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ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

RESHAPING ALTERITY: MONSTER-LIKE CREATURES IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

PhD Coordinator:
Prof. univ. dr. habil. Monica MATEI-CHESNOIU

PhD student:
Tănăselea (Orhean-Tănăselea) Mihaela Ilinca

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

What is the function of a monster in literature? Why do people need to embody and represent what is monstrous? How differently does early modern English drama represent the monstrous in the theatre? This doctoral dissertation examines the transference from medieval descriptions of what was considered to be a monster to representations of monstrosity as a mental state in early modern English drama. Early modern English audiences were attracted by grotesque monsters, but there are few representations of actual monster figures in early modern English drama, especially in plays by Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Rather, monster-like creatures are psychologically contaminated characters whose flawed perception of reality makes them interact deficiently with others. I have termed the theatrical result of this specific character interaction *mental monsters* because the metaphor-engendering process occurs in the mental frames of other characters in the world of a play and in the imaginations of the members of the audience. My concept is similar to, but also different from, the fictional monsters conceived by the human imagination, which have populated the cultural imaginary throughout the ages. While the so-called "monstrous races" were the product of collective imaginary and the information about them was transmitted via folklore tradition, myth and literature, the mental monsters in early modern drama are circumscribed to the specific dramatic world and they are conditioned by an identifiable cultural space.

Drawing on cultural history and studies of spatiality, as well as new historicism and cognitive studies, and using close-text analysis, this dissertation examines the grotesque characters, villains and avengers of the early modern stage—who look human but behave like monsters—in order to provide a functional understanding of the social, moral, and philosophical significance of their actions. While in earlier medieval texts about monsters these bizarre creatures were relegated to faraway lands of wonder, in the pragmatic approach of early modern drama, monsters are human-like creatures developing in the theatrical world. Therefore, space—distant or local—is not necessarily a condition for the definition of monstrosity, but society is. I argue that dramatic images of fictional human monsters help audiences both identify with and interrogate what constitutes normality; they re-construct what is acceptable in humanity by reshaping what is not quite acceptable. This dissertation, therefore, demonstrates how monstrosity and notions of the monster are social and cultural constructs, but also how the theatre contributes to reshaping alterity in a world of increasing social and cultural diversity existing in the early modern period.

Although there have been many studies of medieval monsters, there have been few studies of early modern monsters, aside from scholars who examine the significance of the monstrous or deformed body in public exhibitions and broadsides, such as Lorraine Daston and Katherine Parks, and Mark Thornton Burnett. This dissertation, therefore, offers a new understanding of monstrosity in early modern drama, and how these "monstrous" villains in the plays lead to a transformed understanding of monsters of the human psyche: these monster-like characters reject human reason and sympathy in favour of fulfilling their own outrageous or merely comic passions. This dissertation contributes to the growing field of early modern studies that analyse the monstrous and the grotesque,[1] with the addition of the perspective of spatiality. It offers a new interpretation of what it means to be a monster on the early modern English stage to more closely align with the period's debates and ideas about the boundary between the human and inhuman—or how monsters are not only products of their geographic space, but they are also social and political constructs. I argue that representations of monsters in early modern English drama have a double-tier level of hybridity: one derived from the inherited cultural metaphors disseminated throughout the centuries and another one engendered by the embodied nature of the theatre.

Each chapter of this doctoral dissertation surveys representations of monstrosity across various genres in early modern texts printed in England—whether non-fictional pamphlets or dramatic representations of monstrosity. The chapter entitled "Early Modern Metaphors of Monstrosity" (2) explores the ways in which non-fictional English writers reconsider earlier texts about monsters: early modern translations of classical accounts (Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, translated by Philemon Holland and published in 1601); the English translation of the French philosopher Michel de Montaigne (*Essays*), translated by John Florio and published in 1603; popular English broadsides, published anonymously around 1620; or philosophical and psychological tracts by Sir Thomas Browne (*Religio Medici*, 1642), William Rankins (*A Mirrour of Monsters*, 1587), Thomas Wright (*The Passions of the Minde in Generall*, 1604), and Robert Burton (*The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621). All these non-fictional texts reveal a world in constant change. In this amalgamated textual world, the strange landscapes inhabited by monsters coexist with real-life environments of the city or the court. Early modern writers situate imaginary monsters within domestic settings—the common trades, the family, the

[1] My understanding of the grotesque relies on Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of the grotesque image of the body. As Bakhtin notes in "The Grotesque Image of the Body and Its Sources," in *Rabelais and His World*, "Exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style" (303). Indeed, in the plays discussed, characters are drawn with broad lines and their exaggerated behaviour is characteristic not only of comedies, but also of tragedies.

theatre, or political and religious circles. In recreating past and present, non-fiction writers relocate the medieval and classical images of difference, as well as early modern prodigies—both temporarily and geographically—to show the relativity and multiplicity of human experience.

The first subchapter of chapter 2, entitled "Monstrous Bodies and Alien Figures" (2.1), examines metaphors of monstrosity proliferated in classical and early modern non-fictional texts. The English translation of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* (1601; 1613) is an objective account that reinforces the social, historical and political constructedness of reports about monsters. Michel de Montaigne's scepticism allows him to see his own creative and fluid thoughts, displayed in the *Essays* (1603), as monstrous creatures of his imagination, but the concept of monstrosity is just a matter of opinion in the French philosopher's view. Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* (1642) is a psychological self-portrait in which grotesque images of monsters are used to explore the variety of human nature in a rational manner. Classical and early modern writers see monsters as an alien cultural space, as they negotiate between historical displacement and continuity. They also represent the embodiment of the monster-like figures in popular culture, including the theatre. These reimagined monster-like creatures inhabit early modern thought and negotiate the intersection between the historically distant and the domestically familiar in cultural works of exceptional variety.

The second subchapter of chapter 2, entitled "Figuring Monsters in Early Modern English Broadsides" (2.2), examines metaphors of monstrosity in three anonymous seventeenth-century English broadsides to show that social monsters are reimagined in various mental shapes, which are even more harmful than the fearful monsters of antiquity. Popular images of monstrosity in English broadsides are shaped to build connections between metaphors of social vices in the family and transgressive characters in the minds of ballad consumers. Figures of moral monsters are found among the ordinary members of society, especially in the family: the married couple, parents and children, sons and daughters. Social monsters are signs of behavioural excess and instability, such as when cuckoldry is presented as a form of moral monstrosity (in *A Merry neuu catch of all Trades*, 1620); children's ingratitude towards their parents is a variant of social monstrosity (in *A most notable example of an vngracious Son* and *A Most excellent ballad of an old man and his wife*, 1620); and Papacy is presented as a political monster (in the Elizabethan pamphlet *An epitaphe declaring the lyfe and end of D. Edmund Boner* by Thomas Broke the Younger, published in 1569). All these monster-like figures are no longer believed to exist in distant lands, but they are shown to populate early modern English society, especially families and political life.

The subchapter entitled "Mental monsters" (2.3) of chapter 2 examines the psychological monsters represented through various metaphors of monstrosity: actors as monsters (in William Rankins' anti-theatrical pamphlet entitled *A Mirrour of Monsters*, 1587); the passions of the mind as monsters engendered by the human imagination (in Thomas Wright's treatise about the passions of the mind, entitled *The Passions of the Minde in Generall*, 1601); and melancholy as a monster of the mind (in Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621). The monster and animal metaphors in these philosophical and psychological pamphlets published in early modern England suggest the transgressive nature of the human mind, by means of which reality is disrupted and represented as something else. While William Rankins rants against the actors and the theatre as monsters that propagate illusions among the spectators, in Thomas Wright the notion of psychological monstrosity emerges as a passion of the mind, which embodies any human action that goes contrary to the rules of nature. Yet both authors show the alterity and variety of human behaviour. Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* represents this malady as a monster of the mind, under the guise of a narrative persona (Democritus Junior), and this offers to the readers a sense of distance and theatricality, while exposing the monstrosity of flawed character and showing a relativistic view of human passions. I argue that such scholarly images of psychological monstrosity reveal the vulnerability of the early modern social landscape, which represents immoderate imagination, wealth and excess, considered as mental monsters. Mental monsters—ambition, will for power, lack of human compassion—are just as dangerous as any kind of sea-monsters because they are represented under the guise of virtue

The third chapter of this dissertation, entitled "Shakespeare's Mental Monsters" (3) discusses dramatic representations of figures of monsters in three Shakespearean plays, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Titus Andronicus* and *The Tempest*. Shakespearean dramatizations of mental monstrosity—represented by greed, ambition, anxiety, fear, revenge—are manifestations of mental monsters. Through characters such as Troilus and Cressida (in *Troilus and Cressida*), Titus Andronicus and Tamora (in *Titus Andronicus*), or Caliban, Sycorax and the usurping Antonio (in *The Tempest*), Shakespeare represents psychological or mental monsters in an equivocal manner. The theatre distorts the commonly-held moral assumptions of the time and highlights the tensions between the socially constructed idea of monstrosity and the individually embodied figures represented on stage. Monstrosity is no longer represented by physical deformity, but it is a function of individual moral responsibility, related to the character's identity. Animal imagery and allusions to hybrid creatures, as well as spatial metaphors, suggest distorted minds and reveal the psychological monsters kept at bay by social

conventions, culminating in the ultimate monsters of humanity, war and civil dissension. In this way, Shakespearean drama creates new categories of monstrosity, such as the warlord, the revenger, and the alien (or the other). Shakespeare takes over traditional and early modern notions of monstrosity and transforms them into social variants of monstrosity represented by several characters.

The subchapter entitled "Mythological Monsters of War in *Troilus and Cressida*" (3.1) of chapter 3 examines Shakespeare's problem play from the perspective of the notion of monstrosity to show that the play avoids traditional categorizations and creates uncanny images of mental monsters. Dramatic images of monstrosity and disease—both moral and physical—show that the theatre is a place of interrogation of values. While the Trojan War in *Troilus and Cressida* is the dramatic background against which the forces of mental monstrosity—fear, anger, greed and revenge—are unleashed, the essence of the characters' psychological disintegration comes from within, from the dissolution of the self. From the fabulous monsters of classical Greek mythology (Perseus' horse, Typhon, Vulcan) to psychologically or physically damaged characters—whether male, female, or hermaphrodite—images of monstrosity converge in the image of the ultimate monster of humanity, war. War creates anxiety, just as love does. Against the background of this social and political monster, Troilus is a monster of his own anxiety, indecision and fears, who lacks self-knowledge and becomes a monster of vengeance; Cressida's ambiguity lies in her teasing femininity; Hector is a machine-like monster of war, and so is Agamemnon; in fact, all warriors (in both the Greek and Trojan camps) are composite monsters serving the demon of war. Therefore, notions of right and wrong are deeply distorted in this Shakespearean play. Hybrid imaginary features (such as Helen's golden tongue or Troilus' copper nose or cloven chin) emerge in a war-torn world where nobody knows who is right and who is not. Notions of monstrosity in this play—like models of beauty and ugliness—are vague concepts triggered by subjectivity. As war is engendered by self-cannibalistic passions, the theatre represents warriors as repulsive monsters.

The subchapter entitled "Monstrous Revengers: *Titus Andronicus*" (3.2) of chapter 3 examines the figures of monstrosity in Shakespeare's revenge tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, inspired from Seneca's tragedy of revenge. The play muddles the notions of barbarian and civilized, Goth and Roman, by questioning these essentialized but relative concepts. Both Tamora and her sons and Titus and his family (including the gentle and pitifully wronged Lavinia) are equivocal monsters of revenge performing atrocious actions. Monstrosity is irrelevant in relation to gender, social class or geographic space of nativity, as I argue. Instead,

anxiety and revenge generate mental monsters regardless of these external parameters. Flawed subjectivity is a factor fostering monstrous behaviour, but this is also influenced by savage landscape, such as the wild woods in which Lavinia is raped and maimed, or the wild cannibalistic banquet at the palace, which only sustains the appearance of civility. The true monsters in *Titus Andronicus* are war, discord and revenge, which create monstrous revengers out of internecine war, political dissension, dissimulation, rape, murder, and cannibalism. The dysfunctional mental monstrosity displayed by Aaron, Tamora and her sons, as well as by Titus and his Roman family, is generated by fractured relations between self and world. Just as war in *Troilus and Cressida* appears as a universal wolf that engulfs everything, revenge mounted against the background of war in *Titus Andronicus* is represented as a self-cannibalizing monster that destroys individual subjectivity. The play's hyperbolic gruesomeness highlights theatricality, but it also exposes monsters of horror. Lavinia's maimed body, Tamora's atrocity, as well as Titus' incentive to cannibalism are triggered by behavioural monsters such as greed, envy and acquisitive intentions, lack of compassion and aggressivity, including competition for political gain resulting in internecine war. Mythological monsters (Vulcan, Cerberus, Centaurs, Enceladus, Typhon, nymph, siren) are opposed to Goth and Roman behavioural monsters to create a grim pseudo-classical world in which war and revenge rule supreme. Even if there can be no degrees of monstrosity—evil is evil however it is perpetrated—the theatrically vivid presentation of mythological stories of dismemberment is more convincing than the classical narratives alluded to in this play.

The subchapter entitled "Monsters and *Canibales* in *The Tempest*" (3.3) of chapter 3 discusses the monster-like creatures in Shakespeare's romance to show that power and colonial mastery can generate more dangerous behavioural monsters than the apparently misshapen creature, Caliban. Moreover, Shakespeare distinguishes between the monsters of imagination (created in people's minds) and the scientific or rational reconsiderations of the notion of monstrosity. Caliban is neither the physical monster described by many characters, nor a mental monster, like Iago or Titus Andronicus; he is represented as a strange being because of his exceptionality, because he is different from the others. Even if his name is an anagram for cannibal—and the character echoes Montaigne's essay *Des Canibales*—Caliban's polyvalent identity is derived from early modern accounts about monstrous races, combined with various interpretations of monstrosity attributed to several cultures. Through Caliban and his mother, Sycorax, Shakespeare suggests a distorted concept of monstrosity that invites to a reconsideration of received notions and practices concerning otherness. Prospero's island is a liminal space that accommodates strange and ambiguous monster-like creatures, such as

Caliban, but also moral monsters of usurpation (Antonio or Sebastian), of hunger for power (Alonzo), or even Ariel as a fearful monster of the air, and Prospero as a psychological manipulator who intends to control everybody on the island. The play challenges notions of monstrosity and normalcy, involving allusions to the influence of power in destabilizing the stereotypical commonplace assumptions; the play suggests that monstrosity is often a matter of prejudiced belief. Various opinions about monstrosity range from the superstitious to the pragmatic, to the objectified use of native Indians as curiosities, and finally to the scientific reports about natural phenomena and people from the Indies. Yet none of these opinions is accredited as true, and none of them prevails in the play. Various characters project their insecurities (fear, anxiety, self-doubt) on what they think they see on the island—including "monsters" and creatures of the imagination, such as harpies, Caliban, Sycorax, Ariel—as these characters are in a highly-strung state of mind.

Chapter 4, entitled "Monsters of Comedy in Ben Jonson" (4), deals with figures of monstrosity in three Jonsonian city comedies, *Epicoene, or The Silent Woman*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholomew Fair*. Social satire is the particular genre of these city comedies, which dramatize grotesque social monsters, such as the isolated misanthrope, the loose-living women, the fake alchemist, or the carnivalesque figures at the fair. These social monsters of comedy are hybrid creatures, whose outrageous characteristics are not physical, but psychological. Their emotional dysfunctions are grotesquely exaggerated in performance, and the theatre represents them in order to reinforce behavioural standards. Some of these monsters are cross-dressed androgynous creatures and misanthropic anti-social hybrid characters (in *Epicoene*); others are con-artists who cheat gullible people (in *The Alchemist*); and still others populate the fairs of London, where other so-called "monsters" are exhibited as deformed creatures (in *Bartholomew Fair*). I argue that the behavioural transgressivity of these social monsters is represented in Ben Jonson's comedies as a form of social satire, similar to the broadside images of monster-like figures. Morose's noise-hating idiosyncrasy and Epicoene as a monster of dissimulation, as well as the collegiate ladies in *Epicoene, or The Silent Woman* are metaphors of monsters of excess, deceit, and disturbed social standards. Face and his deceitful troupe in *The Alchemist* are monsters of dishonesty, but they are also monsters displaying greediness and avarice, who fall victims to their own behaviour. Ursula the Pig-Woman, Quarlous, Winwife, Knockem, Leatherhead and Trash in *Bartholomew Fair* are monsters of dissimulation, self-indulgence and lust. These characters are the target of theatrical satire and they display transgressive psychological features that contravene to moral or social rules.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has mapped various metaphors of monster-like creatures manifested in early modern English drama, but also emerging from non-fictional texts printed and published in England in the same period in which the plays analysed were first performed (1590-1640). I have discerned two elements that shape the notions of monstrosity in both the literary pamphlets and drama: (1) metaphors of monstrosity are part of a tradition representing human constructs that have been charged with meaning throughout the ages; and (2), there is an ambivalence of interpretation in representing the monstrous body on stage. Though monster-like creatures highlight the age's anxieties and vulnerability, the features of the dramatic characters embodying monsters are not physical, but psychological, related to the characters' identity. Moreover, monster-like creatures on stage are represented obliquely and circuitously, incorporating various traditions and perspectives and involving the audience's interpretation. The phenomenon of monstrosity in the theatre is connected with the visual nature of this medium, yet the theatrical monsters in plays by William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson suggest that the monstrous is seen psychologically, as the inverse of what is human, the warning sign at the edge of human identity, before it transgresses the boundary of the amoral and the inhuman. Dramatic representations of monster-like characters and their actions depend on the corporeal figure of the actor on stage, whose renditions of monstrosity varies according to the particular cultural understanding derived from centuries of dealing with the subject. In addition, monster-like characters are moral and mental monsters, rather than physical ones, and their monster-like features do not depend on physical appearance, race, gender, or social class, but on their transgressive behaviour towards their fellow human beings.

Early modern non-fictional texts analysed in Chapter 2—ranging from classical descriptions of monsters, early modern philosophical essays and pamphlets, and English broadsides— have demonstrated the uncertain status and constitutive in-betweenness of early modern monster metaphors, which generate an intellectual disorientation that defines the uncanny. These images of monstrous figures are characterized by a sense of incongruity, since monsters in the natural world and the human mind are relocated according to the author's specific perspective. Whether the space is ancient Rome or the distant lands of Asia and Africa (in Pliny the Elder), or early modern England (in Thomas Browne, Thomas Wright, Robert Burton), and the English broadsides of popular culture, or even early modern France and the New World (in Montaigne), these authors relocate various images of alterity in a process of spatial and temporal amalgamation, through objectivist and lucid representations of monstrosity. Natural phenomena, idols, cannibals, prodigies, cuckoldry monsters, ungrateful

sons and daughters, and corrupt papacy, but also mental monsters, such as hatred, envy, fear, melancholy, or religious excess, recreate a specific geography that maps the world and the human mind by means of literary allusions, metaphors, and quotations. These hybrid figures of monstrosity display the limits between past and present and show that human experience is relative and constructed out of varied images and metaphors. Early modern images of monsters are reconstructed within a logical and realistic framework to show a specific spatial configuration but, more importantly, to display psychological amplitude. William Rankins, Thomas Wright and Robert Burton highlight the psychological aspects of human monstrosity, manifested by transgressing social hierarchies and ethical norms. Mental monsters have replaced the ancient monsters of the wilderness, and psychological monsters are fictions created by imagination, when this human capacity is not checked by reason.

Shakespeare's mental monsters, as analysed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, are hybrid creatures that dislocate commonly-held conceptions about the barbarous and the monstrous. Shakespeare creates new mental categories of monstrous barbarity: the warlord, the revenger, and the alien (or the other). During dramatic interaction, these categories are questioned and refashioned in such a way that early modern notions of monstrosity are recomposed and transformed into mythological and classical monsters of war, the revenger as monster, and the alien or the other as a composite monster, viewed differently by several characters. Thus, Shakespeare's mental monsters are the results of human imagination, as the characters reveal the tensions between the socially constructed idea of monstrosity and the individually embodied figures represented on stage. Shakespeare's mental monsters are greed, desire, ambition, pride, anger, falsehood, anxiety, indecision, fear, or revenge, and these emotions work on the audience's imagination to engender fantastic creatures. Whether fictional/ historical characters (Troilus, Hector, Titus Andronicus); or mythological monsters (Cyclops, Centaurs, titans Briareus, Argus, Cerberus, Pegasus, Typhon, Enceladus, Vulcan, Aquilion); or racially defined monsters (Aaron and Caliban); or monsters of femininity (Cressida, Tamora or Sycorax); monsters associated with spirits of the air (Ariel); or monsters associated with cannibalism (Titus Andronicus and Caliban), Shakespeare's monsters are paradoxically defined by what they do and, primarily, by how others see them. These psychological monsters of anxiety and fear, warriors as monsters, or cannibalistic monsters of revenge evolve in the world of the theatre, where commonly-held early modern notions of monstrosity are radically challenged and displaced. In this way, the theatre has the potential to create new categories of monster-like creatures, whose features constantly shift in performance, because they are creatures of inventiveness taking shape in the audience's imagination.

The monsters of comedy displayed in Ben Jonson's city comedies, discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, are social monsters that show a certain degree of behavioural transgressiveness. These characters display immoral psychological features; they violate moral or social boundaries, which makes them not only disagreeable in society, but also the target of theatrical satire. The grotesque social monsters expose features that align them to monsters of ignorance, greed, avarice, hypocrisy, fortune-hunting and fortune-telling, licentiousness, and immorality. These mental monsters display psychological weaknesses, such as the self-isolated misanthrope (Morose in *Epicoene*); loose-living women, who are monsters of ignorance and lack of compassion (the collegiate ladies in *Epicoene*); charlatans (transgressive monsters of deceit and insensitivity); and the carnivalesque figures at the fair, represented by monsters of deceit (the fortune-hunters, Winwife and Quarlous in *Bartholomew Fair*); monsters of dissimulation (Justice Overdo and Littlewit in *Bartholomew Fair*); and monsters of religious ignorance and hypocrisy (the zealous Puritans Ananias and Tribulation in *The Alchemist* and Busy and Dame Purecraft in *Bartholomew Fair*). Ben Jonson's satirical city comedies create prototypes of social monsters, such as cutpurses, prostitutes, cross-dressed androgynous creatures, fake alchemists, impecunious fortune-hunters or just ignorant gulls, as well as religious zealots, who are monsters of hypocrisy. Monster-like behaviour in these characters reinforces meta-theatrical issues, in the sense that social hypocrisy—when characters perform a social theatrical act—is seen as the worst kind of transgressive action. The fair and the stage are locations in which these grotesque figures of monstrosity evolve, in such a way that the city comedies represent *maps of monsters* (as I argue)—characters that feature specific traits, corresponding to real-life mental monstrosity.

A map is a graphic representation of the terrain in reality and it involves a certain degree of abstraction and reduction of real-life features, but also a form of conventional highlighting of specific elements of the landscape. By analogy, dramatic maps of monsters—in both Shakespeare's and Ben Jonson's plays—are representations of characters which may vary according to directorial interpretation or the time and place of action. However, monster-like creatures represented in early modern English drama are at once grotesque and familiar, exaggerated and commonplace. Whether they are character figures inspired from classical antiquity or the early modern world, living on an uninhabited imaginary island or in the city of London, these maps of monsters are both real and fictional, and their monstrous features are grotesquely exaggerated to suggest meta-theatricality. In this way, such maps of monsters exist only in the theatrical world, but their features are uncannily similar to people in real-life early modern society, as well as in our contemporary world. By questioning what constitutes

monstrosity in the real world, early modern theatre offers possible answers for various possible situations, including our own contemporary society. The ways of representing these mental monsters still depend on the actor's or the director's interpretations, but my analyses have shown that there are certain constants of representing mental monstrosity, common throughout the ages.

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