the seeds of the narrator's monomania "lie in his pride, his exalted notion of himself, whom he likens to Mankind early in the story but to God as the story progresses, thus recalling Halio's comment that the sin of pride forms the basis of many of Poe's tales" (43). Much like there is a tension between the roots of the narrator's monomania, there is, throughout the tale, "a basic double tension informing the tale" between the desires of man and brute (Frushell 43). These desires of love and hate are in conflict until the narrator finally reaches a depth of complete moral degradation.

As a result of his inebriation and pride, the narrator's monstrosity manifests itself both in the form of an overzealous obsession with the cat, Pluto, and in the form of atrocious and appalling actions towards both his animals and his wife. For instance, Poe's narrator "made no scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog" (320). After succumbing to the disease, as the narrator calls it, of alcoholism, the narrator says, "The fury of a demon instantly

possessed me. I knew myself no longer” (Poe 320). This is followed by the narrator telling the audience that, “a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-natured, thrilled every fibre of my frame” (Poe 320-321). This leads the narrator to violently and deliberately cut out one of Pluto’s eyes. At first there seems to be hope or redemption for the narrator. The narrator admits that, when the morning after the atrocity finally comes, he felt a “sentiment half of horror, half of remorse” (321). However, the narrator then adds that the feeling was “feeble and equivocal” and that his soul remained untouched (Poe 321). The narrator states that he then drowned the memory of the evil deed in wine. Within a page of beginning the maltreatment towards his animals, the narrator is completely unmoved by his appalling actions.

The narrator’s character and monstrosity develop rapidly after cutting out one of Pluto’s eyes. The narrator is overcome by the spirit of perverseness in which he loses all sense of human decency and compassion. The narrator soon seeks “to do wrong for the wrongs sake only” (Poe 321). The narrator kills the cat, stating he “hung it *because* I knew that it had loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason of offence; hung it *because* I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin” (Poe 321). At this point, the narrator is no longer sorry for his actions nor does the narrator seek to explain or rationalize his actions. Again, Poe is contemplating the love-hate dichotomy and allowing his audience a literary outlet for desires they could never manifest in reality, at least not without fear of reprisals and punishments from their society.

After killing Pluto, the narrator goes so far as to admit that he committed the sin of killing the cat because it might, if possible, place his immortal soul beyond the forgiveness and mercy even of God. However, for Frushell the narrator’s challenge to God comes when the narrator

murders his wife; according to Frushell, when the narrator murders another human being he is attempting to assume the power of God (44). Comparatively, Gilmore tells us that monsters are “warnings from God, directing attention to deviations from the true path in symbolic or allegorical form” (10). Moreover, Pierre Barsuire argues that monsters “exemplify some moral or spiritual flaw” (qtd. in Gilmore 10). Poe’s narrator is very much aware of the sinful and immoral behavior he is indulging in, and it is for those very reasons that the narrator indulges in such actions, much like Hawthorne’s Ethan Brand. The narrator does not question whether what he is doing is wrong, he knows it is, but he does it anyway, without remorse. Thus, Poe’s tale, besides also serving as warning against the excesses of alcohol, questions his society’s cultural norms in regards to understanding the fundamentals of human nature.

Additionally, after killing Pluto, the narrator replaces the cat with another similar looking cat. In essence, after destroying the object of his obsession, the monster replaces the object of his initial obsession with a new object of obsession. The replacement object is another cat who is also missing one of its eyes but which induces a sense of fear within the monster rather than the monster causing fear within the cat. This fear typically signifies the downfall of monstrous characters in literature, just as it does in Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Much like Pluto, the new cat’s love for its master appalls the narrator and only leads him to hate the new cat even more. The narrator tells the audience that he “longed to destroy it [the cat] with a blow” (Poe 324). The obsession with the new cat leads the narrator to an even deeper and darker monstrosity. Throughout the tale, the narrator’s cats “symbolically reflect the narrator’s degradation” (Frushell 43). During his obsession with the second cat, the narrator tells us that “Evil thoughts

became my soul intimates – the darkest and most evil of thoughts. The moodiness of my usual temper increased to hatred of all things and of all mankind” (Poe 325). This again represents the evils mankind is capable of, both in thought and deed, and shows just how morally degraded the narrator has become.

Stuck in conflict between hatred and terror, the narrator attempts to kill the new object of his fear and hatred. Much like Grendel, who never felt fear until grasped by Beowulf, the narrator of Poe’s tale never felt fear until the cat he so hated began to haunt his dreams. Just as Grendel tries to kill Beowulf, Poe’s narrator tries to kill the cat, but both fail. The narrator’s fear forces him to act, and in his anger the narrator attempts to kill the cat. In his attempt to kill the cat, the narrator is at first thwarted by his wife. However, in his wrath the narrator buries his axe in his wife’s head, killing her instantly. Without remorse, without sorrow, the narrator hides the body within a wall in the basement of their home. Frushell claims that, “When he buries the axe in his wife’s head, the narrator symbolically enacts the murder of his rational self” (Frushell 44). Thus, at this point, Poe’s narrator has clearly crossed over the line between man and monster, and “The final stage in his degradation has been reached” (Frushell 44). Likewise, for the rest of the story the narrator’s actions become increasingly crazed and irritational.

However, the narrator’s actions still do not bother him. After the murder, the narrator states: “I soundly and tranquilly slept; aye, I slept even with the burden of murder upon my soul” (Poe 326). The narrator goes on to say that, “My happiness was supreme!” (Poe 326). Even when the police come to investigate, the narrator feels nothing but glee, glee at the idea that he has committed such a heinous act without any repercussions or punishment. Poe’s narrator is as

pleased or unmoved by his murderous actions as any monster, as Dracula, as Harpin or as Windigo.

However, like Hawthorne's Brand, Poe's narrator in "The Black Cat" becomes a monster with nothing left to destroy. Ethan Brand finds the unpardonable sin and then, with no purpose left for him, he kills himself. Likewise, when the cat seemingly disappears in Poe's story, the narrator becomes irrational and purposeless until the cat is rediscovered, the narrator's crimes come to light and the story ends. As in "Ethan Brand" and "The Tell-Tale Heart," when a monster no longer has an object of obsession or fixation it becomes devoid of purpose, and the monster cannot long exist without some object to focus its obsession and terror upon. "Berenice," "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Birthmark," and "The Maypole of Merry Mount" do not contradict this concept, but the stories all end before the audience is permitted to see what happens after the monster destroys the object or person of its obsession.

In "The Black Cat," as in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the monstrous character cannot help but gloat about his victory, but without an object of obsession to give the monstrous character a sense of purpose the character inevitably becomes unstable and brings upon his own downfall. The narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart" reveals the location of the dismembered body, and in "The Black Cat" the narrator knocks upon the very spot in the wall where he has walled up his wife's body, which only leads to the second cat being discovered shrieking within the wall. In turn, the discovery of the body reveals the narrator's actions. In "Ethan Brand," "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart," the monstrous character brings about its own defeat once its direction and purpose are disrupted by the loss of an object of obsession or hatred, which is a common theme

in monster lore.

Additionally, in literature the monster “signals a return of the primeval reptilian cerebellum, the lowest animal instincts in man” (Gilmore 188). Poe’s narrator in “The Black Cat” is driven by anger and violence, without any real thought or concern for his actions. The narrator does not reason but seeks only to please himself through dominance and violence, which eventually leads to the murder of his wife and cat along with the beating of many other animals. Gilmore argues that the monster represents, “a form of regression in a bioevolutionary sense: devolution to lower levels, a return to the infancy of life itself, to the primal ooze” (188). Within many of Poe’s tales, the monstrous characters are driven by very basic and simple human desires, such as anger, hate or violence. Thus, Poe’s stories help to show that, although civilizations have advanced and humans have created a sense of order out of chaos, the most primal and intrinsic desires of mankind remain within humankind. These beast-like desires are only suppressed and stifled due to mankind’s progress and desire for order.

Aside from addressing the lower instincts of mankind, many of Poe’s tales, “The Black Cat” included, address the deep psychological nature of monsters. According to Gilmore, “A psychoanalytical approach is unavoidable in any serious approach to monster lore” (16). On the psychological level, monsters serve as “moral ambiguities” and “projections of inner conflicts” (Gilmore 18). In the case of the narrator of “The Black Cat,” the narrator is projecting his inner conflict with failure, humiliation and alcoholism. The narrator also struggles with functioning between an intense love for his wife and pets, before his alcoholism, and a hatred that leads him to abuse his animals and murder his wife.

Of course, the narrator in Poe's story, as in all of Poe's tales, is not born a monster, but he does become one. Poe writes that, "perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart," and this is evident throughout Poe's short stories, especially in "The Black Cat" (321). This correlates directly to the idea that monsters are projections of our inner longings and desires, the innate human capacity for evil. Poe himself asks, "Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a stupid action, for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*?" (321). This is a revealing quotation about the psychological state of Poe's characters and Poe's perception concerning the overall state of humanity. However, it is not just Poe's narrator in "The Black Cat" that acts this way. All the monstrous characters in Poe's short stories act viciously towards mankind. Poe's characters commit these dreadful acts simply because they want to, and they can. As such, the characters therefore serve as a release for the culturally prohibited desires within Poe's audience.

One such character is Poe's Montresor. Montresor is the narrator of perhaps the most lasting and important of Poe's short stories, "The Cask of Amontillado." Much like "The Black Cat," "The Cask of Amontillado" is a tale of moral degradation and the rejection of social and civilized moral norms. Also, like several of Poe's other stories, and many other 19<sup>th</sup> century stories, the plot centers around a character being buried alive. In addition, the story is told from the point of view of the murderer, not the victim, as many of Poe's tales are. Furthermore, like his other stories, Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" has cultural value as well. Finally, Poe's narrator, Montresor, is of an uncertain reliability, just as many of his other narrators are. In short, "The Cask of Amontillado" could almost serve as a synecdoche for all of Poe's tales, as it

displays so many of Poe's themes and highlights his writing style.

The story opens with Montresor saying, "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge" (Poe 426). Nonetheless, we are never told what Fortunato has done, and Montresor's actions towards Fortunato, a rather ironic name given the man's fate, seem unwarranted, despite Montresor's claims. There is no hint at the actual insults Fortunato has purported to have committed against Montresor. Nevertheless, these imagined slights and insults drive Montresor's actions throughout the story. Although he is as unreliable and questionable a narrator as any of Poe's other narrators, Montresor is as methodical and plotting as any sane man. Montresor's plan is well conceived and planned out, and as his plan develops Montresor even leads and goads poor Fortunato. It is unlikely a madman could maintain the meticulous steps necessary to complete Montresor's plan, or continue to manipulatively prod Fortunato onward.

Additionally, just as Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" is set in a medieval-like setting, which is typical of monster literature and lore, Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" is set amidst carnival, a season often connected with later monster and grotesque literature. Bakhtin defines carnival as, "the second world and the second life outside officialdom," or as, "people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter" (*Rabelais and His World* 6, 8). By "officialdom" Bakhtin means a serious or solemn culture. That is, a culture defined by a "prevailing truth" with an "established order" made up of "hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (*Rabelais and His World* 10). Typically, this culture is based on religious forms of social domination and restraint. Poe's story, set amidst carnival, challenges the hierarchy and restraints of society.

Though setting is important, “The other aspect which plays a crucial role in carnival is laughter,” which was mentioned in the previous paragraph (Pirnajmuddin and Amani 109). Accordingly, Fortunato is depicted dressed as a colorful jester for the festivities of carnival. In addition, Bakhtin adds that “carnivalistic laughter . . . is directed toward something higher – toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders” (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 127). In the story, Montresor is able to challenge and defeat his social superior, Fortunato, thus bringing about a shift in social order and challenging the social hierarchy. This ties into Pirnajmuddin and Amani’s argument that, “During the carnival everything conventional and official is mocked and reversed and seen as happily grotesque” (107). Poe’s Montresor mocks his prey, the unfortunate Fortunato. Montresor slyly jests Fortunato, telling him that he is a man to be missed. Yet, all the while, Montresor is plotting to slay Fortunato in secret. However, Montresor’s victory is somewhat restrictive in that he cannot tell anyone about it without facing extreme legal and social punishments.

However, Montresor and Fortunato are not just objects of monstrosity and mockery. Poe’s characters, as other literary monsters, “are sources of identification” (Gilmore 4). Essentially, monsters “serve as vehicles for the expiation of guilt as well as aggression.” This is exactly what Poe allows his contemporary audience to do through Montresor in “The Cask of Amontillado,” as well as through many of his other monstrous characters in his other tales (Gilmore 4).

Throughout the story, Montresor goads Fortunato continually. First Montresor drinks, ironically, to Fortunato’s “long life,” knowing he plans to murder Fortunato (Poe 429). Likewise,

Montresor implores Fortunato to return from the catacombs several times while leading him on by holding the false hope of Amontillado over his head. The sheer amount of time spent in planning implies that Montresor retains enough reason to murder and perform monstrous acts without being labeled completely mad. Moreover, Montresor plans and carries out his plan without error or compassion. In fact, the story ends with Montresor expressing that half a century has passed since he walled-up Fortunato. Nonetheless, Montresor expresses no pity or repentance at his actions, even after 50 years.

Poe's Montresor also possesses many of the other qualities of a classical monster. Montresor's calmness in chaining Fortunato to the wall, and then proceeding to wall him in, without remorse or compassion displays Montresor's complete lack of sympathy, a typical monster trait. Likewise, Montresor takes satisfaction in the noise of Fortunato struggling against the chains Montresor has locked him in. This joy in harming others is also typical of many literary monsters. In addition, in what can hardly be seen as a coincidence, Montresor finishes his task just as midnight, the witching hour, approaches. Finally, Fortunato pleads to God for pity, and Montresor mocks Fortunato by repeating his cry, "for the love of God!" (Poe 432). According to Gilmore, monsters exist as "sworn enemies of God, and, specifically, in light of Christian eschatology, as descendants of Cain or emissaries of the Devil" (47). Gilmore adds: "monsters have come to symbolize pure unvarnished evil, at least at the conscience level, meaning that which is opposite to God, spiritual malignancy in a general sense" (50). Therefore, the battle is not between man and monster; "The real battle is between the soul and its adversaries" (Gilmore 50).

Comparatively, according to Bakhtin, "the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, abstract" " (*Rabelais and His World* 19). This moral degradation and spiritual rejection is seen throughout both Poe and Hawthorne's short stories, as well as many other monster tales before their time. Thus, Montresor is both an enemy of God and a man of moral and spiritual degradation. In "The Cask of Amontillado," Montresor signifies absolute evil, unadulterated wickedness and unmitigated malevolence. Montresor is the exact opposite of all that is decent and respectable. Montresor is sly and conniving, and he is the embodiment of all the things people desire to do in their darkest hours but never could do within a civilized society.

In addition, Gilmore argues that, "imaginary monsters provide a convenient pictorial metaphor for human qualities that have to be repudiated, externalized, and defeated" (4). Although he isn't defeated in the story, Montresor still represents the temptation and desires that plague mankind in their darkest hours. In reality, people have to confront these secret desires and hidden pleasures. People must defeat their inner desires somehow, and externalizing inner desires, even in a literary form, can help people to confront and overcome them, even if they are culturally forbidden desires and fears. Though he survives, Montresor still serves as a warning against the potential evil mankind is capable of. "Monsters embody all that is dangerous and horrible in the human imagination," and, as such, stories like "The Cask of Amontillado" show the dangerous potential of the unmitigated evils mankind is capable of committing. However, stories like "The Cask of Amontillado" also serve as the necessary channel for confronting and overcoming those depravities without actually partaking in them (Gilmore 1).

All of Poe's tales, like Hawthorne's, seem to express cultural truths and impart cultural morals. Poe gets at many issues of culture but even more so at issues of human nature. Issues like love and loss, vengeance and punishment, isolation and insanity and fear of the unknown, especially the unknown of human nature, are depicted and scrutinized within Poe's stories. All of Poe's tales probe intensely into the exploration of evil and its consequences on the human soul.

For example, Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" addresses several cultural issues. For one, Poe's story addresses whether vengeance is the same as justice, or, perhaps, whether revenge is always justified. After all, what are the limits of retribution? It depends, in the end, upon a specific cultural order and society's expectations. Poe also questions whether our intentions make a difference in regards to our actions. Moreover, Poe questions how far can one go in an attempt to keep humanity in check, or how far must one go to keep the cultural order intact. More specifically, in a cultural sense "The Cask of Amontillado," much like "The Black Cat," depicts the potential horrors and dangers of alcoholism and addiction, including the potential for dependency and abuse. This would have been a very real cultural issue in Poe's time, and in Poe's personal life.

Likewise, in "Berenice" Poe questions identity and even seems to question whether identity can survive death. Poe also revisits the trope of being buried alive. Vivisepture was still an actual issue in Poe's time, although perhaps less so than in the past. Being buried alive is a theme Poe addresses in "The Cask of Amontillado" and four of his other tales. Poe also writes about the death of a beautiful woman, a very Poe-esque theme, potential mental illness, psychological issues and monstrosity, all cultural issues.

Besides that, in "The Tell-Tale Heart" Poe returns to the concept of compensation, that no violation of moral law goes unpunished. Even if we can escape the judgment of others we can never escape the moral or ethical judgments of ourselves, no matter how monstrous we become. This argument for moral balance seems to maintain itself in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart." Eventually the burden and guilt for the sins and misdeeds one commits will overcome the sinner, if other judgments fail. In fact, even the namelessness of all of the characters in the story helps to open the door of ownership, or lack thereof, that allows for anyone to take on the role of the unnamed narrator in the story. Poe's narrator is so mysterious as not even to be assigned a gender as a form of identity; we never learn if the narrator is a man or a woman. Anyone could be the monstrous narrator in Poe's story; every person has the potential for the evil necessary to commit the crimes in Poe's tale. All people are susceptible to the dangers of a guilty conscience.

Of course, the dichotomy between love and hate is also brought into "The Tell-Tale Heart." The unnamed narrator kills the old man despite confessing harboring a certain love for him, "Yet each man kills the thing he loves / By each let this be heard" (Wilde 37-38). Poe's tale certainly questions the ability of mankind to possess a great capacity for both love and hate and the ability to act against one in favor of the other despite the power of each.

In addition, inside every person there is a balance between moral greatness and inexplicable evil. Although the potential for each may be measured and varied from person to person, the potential for good and evil undeniably exists within everyone. The dichotomy between good and evil is never on better display in Poe's stories than in "The Black Cat," because the narrator expresses both great love and great hate. In fact, the question must be asked

whether or not there are limitations to the depths of human depravity and evil. The dichotomy between good and evil also helps to prove the need for both law and order within society. Law and order allow for justice while also balancing and maintaining the struggle for power. Thus, Poe's story both challenges and reinforces cultural codes and norms. The story functions as a form of release while simultaneously reinforcing cultural hegemony.

There is a drive and hunger for power and control both in "The Black Cat" and in society, in all societies. However, there is also the question of whether or not power corrupts and destroys the human soul. Furthermore, Poe may be suggesting that there are things worse than death. In a society struggling between religious ideas of immortality and the rising trust in science and evolution, one might ask if a death of conscience and ethical behavior is worse than actual death, and how each might affect society.

Psychologically one might ask, is superstition more than superstition? Again, Poe seems to ask if any act can truly go unpunished, much like Emerson did in his essay "Compensation" when he wrote, "Commit a crime, and the earth is made of glass." On a more cultural level, Poe seems to question life in the home, the issues of alcoholism and domestic violence. Marital life seems to be center stage in the tale, starting off well and descending into a cesspool of anger and violence. The story also questions the human potential for transformation, good or bad, whether driven by human nature, temptation or supernatural forces.

Therefore, like many literary devices, the monster is a very complicated thing. The monster is "feared, hated, admire, and beloved all at the same time" (Gilmore 22). According to

Gilmore, the monster in literature “frees humans from their day-to-day location in the world of common sense” and provides “insights into both the world and the self” (20). Monsters, however, are never created out of nothing, but, rather, monster are created “out of scraps of reality,” and “culture is at least partly founded on the repression of instinct, and the resulting discontent bubbles beneath the outworld calm surface” (Gilmore 21, 20). Eventually, the monster comes to “symbolize evil in order to cleanse the society of its own guilt and terror” (Gilmore 21) Thus, the monster becomes “a psychological model for ritual scapegoating” (Gilmore 21). The release from these common restraints helps to transform ordinary objects into fantastical and novel creations, such as turning a man into a monster or a cat into a symbol of death. Thus, in the end, due to its complexity, ambiguity and cultural significance, “The monster of the mind is both our foulest mental creation and our most awesome achievement” (Gilmore 10).

Aside from the other implications of monstrosity in literature, some of the most important aspects of literary monstrosity are the moral lessons meant for the edification and progression of culture. Poe and Hawthorne’s monsters challenge moral expectations and cultural boundaries, allow for a variety of readings and interpretations from different perspectives, allow for self-discovery and help progress civilization through literature. According to Gilmore, “The power of monsters is their ability to fuse opposites, to merge contraries, to subvert rules, to overthrow cognitive barriers, moral directions, and ontological categories” (194). Both Poe and Hawthorne, through their stories, were able to subvert cultural boundaries and challenge moral dichotomies while still reinforcing cultural codes and expectations. Throughout their stories, Poe

and Hawthorne's characters provide an array of moral lessons and challenges to their respective cultures. Gilmore argues that, "the monster can only be seen as symbolizing human threats to Western bourgeois society" (14). By their sheer existence, monsters challenge cultural norms and expectations.

By writing monsters into their stories, both Poe and Hawthorne were able to challenge the boundaries and norms of their culture in a variety of ways. This is especially true in terms of fundamental moral truths and the human psyche. Moreover, Hawthorne and Poe's monsters are able to expose the grey areas that exist within a black and white moral binary while also attempting to display the human potential for unflinching love and unmitigated hatred. The monstrous characters of Poe and Hawthorne question the human psyche and the psychological state of mankind. Both authors, but perhaps Poe even more than Hawthorne, were able to question the cultural understating of the self. As Gilmore argues, monsters are always "a projection of some repressed part of the self" (Gilmore 16). Poe is more than able to express that repressed sense of self within his tales, and Poe's monstrous characters are perfect symbols of the evils and desires the self is capable of when it is no longer stifled or suppressed.

Another important factor in Poe and Hawthorne's stories is their interpretability. The stories can be viewed and interpreted through a variety of theoretical lenses. For example, although neither Hawthorne or Poe were writing for a Marxist audience, both Poe and Hawthorne's characters can be read from a Marxist perspective. From a Marxist standpoint, the monster is often seen as the "embodiment of monopoly capitalism. Both are predatory, acquisitive, alien, and parasitical" (Gilmore 14). All of Hawthorne and Poe's monstrous characters

- Ethan Brand, Aylmer, John Endicott, Richard Digby, Egaeus, Montresor, and the unnamed narrators of “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart” – prey upon and destroy the people and objects they encounter. Poe and Hawthorne’s characters take from others and drain those they prey upon. Moreover, many of the characters, especially Hawthorne’s characters, are outsiders who are alien to the societies they enter into and destroy.

More importantly, Poe and Hawthorne’s stories are signs of progression. As civilization advances so does literature; as literature advances characters become more complex. Gilmore claims that “monsters arise with civilization – with human self-consciousness” (5). As civilization advances so does culture and with it cultural figures, in this case monsters. The monsters that Hawthorne and Poe crafted are not as obvious or simplistic as literary monsters of the past, at least in the sense of identification as a monster. The meaning and interpretation of monsters in literature, as far back as *Beowulf*, medieval dragons and before, has always been complex and insightful. However, what Poe and Hawthorne did was craft monsters that were more simplistic in form, in that they are fully human, but more complex in their characteristics, meaning and psychological significance.

What Hawthorne and Poe accomplished is a ciphering out of the excesses of monsters of the past. According to Gilmore, “Characterologically speaking, monsters are fully human: their unmotivated malice and destructiveness are human, not animal traits” (93). What makes Hawthorne and Poe’s characters so interesting and instructive, from the viewpoint of monster theory, is that they are fully human. Poe and Hawthorne filter out the inhuman qualities of literary monsters and focus more deeply on the exaggerated human qualities that make

monsters so fearful and aweing. The characters created by Poe and Hawthorne are just people, but they are people who question even the most basic human understandings of morality, psychology, human potential and the self. As societies advanced, it was only a matter of time until monsters became more complex. It was only a matter of time before American literature began to incorporate monsters as tropes and themes. Poe and Hawthorne were perfect for crafting the monsters necessary for understanding and challenging the advancing and changing landscape within American culture during their lifetimes.

Furthermore, as Gilmore claims, "Evil is not without its attractions" (192). The desires for revenge and release are a part of every human, and they are common temptations that each individual must deal with. While people may not be envious of the characters in Poe and Hawthorne's stories, nonetheless, the character's ability to indulge in the darkest and most forbidden aspects and desires of human nature is something people can envy and appreciate. As societies advance, rules for maintaining and punishing crimes, like murder, come to help maintain a social order and sense of civilization. What may once have been allowable becomes forbidden, but human desires do not always change or advance at the same rate as social progression. People may not truly want to murder or dismember each other, or to kill and destroy societies, but the desire for hate and destruction is still present within mankind. As such, even just reading about the destructive and hateful actions of monsters in literature helps to allow for the release necessary for individuals within civilized societies.

In the end, "the monster is both a powerful universal symbol and the product of a compulsive fascination that can be explained only in its own terms" (Gilmore 194). The monster

has meaning, both implied and interpretive. The monster will always be a symbolic challenge to God, moral codes, cultural norms and boundaries, but the monster can also represent repressed desires, physiological needs and the human potential, for both virtue and vice. The monster can always be understood culturally, in any time or place, and yet the monster, to some extent, can only be understood as it is initially meant to be, within a specific cultural context and situation. So, like most things, the monster is ambiguous, complex and multifaceted in form, interpretation and understanding. The human qualities and aspects of Hawthorne and Poe's monsters only makes them more complex and interesting.

While monsters serve many purposes, one of the greatest assets of literary monsters is that monsters "encourage us to confront deep fears" (Gilmore 190). Fears may vary from individual to individual, but, whatever our fears might be, monsters allow us to project, confront and overcome our fears. Sometimes what we fear most are our forbidden desires and our undisclosed thoughts of hatred, especially towards the people we love the most. Having a literary projection to displace our fears upon, knowing such a projection can be overcome, is one way for people to confront those fears. Thus, monsters help us to overcome fears and develop as human beings. As we develop as individual human beings our societies advance as a result. Both Poe and Hawthorne's stories allow readers to confront numerous cultural issues, but perhaps none more important or universal than the unspoken fears of the human conscienceness, and thus serve as important cultural texts.

Cultural texts provide insights into social reality unavailable through traditional social sciences and enable us to understand what it felt like to be alive during a particular time and in a

particular place. In fact, “cultural studies always involves the study of contexts—sets of relations located and circumscribed in time and space” (“Cultural Studies”). This is perhaps something Hawthorne does better than Poe, as Hawthorne’s characters are more apt to interact with larger cultures rather than function within very confined social spaces. On the other hand, Poe excels at addressing and presenting the effects of culture and temptation on individuals. According to the editors of the *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, cultural studies theorists “sought to describe culture's concrete effects on people's lives.” Poe does this exceptionally well, at least in regards to the potential negative effects of culture on the individual (“Cultural Studies”).

The editors of the *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* go on to claim that, “the basic unit of investigation is always relationships, and that anything can only truly be understood relationally” (“Cultural Studies”). Both Poe and Hawthorne are able to show the importance and effects of relationships on culture and on the individual. Cultural studies “cannot be equated with any particular political agenda or with any particular theoretical position” (“Cultural Studies”). Since they seek to understand how culture is created and maintained, cultural studies theorists and theories are not driven by a particular political agenda the same way some theories, like Marxist theory, are.

Instead, cultural studies as a field is devoted to what can be called anti-anti-essentialism, or the opinion that there are relationships in both history and reality, but that those relationships are not necessary. The argument cultural studies theorists make is that those relationships did not have to be that way. Nonetheless, those relationships are real and they have real effects. However, there are no guarantees in history or reality that things will continue

to form in a particular way. Thus, both reality and history are not predetermined or fixed, but, rather, they are fluid. Neither is ever guaranteed. Cultural studies itself is almost like a binary. On the one hand, cultural studies is about closure and containment, and, on the other hand, cultural studies is about absolute freedom and possibility. In short, "Cultural studies does not begin with a general theory of culture but rather views cultural practices as the intersection of many possible effects" ("Cultural Studies"). This is exactly what Hawthorne seems to understand and do so well in his retelling of America's Puritan past and what Poe does such a good job of manipulating and challenging in his tales.

## CONCLUSION

Hawthorne's works are clearly Romantic, but that does not mean they cannot be filled with monsters and grotesque beings. It is not uncommon to find such creatures in works of romantic literature. Aside from the monstrous creatures present in the works of Hawthorne and Poe, many other romantics authors, before and after Hawthorne, have used monsters in their Romantic pieces.

It is not uncommon to see the monster as a Romantic hero, or at least anti-hero, because, along with other burdens, of the necessity for monsters to bear the burden of exclusion from normal, or accepted, society. The monster is an outsider, the monster, whatever his monstrous traits or his grotesque roots, is chastised and banished, chased away from the community of men. Be it classical monsters, like Grendel from *Beowulf*, Victor Frankenstein's monster in *Frankenstein*, Mr. Hyde in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, The Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the dragon, giant and ogres in Chrétien's *The Knight With the Lion (Yvain)*, or more modern and humanoid incarnations of monsters, such as Hawthorne's Digby in "The Man of Adamant," Aylmer in "The Birthmark," Brand in "Ethan Brand" or Endicott in "The May Pole of Merry Mount," and Poe's Egaeus in "Berenice," and the unnamed narrators in "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Cask of Amontillado," monsters are always outsider figures whose actions are unaccepted and challenged by society. Additionally, these actions always serve as both a means of condemnation and agency for the monsters, eliciting fear which allows the monsters to obtain a certain amount of power, but also serving as the source of exclusion from, and out lash by, society.

All monsters are outsiders, however, many times they are border crossers, they interact with, and often upset, society and its norms. Much like the Green Knight, whose alter-ego Bertilak de Hautdesert lives within society, as the lord of a castle, both Hawthorne and Poe's characters function within society, but, like the Green Knight, their monstrous acts are not done in sight of society, or even, most times, within its borders. Poe's *amontillado* narrator commits his crimes within a wine cellar, his *Tell-Tale Heart* narrator commits his crimes at night, out of the sight of society; Hawthorne's Ethan Brand tells his tale of evil near a kiln on the outskirts of a city, Richard Digby hides in a cave to curse mankind and remove himself from their very presence, and Endicott, like *Beowulf*, goes into the midst of the den of evil to confront and destroy the monsters who commit evil in a wood, not among men.

It is common for monsters to cross these borders and play a part both within and without a society. Grendel does, and, through their alter-egos and transformation, both the Green Knight, or Bertilak, and Dr. Jekyll, or Mr. Hyde, do as well. It is not surprising then to see this similar trait continued in the monstrous natures of Hawthorne and Poe's characters. Furthermore, the mental and moral state of monsters has long been questioned, and both Hawthorne and Poe continue, and arguably expand, the questioning and focus on the mental faculty and state of monstrous characters.

The mental state of monsters is often a dichotomy, a polarized desire for love or hate, or acceptance or rejection. For Hawthorne's Digby and Endicott, it is total submission to their expectations or total rejection. Endicott forces his will upon the Merry Mounters and Digby leaves society and asks for their destruction from God. Likewise, Grendel struggles with the want

to be a part of society and a need to destroy them for their rejection, and Shelley's Frankenstein monster tells Dr. Frankenstein, "if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear" (Shelley "Chapter 17"). Poe and Hawthorne's monsters, like the literary monsters that precede them, are driven by obsession, and whatever idea consumes them consumes them wholly until some outside factors forces a change.

Like the literary creatures that precede them, the monsters of Hawthorne and Poe remain as cultural figures that inspire fear, and from that fear they gain their agency. Like Shelley's Frankenstein monster, who tells his creator, "Beware, for I am fearless and therefore powerful," monsters maintain a sense of agency and power by causing fear, and by being fearless (Shelley "Chapter 20"). This change often leads to the monster's downfall or constraint. Grendel is powerful until Beowulf grasps him, then, for the first time of which the audience is aware, Grendel knows fear, and it is the end of him, as he dies from the wounds inflicted by Beowulf.

Likewise, Poe's narrators in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat" are powerful until their guilt causes them to begin to fear their atrocious acts will be discovered. The power the narrators hold in Poe's stories is not the same as Grendel's, but the narrators' fearlessness in the face of committing acts such as murder is still the root of their agency and ability to manipulate the norms of society. Likewise, for Hawthorne's characters, Ethan Brand causes fear through his very laugh; Endicott causes fear through intimidation and force. Yet, neither character fears the backlash of their fellow man because of the fear they elicit.

Although Poe and Hawthorne establish fearlessness, agency and monstrosity in noticeably different ways than the writers and authors who preceded them, both Poe and Hawthorne are deeply rooted in the intrinsic traits that compromise and signify the literary monster. Additionally, as Stuart Hall argued, "ordinary people are not cultural dopes" (qtd. in Guins and Cruz). With Hawthorne attempting to find, or create, symbolic significance in ordinary life, and Poe's narrators being ordinary people, so far as we can discover, it is not surprising that both authors use ordinary characters as monstrous and cultural figures in their stories.

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