

Pleasures of Horror:
the Myth of the Modern and the Late Medieval Self
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To my family, for letting me do what I needed to do.

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Abstract

Too often, the people of the European Middle Ages and the literature they produced are regarded as somehow inchoate or incomplete human beings, especially when compared to the modern individual. Critics and scholars have often Other-ized the period and made it a foreign era in our history. Thankfully critics like David Aers, Lee Patterson, Ronald Ganze, Caroline Walker Bynum, and countless others have worked to correct this misconception. As recently as last year though, the problem of caricaturizing and gross oversimplification of the Middle Ages was exemplified by the awarding of a Pulitzer Prize to Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*, an event that reignited a debate all too familiar to medievalists everywhere. While contemporary critics came to the defense of the Middle Ages, and in particular, the defense of medieval ideas of pleasure and subjectivity, it is obvious that much work needs to be done in order to correct this pervasive misrepresentation of over a half-century's worth of people. This thesis joins these critics in defending the literature and people of the Middle Ages by looking at episodes from the medieval texts *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium*, and Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum* as horror in order to prove the medieval person did in fact have a cogent understanding of the individual self.

A genre often thought of as quintessentially modern in great part due to its emphasis on the psychological affect it inflicts upon individuals, horror has gone largely ignored in the Middle Ages. As a genre, horror aims to agitate an emotional response from a reader by destabilizing the reader's understanding of identity and what foundations notions of identity are constructed upon. However, an understanding of identity can only be destabilized if it exists in the first place. Thus by isolating horror operating in medieval texts, and more importantly, proving that this type of horror would have indeed operated as horror to its intended audience, it can be inferred that the people of the Late Middle Ages without a doubt had an understanding of the self. By invoking Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's "monster theses", Julia Kristeva's writings on abjection and the breakdown between subject and object in *Powers of Horror*, and Noel Carroll's structural analysis of what this thesis refers to as the "mechanisms" of horror, the analyses prove that these texts at the very least contain episodes that are themselves examples of horror.

The connection between horror and the self is further explored through the lens of pleasure, guided by Freud's writings on both the Pleasure Principle and his observations of the "Fort-Da" game. Horror texts create what this thesis refers to as a "laboratory of the self" in which readers are given the power to experiment with their fears without facing them in reality. This opportunity provides readers with an outlet to master and control their fears, similar to how Freud observed the "Fort-Da" game working. This intersection of horror, pleasure, and "the self" further implies that not only implies that the self is something medieval people understood, but that they understood their understanding in a way that is surprisingly and recognizably "modern."

In performing the aforementioned analyses, the value of horror as a tool for understanding the self through both ideas of fear and pleasure becomes apparent and calls for a reexamination both of similarly caricatured or undervalued literary traditions and of the ways and lenses critics and scholars use to investigate and understand literature.

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Introduction

“The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown,” opens HP Lovecraft’s classic, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*.¹ Lovecraft—perhaps one of the most beloved figures in horror literature of the last century—is a well-respected authority on the subject, and his essay has influenced many other scholars and their work. Perhaps most notable in recent years, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* colors philosopher Noël Carroll’s work *The Philosophy of Horror; Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. Contained in both writers’ works is a wealth of wisdom and insight: Lovecraft’s ruminations on the value, history, and dignity of horror literature lucidly illuminate the origins and importance of one of literature’s least interrogated genres, while Carroll provides a compellingly nuanced analysis of the ways in which horror functions in texts.

And yet, as commendable as these works are in their efforts, they share a sentiment that I can only describe as misguided: that horror as a legitimate genre begins in the modern era. While Lovecraft recognizes “[horror is] as old as man,” he pinpoints the “birth” of the genre in literature in the eighteenth century, citing “academic recognition” of these tales to validate his assertion.² This argument is echoed by Carroll in his book: “Following the lead of many commentators on horror, I will presume that horror is, first and foremost, a modern genre, one that begins to appear in the eighteenth century.”³ Like Lovecraft, Carroll reinforces his assertion by invoking academic consensus on the issue, citing a number of critics, perhaps most troublingly Benjamin Franklin Fisher. In a passage quoted

¹Howard Phillips Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (New York: Ben Abramson), 12.

²*Ibid.*, 21-22.

³Noël Carrol, “Introduction” in *The Philosophy of Horror; Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 4.

by Carroll, Fisher writes that during the rise of the Gothic novel (i.e. the beginning of horror-literature), “There was a shift from physical fright, expressed through numerous outward miseries and villainous actions to psychological fear.”⁴ Although I respect the work these critics have done, the assertion that horror tales from the premodern era are less complex or lack an investment and understanding of human psychology exposes these writers’ and critics’ unfamiliarity with the literature that came before the Gothic novel and fails to give credit where credit is undoubtedly due.

This thesis aims to debunk the pervasive myth in scholarship on horror literature that the genre only becomes a serious one during the eighteenth century. Though critics and scholars rarely talk about horror in texts much before the eighteenth century, horror is an experience common to people throughout history, and episodes of it can be found just about any time and place one might look. Indeed, horror may make its most powerful impact on the individual human psyche, and does so by tapping into cultural anxieties and fears specific to historical and cultural preoccupations. Horror has worked in this way, drawing from the larger picture to create a profound psychological effect since at least the late European Middle Ages, and likely much earlier. Current Western cultural obsession with films like *Paranormal Activity*, *The Ring*, and *Sinister* may speak to a fear of the unknown in technology we overlook in our daily lives. Similarly, horror classics like Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* draw on unease about the absolute positives of scientific progress and its breakneck speed of advancement around the time these novels were published. Moving in to the European Middle Ages, episodes from medieval texts like the visions Julian of Norwich’s and Walter Map’s writings for courtiers

⁴Ibid., 5.

create horror by tapping into the fear of an unholy reclamation of the soul and a tempting away from God by demons and the devil. It seems unwise to overlook these earlier instances of horror, ones that may not perfectly fit the mold of what typically signifies the genre to a modern reader. However, texts like Julian's and Map's make use of what I will refer to as the "mechanisms of horror" identically to how "modern" horror tales do once these mechanisms have been appropriately historicized. Julian's and Map's texts—like all psychological horror—disrupt both a cultural and a personal understanding of identity, a stable construction of the self, and in doing so, create a welcome pleasure in the affirmation of the self afterward.

Embedded in the assertion of psychological horror as a modern invention in literature lies an implicit claim that premodern readers did not possess an understanding of their interior selves, as psychological horror assumes this on the part of a reader. Any literature that affects the mind must also affect the self, as the mind is the part of the body through which a person constructs the identity that is the self. This identity is made up of a number of elements—race, gender, sexuality, etc.—each of which is a product of the particular culture and environment into which a person is born. Because of this fact, appropriate contextualization of these elements is needed to understand why they might produce an idea of the self that they do, especially when the culture in question is a foreign one. For example, Stephen King weighs in on the appeal of horror as it relates to a primal psychology, speculating people in contemporary Western culture crave horror movies because they "re-establish our feelings of essential normality."⁵ King argues that horror

⁵Stephen King, "The Modern American Horror Movie—Text and Subtext" in *Danse Macabre* (New York: Gallery Books, 2010), 185.

movies might “provide psychic relief on this level because this invitation to lapse into simplicity, irrationality and even outright madness is extended so rarely. We are told we may allow our emotions a free reign ... or no reign at all,”⁶ hitting an interesting and accurate mark with his observation.

Horror provides a release and a Freudian pleasure of cathartic relief for a reader, especially after the experience of a horror text has ended. While horror endured might create what Freud would refer to as “unpleasure”, the relief from it and subsequent affirmation and reassurance of the self as intact and safe also provides a relief from this unpleasure, which is itself a type of pleasure. This process unfolds no differently in the literature of the Middle Ages than it does in modern texts. But, because the culture of the Middle Ages is foreign to contemporary readers (in some cases geographically and in all cases temporally), carefully historicizing before making claims about the period is critically important. It is highly likely that scholars like Carroll and Fisher have ignored the horror present in medieval literature simply because they lack an understanding of how the people of the Middle Ages understood their world and how they were influenced by it.

This ignorance and dismissal of the Middle Ages and its influence on history and Western culture, whether intentional or otherwise, is not uncommon or infrequent and can be observed as recently as last year. In his Pulitzer Prize winning nonfiction book, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*, famed New Historicist Stephen Greenblatt uses pleasure as the basis of his arguments about the emergence of the modern person in Europe and the realization of the self as an abstract concept during the Renaissance. Hailed

⁶Ibid.

by reviewers as a “gloriously learned page-turner”⁷ and treated as similarly groundbreaking by others,⁸ *The Swerve* has become a sore subject for many medievalists.⁹ Citing gross historical inaccuracies, sweeping and lazily researched generalizations, and what seems like a willful ignorance of the Middle Ages as reasons for the eruption of their ire, medieval scholars like Bruce Holsinger and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen have judged the book harshly. These criticisms are made with good reason, as *The Swerve* makes enormously self-aggrandizing claims about the “Renaissance” (a term that implies a lack of complexity on the part of the Middle Ages) at the expense of the historical truth, claiming, “Something happened in the Renaissance, something that surged up against the constraints that centuries had constructed around curiosity, desire, *individuality*, sustained attention to the material world, the claims of the body.”¹⁰ The great irony in *The Swerve* comes from a historicist’s failure to historicize as it defines the Middle Ages as separate from, and essentially Other to the Renaissance. Though he admits the obvious fact that the people of the Middle Ages partook in feasts, sex, and other typically pleasurable experiences, he

⁷“The Swerve: How the World Became Modern,” <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-393-06447-6>.

⁸For examples, see Maureen Corrigan’s review, “The Swerve: Ideas that Rooted the Renaissance,” for NPR, September 20, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/09/20/140463632/the-swerve-ideas-that-rooted-the-renaissance>; Eric Ormsby’s review, “How the Secular World Began,” in the Wall Street Journal online, September 26, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111904353504576566621864350318.html>; and Nick Owcher’s review for the LA Times on November 20, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/nov/20/entertainment/la-ca-book-greenblatt-20111120>.

⁹Bruce Holsinger, Twitter post, December 5, 2012, 9:42 am, <http://www.twitter.com/burnablebooks>. Holsinger’s criticisms are of particular note. In December 2012, Holsinger picked a number of the more outlandish claims made in *The Swerve* and countered with a wealth of examples: “In the Middle Ages, ‘to be interested in books was already an oddity,’ as evidenced by medieval literature,” “In the Middle Ages, ‘pleasure seeking had come to seem philosophically indefensible,’ as the Wife of Bath’s Prologue shows us,” “In the Middle Ages, ‘the pursuit of pain triumphed over the pursuit of pleasure,’ as demonstrated by medieval feasts, sex, and dancing,” etc.

¹⁰Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2012), 10. Emphasis is mine.

argues that these activities were “philosophically indefensible.”¹¹ But pitting pleasure and the “philosophy” of the European Middle Ages (i.e. Christianity) against each other and claiming the two to be irreconcilable during this period makes little sense. No, indulgence in food, drink, and sex may not have resonated with the medieval cultural understanding of goodness or piety, but these associations of pleasure come from understanding of the word constructed through modern principles and values, not ones rooted in medieval cultural assumptions.

The Epicurean hedonism Greenblatt refers to as pleasure and conflates with the self fails to acknowledge that it, at its core, is the same as the pleasure of a religious devotion the likes of which can be found very clearly in texts such as Julian of Norwich’s; at the center of each, these pleasures are motivated by a want of relief from unpleasure. One could even potentially argue that the pleasures found in Julian’s text show a greater understanding of the self than the poetry of Lucretius that *The Swerve* centers its narrative on, as Julian’s text privileges a pleasure of the mind (which again, is inextricable from the self), while Greenblatt’s assertions privilege the pleasures of the body. The problem that plagues Greenblatt’s work is similar to that of the other aforementioned critics and scholars in that it illustrates a severe lack of familiarity with the subject it uses as a counterpoint (i.e. the European Middle Ages). With this in mind, it only makes sense that the horror present in texts from the Middle Ages has been largely overlooked; the very elements that make horror from the period successful as horror—namely, the importance

¹¹Ibid., 109.

of religious devotion and temptation from the devil—are the same elements referenced by critics that still allow phrases like “the Dark Ages” to be used seriously in scholarship.¹²

As has already been discussed, an understanding of the self is a necessary assumption made by psychological horror, as it affects an idea of the self by destabilizing it, which creates a pleasurable experience of re-stabilizing a reader’s understanding of a personal self. It follows then, that if texts that make use of the same mechanisms as “modern” psychological horror can be identified in medieval texts, the people of the Middle Ages possessed an intricate, sophisticated understanding of the self and that “modern” horror actually begins at least in the Late Middle Ages (and likely, much earlier). Further, if these moments of horror in the Middle Ages create a pleasurable experience that reinforces an understanding of the self constructed through an understanding of Christianity, Greenblatt’s argument of the indefensibility of pleasure seeking falls apart. Thus, in addition to debunking the myth of the modern era as the beginning of the psychological horror story, this thesis aims to combat the unfortunately pervasive conception of the Middle Ages as a historical era in which people failed to possess interiority and an understanding of the personal self, and does so by locating tales, episodes, and moments of horror in texts from the Middle Ages and historicizing them appropriately.

Greenblatt in no way defines or created this attitude toward the Middle Ages; indeed, the positioning of the Middle Ages as somehow inchoate is nothing new, as has been illustrated by Lovecraft’s, Carroll’s, and Fisher’s denials of the existence of horror in

¹²This term has admittedly become less commonplace in recent years. However, a quick Google search of the keywords “Dark Ages” provides as many results that uphold the accuracy and legitimacy of the term as results that contest it, with proponents of it often citing a pre-Renaissance or pre-Enlightenment emphasis on religion and faith as reasons for a lack of scientific and philosophical advancements in the Middle Ages, and thus justification of the phrase’s usage. Though these sources are less than often scholarly, their prevalence illustrates a way in which the phrase is still taken seriously by many outside of academia, perpetuating a harmful and inaccurate historical and cultural myth.

premodern literature. The subject of an understanding of the individual or of a self, terms I will use interchangeably, is one medievalists have long fought an uphill battle to prove medieval people did in fact realize and possess. Time and time again, critics like David Aers, Lee Patterson, and Caroline Walker Bynum proved assertions of the medieval person as lacking any idea of personal selfhood false.¹³ In spite of the work these critics and other scholars like them have produced, the general praise of *The Swerve* makes clear which narrative dominates the conversation. But, like Lovecraft's, Carroll's, and Fisher's claims about horror and the Middle Ages, Greenblatt's is nonetheless egregiously misguided, and the celebration of his latest book only goes to show that much work still needs to be done in order to correct this cultural myth that envelopes many peoples' understanding of nearly seven hundred years of Western Europe's history. The implicit criticisms of the Middle Ages made by the aforementioned horror critics and the explicit criticisms made by Greenblatt about the Middle Ages and its people's failure to understand the self are at their roots linked by what feels like an attempt to lionize the "modern."

"The Middle Ages" is an anachronism invented by critics and scholars that allowed those looking at the era as Other to view themselves as progressive, developed, and good in relation to it. As Brian Stock noted in 1974, "The Renaissance invented the Middle Ages in order to define itself; the Enlightenment perpetuated them in order to admire itself; and the Romantics revived them in order to escape from themselves. In its widest ramifications 'the Middle Ages' thus constitutes one of the most prevalent cultural myths of the modern

¹³As mentioned, the body of scholarship on this particular topic is vast. For some of the best examples, see David Aers' "A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists," in *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 177-202; Caroline Walker Bynum's "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" in *Jesus as Mother* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 82-109; and Lee Patterson's article "On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies," in *Speculum* 65 (1990), 87-108, as well as his introduction to *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 3-46.

world.”¹⁴ Yet still, nearly four decades later, the false narrative persists and the awarding of multiple, significant honors to *The Swerve* only further solidifies an inaccurate and caricatured representation of the Middle Ages in our culture at large.

With the wealth of evidence contradicting these falsely one-dimensional paintings of centuries worth of people, it baffles me how such carelessly flat portrayals of the Middle Ages can continue to receive such praise and acceptance. An argument that boils down to a perceived lack of partaking in purely physical pleasures is an insult to both the periods criticized and congratulated. Because of horror’s close and necessary relationship with pleasure and the self, it seems the perfect avenue of response to the most recent example of a longstanding tradition of conveniently denying the Middle Ages a developed sense of the self. Again, identifying moments of horror in medieval texts that make use of the mechanisms of horror, mechanisms that necessitate an understanding of the self in order to create horror, proves that the people of the Middle Ages must have understood their individuality in much deeper and complex ways than often portrayed.

Chapter one of this thesis sets up the framework I use as the basis of my analysis. In order to understand the structural mechanisms of horror, I turn to Noël Carroll’s previously mentioned *The Philosophy of Horror*, which provides a simple yet effective line of reasoning that establishes how horror functions in a text. However, while these mechanics of horror may be “triggered” by elements common to both modern and medieval texts, the horror they produce may affect modern readers in drastically different ways from they likely affected medieval readers. To reconcile this point, I turn to psychoanalytic theorist Julia Kristeva’s book *Pleasures of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* and

¹⁴Brian Stock, “The Middle Ages as Subject and Object: Romantic Attitudes and Academic Medievalism,” *New Literary History* 5 (1974): 543.

medievalist Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's essay "Monster Culture (Seven Theses), invoking each in an effort to understand both the breakdown of meaning related to the self that horror creates and the "agents of horror" that catalyze this effect within a horror text by tapping into prominent fears specific to the culture and historical period that produced them, respectively. Using these frameworks, I go on to perform readings of Julian of Norwich's encounter with the devil found in the sixteenth *shewing* of her book, and an episode from Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium*. A reading of an episode from Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum* that typifies the general consensus of what constituted medieval horror (but fails to achieve any sense of horror at all) acts as a counterpoint to illustrate how "modern" the preceding two texts are in their use of horror, despite having been written in the Middle Ages.

Chapter two picks up where the readings of the first chapter left off, focusing on the relief from horror, an event that re-stabilizes a notion of the self. Horror texts create what I will refer to as a "laboratory of the self," a safe space in which readers are allowed to experiment with agents of horror and how they destabilize and understanding of the self. While the thought of Dracula biting and transforming a person into a vampire may be momentarily horrifying to a reader, it is also evanescent; soon after reading the text and experiencing its effect, a reader realizes it is just that: an effect. This section also acts as a direct response Greenblatt's claim about the indefensibility of pleasure seeking in the Middle Ages. Turning to Freud's writings on the pleasure principle we can see that this is untrue. Freud explains that the pleasure principle is one of a few central human psychological drives, and through it claims that humans do not seek pleasure, but rather that seek relief from unpleasure. When the theory of the pleasure principle is applied to

horror, it becomes a kind of metaphysical object carried by the person experiencing it. Whereas initially, horror momentarily destabilizes an understanding of the self, the release of horror and freedom from it creates pleasure in its relief. This gives a reader power over what he or she does and does not experience in a text; the very act of reading puts a reader in control of their own experience and interactions with a text, mirroring Freud's observations of the Fort-Da game, a game intimately tied to ideas of pleasure. Finally, I revisit the texts from chapter one to show how this process works within them, and make special note of Julian's encounter with the devil, as it provides a meta-example of this Fort-Da process, illustrating the presence of its existence even in the Middle Ages.

This thesis aims to add another voice to the chorus of critics who work to combat the assumption of medieval peoples' incompleteness with regards to their understanding of the self by locating and validating the presence of a brand of horror typically associated with modern sensibilities in medieval texts. By putting critical discourses on the self and pleasure in conversation with a close analysis of how horror works in texts, and by locating examples of horror in medieval texts, I illustrate that medieval people did in fact understand their interior selves in a highly sophisticated and intimate way. Because horror is inextricably linked with pleasure, and pleasure in a Freudian sense necessarily requires an understanding of the self, finding instances of horror in these texts explicitly counters misguided ideas and caricatures of the Middle Ages drawn by an alarming and unfortunate number of critics and scholars. By writing this thesis I hope to debunk the myth of the psychological horror text as a wholly modern invention, illustrate that the people of the European Middle Ages did in fact possess a complex understanding of the self, and validate horror as a legitimate topic of inquiry in serious literary scholarship.

Medieval Monsters, “Modern” Fear: Mechanisms of Horror in Medieval Texts

One need not be a chamber to be haunted,
 One need not be a house;
 The brain has corridors surpassing
 Material place.

-Emily Dickinson, 1863

“Of course horrific imagery can be found throughout the ages,” Noël Carroll concedes in the first chapter of *The Philosophy of Horror*, citing werewolves of Petronius’ *Satyricon* and Jupiter in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as just a few examples; the genre just never starts to congeal until around 1764, he argues.¹⁵ Though often thought of as a modern genre, one that emerges at the beginning of the eighteenth century, plenty of examples of horror exist from earlier moments in history. True, we never find a collection of related texts springing up around the same time in the Middle Ages the way in which the Gothic novel rose to prominence in Europe, with horror “coalescing” as a genre around this event sometime near the middle of the eighteenth century. Perhaps most well-known and canonical of all medieval horror is the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* and its notoriously monstrous antagonists, Grendel and his dam. But between *Beowulf* and the eighteenth century, there exists a disturbing gap in literary and historical scholarship’s knowledge and recognition of horror literature in Europe.¹⁶ In the introduction to *Nightmare at 20,000 Feet*, a collection of short stories penned by acclaimed contemporary horror writer Richard Matheson, Stephen King provides a brief history of the horror story, citing the author of “the Grendel

¹⁵Noël Carroll, “The Nature of Horror,” in *The Philosophy of Horror; Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 13.

¹⁶Barry Beardsmore, “A Study of Two Middle French Horror Stories,” *Nottingham Medieval Studies XLVI* (2002): 85.

story” as well as “canonical” horror writers Mary Shelley, Horace Walpole, Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker, and HP Lovecraft.¹⁷ However, nothing is listed between *Beowulf* and *Frankenstein*, leaving nearly a millennium’s worth of texts unaccounted for in his admittedly cursory listing. However, this does not mean horror did not exist in episodes from texts produced before this time. For this reason, critics and scholars must carefully avoid conflating horror with modernity itself.

“Modern” horror, often branded psychological horror, exists in a number of examples that predate texts like *Frankenstein* and the works of Poe by centuries. While it is not my intention to argue that this type of horror begins in the Middle Ages, it seems odd that scholarship on both horror and medieval literature has largely overlooked the existence of horror tales from this era. Although these texts exist as discreet, seemingly unrelated occurrences across geography and history, this lack of association justifies the consideration of their importance. Though never associated as a discrete genre, the widespread and unrelated nature of these texts hints toward a tradition that grows not out of a specific historical moment, but that exists across time and culture, as people everywhere experience and share their fears through their writings. Horror did not simply appear; it grew from what appears to be a psychological need common to people throughout history.

The Mechanisms of Horror

To understand how horror works in a text, one must first understand what I will refer to as its “mechanisms”—elements of the texts designed and implemented to “trigger” once a condition has been fulfilled. When triggered, these mechanisms work together to

¹⁷ Stephen King, introduction to *Nightmare at 20,000 Feet: Horror Stories by Richard Matheson*, by Richard Matheson (New York: MacMillan, 2002), 11.

create horror in a machine-like fashion. Using these mechanisms, it is possible to dissect the agents of horror—more often than not, a monster in some form—in question and isolate the exact elements that make them horrifying. Carroll’s aforementioned book provides the clearest explanation of these mechanisms and how they function:

I am occurrently art-horrified by some monster X, say Dracula, if and only if 1) I am in some state of abnormal, physically felt agitation (shuddering, tingling, screaming, etc.) which 2) has been *caused* by a) the thought: that Dracula is a possible being; and by the evaluative thoughts: that b) said Dracula has the property of being physically (and perhaps morally and socially) threatening in the ways portrayed in the fiction and that c) said Dracula has the property of being impure, where 3) such thoughts are usually accompanied by the desire to avoid the touch of things like Dracula.¹⁸

To summarize, a monster is only horrifying¹⁹ if a reader is physically affected or nudged into an abnormal mental state by an agent of horror in a text. Additionally, the agent causing this agitation must be one the reader can conceive of as possible (though not necessarily real), and moreover, the reader’s conception must pose at least a physical threat in its textual context. Finally, the agent must be “impure,” a quality which is normally signified by an aversion to the monster’s touch. This impurity is often thought of as “liminal” or “interstitial”; impurity of the monster is the effect of it neither being normal nor Other, but something in-between. For the purpose of re-contextualizing Carroll’s premises as mechanisms, I propose reformulating them slightly: 1) an agent of horror must

¹⁸Ibid., 27.

¹⁹Carroll uses the term “art-horrifying” to differentiate between a constructed type of fictional horror from the horror of a natural disaster or something similar. For the sake of simplicity, I will use the term “horror” as shorthand for the art-horror that Carroll makes the subject of his book.

be physically threatening and will usually also threaten a constructed understanding of the self, 2) the agent of horror likely discourages physical contact with it as an effect of its liminality, 3) the agent of horror can be conceived of as a possible thought. When these three mechanisms are triggered, they work together to create horror that either physically or mentally affects a reader.

The uniqueness of horror as a genre stems from its intent and effect, which proves useful in identifying horror in texts. According to Carroll, horror “is essentially linked with a particular affect—specifically, that from which it takes its name.”²⁰ In horror, character reactions are meant to cue those of the reader as the “emotive responses of the audience, ideally, run parallel to the emotions of the characters.”²¹ This mirroring of reactions between characters and readers is why horror works: if a reader fails to identify with a character in horror fiction, to recognize the character’s circumstances as frightening, then horror has not been achieved. Therefore, character reactions that cue a reader to be horrified will also aid in identifying moments of horror.

These reaction cues can be appropriately historicized by invoking both Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection she develops in *Powers of Horror* and Jeffrey Cohen’s “seven theses” about monsters and how they allow others to “read” the cultures that created them. As Kristeva posits:

The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which as a matter of fact, make me ceaselessly and infinitely

²⁰Ibid., 15.

²¹Ibid., 17.

homologous to it, what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.²²

This “breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object, between self and other”²³ echoes Carroll’s assertion of an agent of horror’s ability to threaten physically, socially, and morally. “Collapsing the distinctions that create meaning by combining a thing and its opposite in one body,” explain medievalists Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, “medieval monsters were frequently imagined as both human and not-human, animal and not-animal.”²⁴ This hybrid monstrousness Bildhauer and Mills describe is analogous to the interstitial qualities that Carroll prescribes to agents of horror in that they occupy a liminal space that defines and polices the acceptable limits of selfhood; if a monster is simultaneously both the norm and the Other, then it is also neither, and what stops the reader from being the same? Thus, if an agent of horror poses a threat to a character within a text that destabilizes said character’s understanding of self, we can interpret this breakdown as a cue to what a reader is intended to experience. If the limits of selfhood for a character in the text become blurred as a result of an encounter with an agent of horror, then a reader should experience this same blurring and destabilization of what constitutes a personal self.

The likelihood that a medieval reader would have been affected by this horror becomes a matter of historicizing. Medievalist and cultural critic Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s “seven theses” from his book *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* provide an ideal framework

²²Julia Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection,” in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1-2.

²³Daniel Felluga, “Modules on Kristeva: the Abject,” *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*, last modified Jan. 11, 2011, <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/psychoanalysis/kristevaabject.html>.

²⁴Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, “Introduction: Conceptualizing the Monstrous,” in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 13-14.

for dissecting what exactly about an agent of horror works to create horror. As the title of the article suggests, Cohen proposes seven theses for analyzing monsters in texts.²⁵ Not every agent needs to conform to each of these principles, but each embodies at least one argument made by Cohen. Most important to this analysis are theses one, three, five, and seven, which, when put into conversation with each other, argue that cultures produce agents of horror that evoke culturally and historically specific fears, often doing so as a result of the crossing of opposed boundaries of acceptability in the same way that Kristeva and Carroll have written on with regards to occupying a liminal space.

The boundary crossing that defines these agents of horrors' "monstrousness" calls the stability of cultural norms of acceptability, and identities constructed through them by proxy, into question. Further, if the agents of horror and mechanisms in these texts are purposefully designed and implemented to create horror, then we can assume they are conceivable in their environments, even though they exist as aberrations. As Carroll notes, a key difference exists between "texts of fancy" that include monsters and texts of horror that include monsters: monsters of horror are anomalies in a recognizable world, whereas monsters in tales of fancy are the norm in an extraordinary world.²⁶ In other words, an agent of horror is only such if it disrupts the natural order of the world in which it exists. This point is especially useful in helping to historicize, rather than essentialize horror as a genre; if a monster or other agent of horror disrupts the normal order of a world the reader

²⁵Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3-25. The theses are as follows: 1) the monster's body is a cultural body, 2) the monster always escapes, 3) the monster is the harbinger of category crisis, 4) the monster dwells at the gates of difference, 5) the monster polices the border of the possible, 6) fear of the monster is really a kind of desire, and 7) the monster stands at the threshold of becoming.

²⁶Carroll, "The Nature of Horror," 16.

can recognize as a mirror of their own, then this disruption should catalyze a physical or mental agitation.

At this point, the question of belief becomes central to an understanding of the connection between modern horror and medieval horror, and why the horror of the Middle Ages has gone unrecognized for so long. A modern reader likely would not believe in the existence of Dracula, but would a medieval reader believe an encounter with the devil or demons to be possible? By Carroll's distinction between horror monsters and monsters of fancy, if medieval people believed their monsters to be real, would this not undermine the value of horror in medieval texts dealing with devils and demons by rendering them natural? As Stephen Justice says, "Treating belief as a historically distinct sort of cognitive experience enforces on medieval subjects the immediacy of faith that the 'age of faith' dreamed of; this scholarly device, far from expelling an exoticized middle ages, swallows it whole."²⁷ Justice reacts against what he identifies as two highly reductive schools of thought that have attempted to categorize belief in the Middle Ages: the "didactic" explanation, in which belief in miracle stories are read as merely religious instructional tools, and the "perceptual" explanation, in which scholars claim that people actually believed they witnessed miracles.²⁸ Justice asserts that belief is a series of internal, mental conflicts between assertions and doubt²⁹ and that to discuss the subject in either of the two previously most relied on models is reductive and ultimately useless, as each presents belief as a static, immutable category that flattens the true complexity of the medieval subject and turns the people of the Middle Ages into a monolith.

²⁷Stephen Justice, "Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?" *Representations* 103 (2008): 2.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 4-7.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 13.

The push-pull dynamic between assertion and doubt that constitutes Justice's conception of belief parallels the ways in which agents of horror in these medieval texts push on the limits of what defines selfhood and provokes an agitation of a reader's identity: "belief does not settle the mind, but riles it."³⁰ The fact that the texts of Julian, Map, and Caesarius attempt to create horror through the use of devilish and demonic figures proves vitally important in understanding how medieval people might have been affected by horror. As the demons and devils of these texts define and police the border of acceptable selfhood, the tension between assertion of held belief and the doubt of perceptual experience constantly redefines what is acceptable to believe on a deeply personal level. Thus, whether or not the people of the Middle Ages believed in the reality of these agents of horror is a bit of a moot point: some likely did, and others likely did not. To provide a simple yes or no answer to this question would essentialize medieval people and their experiences that would inaccurately and unfairly represent the Middle Ages in Europe and also impose modern values, understandings, and aesthetics onto an incompatible historical space.

Before any analysis of medieval texts occurs, it seems necessary to first identify the mechanisms of horror in a modern horror text in order to illustrate how these mechanisms are triggered. Because Carroll focuses on Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in his definition of horror, the novel stands as the perfect text to illustrate how this theory works. In my analysis, I will focus on Count Dracula, his early encounters with Jonathan Harker, and the transformation of Lucy Westenra from a young woman in to vampire.

³⁰Ibid.

Count Dracula obviously poses a serious physical and ideological threat to his victims as evidenced by Lucy's transformation, triggering the first mechanisms of horror. Lucy's death results directly from her contact with Dracula, and more specifically, his bite. Though not immediately fatal, the draining of Lucy's blood over the course of time causes her to expire and also deteriorates her physical beauty, a quality that comes to represent her identity in the text. This deterioration suggests that Dracula's bite is harmful to both her physical well-being and her identity. Once dead, Lucy's beauty returns to her face nearly instantly. "Some change had come over her body. Death had given back part of her beauty, for her brow and cheeks had recovered some of their flowing lines. Even the lips had lost their deadly pallor,"³¹ reports Lucy's former suitor Dr. Seward, signaling the unnaturalness of this event and suggesting that Lucy is no longer Lucy, but something quite different in Lucy's guise; she is Lucy, and yet, she is not. Furthermore, this return of her beauty defies any notion of medical science, which subverts a dominant and emerging ideology prominent in Victorian England. This notion accords with Cohen's third thesis:

This refusal to participate in the classificatory "order of things" is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions.³²

This occupation of a liminal space that dissolves boundaries of distinction problematizes the scientific foundations of society emerging in England around the time of *Dracula's* publication. Thus, Dracula's bite is physically threatening, and beyond that, his powers

³¹Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, (Ann Arbor: Borders Classics, 2006), 152.

³²Cohen, "Monster Culture," 6.

possess the ability to undermine formative ideologies of truth and knowledge in Victorian England.

As Dracula's bite renders his victim's impure, so too is Dracula an impure, hybrid horror, which deters contact with him and inspires feelings of disgust in the characters of the novel, triggering the second mechanism of horror. In an early episode of the novel, Jonathan Harker describes a disturbing image of the Count scaling down the walls of his castle as a lizard might:

But my very feelings changed to repulsion and terror when I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over the dreadful abyss, face down, with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings . . . I saw the fingers and toes grasp the corners of stones . . . just as a lizard moves along a wall.³³

Jonathan describes his repulsion with the Count, a key element in the creation of horror. The association between the Count and lizards problematizes attempts to categorize him; like the medieval monsters Bildhauer and Mills reference, he is neither human nor animal, but something in-between that perhaps should not be. "What manner of man is this, or what manner of creature, is it in the semblance of man?" asks Jonathan,³⁴ suggesting that his disgust is a byproduct of his inability to determine what the Count ontologically is. This sense of disgust comes to a climax when Harker finds the Count resting in his coffin: "It seemed as if the whole awful creature were simply gorged with blood. He lay like a filthy leech, exhausted with his repletion. I shuddered as I bent over to touch him, and every

³³Stoker, *Dracula*, 33.

³⁴Ibid.

sense in me revolted at the contact”³⁵ Again, Harker draws comparisons between the Count and animals, this time a leech in particular, and even refers to the Count as “creature,” reiterating the idea that Dracula exists as neither human nor animal, placing him firmly within the realm of the liminal abject. The Count repulses and disgusts as a result of his hybridity, which, like his supernatural abilities, threatens to undermine ideologies of the time that were key in determining the limits of the acceptable self.

Though few, if any, readers would likely fear that Dracula truly exists, the thought of Dracula is what creates horror. Carroll elaborates on this nuance further: “Saying that we are art-horrified by Dracula means we are horrified by the thought of Dracula where the thought of such a possible being does not commit us to a belief in his existence.”³⁶ To paraphrase, horror occurs when a reader conceives of Dracula as a thought at the crossroads of that which is threatening and that which is impure. The emotional cues a horror text provides project the conceivability of an agent of horror onto a reader; when Dracula threatens characters in the novel, when he disrupts their understandings of the way the world works, when he problematizes the stability of their identities, the reader should briefly experience the same disruptions. This momentary prospect of possibility triggers the third mechanism of horror and catalyzes the breakdown in meaning that Kristeva refers to. For a moment, the possibility of an unwilling transformation into an undead shadow of a former self takes root in a reader’s psyche, creating an effect of horror that quickly dissipates as the realization that this occurrence exists outside the realm of possibility takes hold, and a state of stability restores. This return to stability and its relation to formations of identity, interiority, and ideas of self will receive substantially

³⁵Ibid., 49.

³⁶Carroll, “The Nature of Horror,” 29.

more attention in the following chapter. Because *Dracula* makes such successful use of these mechanisms, it is clear that the Count acts as an agent of horror and thus, the text is itself a horror text.

Julian of Norwich's Encounter with the Devil

Moving back in time approximately 400 years, I turn now to Julian of Norwich's shewings [visions]. Writing at approximately the same time as Chaucer, Julian of Norwich recalls sixteen shewings from God that came to her during an illness she thought she would not survive. Julian recorded these visions in two forms: a short one in 1373, and another, longer and more greatly developed version that elaborates on many of the theological implications of her visions in 1393. The sixteenth and final shewing from the long text encompasses a number of chapters and begins as Julian falls ill again and is visited by the devil in her sleep:

And in the slepe at the begynnyng, methowte the fend set him in my throte puttand forth a visage ful nere my face like a yong man, and it was longe and wonder lene. I saw never none such. The color was rede like the tilestone whan it is new brent, with blak spots therin like blak steknes fouler than the tile stone. His here was rode as rust evisid afor with side lokks hongyng on the thounys. He grynnid on me with a shrewd semelant, shewing white teeth, and so mekil methowte it the more oggley. Body ne honds had ne none shaply, but with pawes he held me in the throte and wold have stranglid me, but he myte not.³⁷

[And when I began sleeping, it seemed to me that the fiend grasped my throat and put his face long and very learn face, which looked like a young man's, close to mine.

³⁷Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Georgia Ronan Crampton, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), lines 2769-77.

I have never seen such a face. The color was red like a newly fired tile stone, with black spots like black streaks more foul than the tile stone. His hair was red as rust, clipped in the front with side-locks hanging on the temples. He grinned at me with a shrewd look, showing white teeth, so much so that I thought the look all the more ugly. He had neither normal body nor normal hands, but with paws he held me at the throat and could have strangled me, but he could not.]

Up until this point in the text, devils and demonic spirits act as tempters, trying to seduce Julian away from God. Both “fends” and devils appear within her book, usually described in close proximity temptation: in chapter two, Julian writes of her sickness: “In this sekenesse I desired to have all manier peynes bodily and ghostly that I should have if I should dye, with all the dreds and tempests of the fends” [In this sickness I desired to have all manner of bodily and spiritual pains that I should have were I dying, with all the dreads and temptations of the fiends];³⁸ in chapter four, Julian writes “methowte by the sufferance of God I should be tempted of fends or I dyed” [it seemed to me by the consent of God I should be tempted by the fiends before I died];³⁹ summarizing the sixty-ninth chapter, she writes: “Of the second long temptation of the devill to despeir [of the second long temptation of the devil to despair],”⁴⁰ etc. Clearly, the ability to tempt is a fundamental, defining element of demons, devils, and fiends in Julian’s mind, and would have been to other medieval Christians as well. As Jeremy Harte notes, devils from sermons and legends usually tried to tempt people in order to test and push the limits of their faith, and so when they did not “behave as a demon should” an encounter with one is made all the more frightening, as it

³⁸Ibid., lines 58-60.

³⁹Ibid., lines 128-29.

⁴⁰Ibid., 135.

has no explainable or immediate theological purpose.⁴¹ And Julian makes it clear that the devil tries to physically harm her, attempting to choke her while she sleeps and is at her most vulnerable. Here, the text triggers the first mechanism of horror: the devil poses a physical threat to Julian.

But, Julian suffers much more than a physical assault at the paws of the devil. The devil is an embodiment of sin and evil, one Julian has only figuratively wrestled with until this point in the text. As she falls asleep, Julian admits she “ravid”⁴² when asked by a religious man how she fared during the day. Here, ravid is a past-tense conjugation of the Middle English “raven,” which presents a couple of key ambiguities. First and foremost, raven roughly translates into Modern English as “to behave in a frenzy,” and particularly in religious frenzy, or “to have visions.”⁴³ But, ravid can also mean “to wander” or “to stray,” especially as a deviant.⁴⁴ Here, both definitions apply to Julian. Her visions have bewildered and exhausted her, and when she tells the religious person visiting her, he simply laughs at the thought.⁴⁵ But when she tells him about her shewings in greater detail, the man turns very serious. While one would imagine this would affirm Julian in her vision, it actually causes her to feel quite guilty: if this man, who has only heard of these visions takes them so seriously, then why would she, the one experiencing the visions, not do the same. Julian wonders “how should a preist levyn me? I leve not our Lord God . . . but as a fole I let it passyn fro my mind” [For she thought, how could a priest believe her? She believes not our

⁴¹Jeremy Harte, “Hell on Earth: Encountering Devils in the Medieval Landscape,” in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 178.

⁴²Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, line 2754.

⁴³“raven,” v1, Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan.

⁴⁴“raven,” v2, Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan.

⁴⁵Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, line 2755.

Lord God . . . but as a fool she it pass from her mind].⁴⁶ Throughout her shewings, Julian proves herself to be something of a theologian, leading the reader to understand her Christianity as central to her identity. In light of this, her feelings of spiritual weakness in this moment open her to diabolical attack. She falls asleep, still “trusting” [trusting] in God’s mercy, but guilty over her momentary abandonment. This prompts the devil to attack.

By attacking Julian during a moment of bodily weakness and spiritual crisis, the devil threatens her both physically and mentally, threatening to destabilize her understanding of her self in doing so. While the act of wrapping his paws around Julian’s throat is undoubtedly physically threatening, it is important to remember that this happens in a dream, and is referred to as a “shewing” just like any other one she experiences.⁴⁷ The horror of this experience is twofold. First, the dream is part of a shewing is meant to test Julian’s faith and make obvious to her the power and love of God. By illustrating the power of evil and of the devil, the shewing acts as a living embodiment of the boundaries of spirituality and faith. The shewing of the devil has undermined a key component of Julian’s security of identity by showing her what is right, what is not, and how easy it is for him to attack her when the integrity of her spiritual armor has been compromised. But the devil is also a personal one, tormenting her dreams, yet undetectable to others. As part of a dream, the devil is a mental intruder, planting the thought of his existence and his power into Julian’s mind. It is here the devil attempts to “take” Julian for good; he has seen a weak point in Julian’s spiritual armor, and uses it as an entry into her mind.

This devil is also unquestionably abject in bodily form, which repulses and disgusts Julian, triggering the second mechanism of horror in her text. Though the devil has many

⁴⁶Ibid., lines. 2761-64.

⁴⁷Ibid., line 2778.

qualities typically attributed to that of a human, a number of his physical features are decidedly animalistic or otherwise non-human. Instead of hands, the devil has paws; instead of any sort of natural flesh tone, the devil's skin is a fiery red; instead of merely tempting, it attacks. "The unnerving color of the diseased complexion, the demonic grin, the hideous hair and teeth, the inhuman hands and loathsome body ... these are the elements of a language which describes an intense moment of horror," notes Brad Peters.⁴⁸

Additionally, the fact that Julian refers to this shewing as "oggly" [ugly] implies Julian's physical disgust with the devil and his contact with her. Again, the agent of horror in this instance defies easy categorization, and conforms perfectly to Cohen's third thesis, which again states that a monster defies attempts to categorize it.

Further, even though the devil attacks Julian in a dream, his effect is undeniably real, making him easily conceivable to Julian, triggering the third mechanism of horror. Peters is careful to warn that, "Julian is not trafficking with the abstract" and that the vision acts in the same way her visions of Christ God, which "intrinsically connect[s] profound ontological proof with sensory experience" for Julian.⁴⁹ Though the attack may occur on an intangible, metaphysical level, the lasting effect of the devil's threat is physically present when Julian awakes. Stirred from her sleep, Julian notices "a lyte smoke" [a light smoke] coming from her door and a "foule stynke" [foul smell] filling the room, and concludes the devil has lit a fire that will burn everyone in her near vicinity to death.⁵⁰ When she asks those with her if they smell the stink, they confess that they do not,⁵¹ which alarms her, and

⁴⁸Brad Peters, "The Reality of Evil within the Mystic Vision of Julian of Norwich," *Mystics Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1987), 199.

⁴⁹Ibid., 197.

⁵⁰Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, line 2782-84.

⁵¹Ibid., line 2785.

for good reason. The devil's presence alone has the power to horrify, but this lack of acknowledgement of his attack means that he is not content to just attack any given medieval Christian. Rather in this instance, the devil deliberately targets Julian and only Julian; he is a literal personal demon. "Evil evince[s] itself in perceptual existence" for Julian now, and her confrontation "construct[s] a bridge between supernatural and natural consciousness"⁵² and makes the devil's attack distinctly horrifying, and worse, conceivably possible in Julian's natural world.

This encounter with the devil and its ability to destabilize Julian's formation of her identity as a result of his ability to threaten and impure ontological state is a result of the aforementioned mechanism. To Julian's intended audience (i.e. medieval Christians), the episode with the devil would likely have inspired horror the likes of which Julian experiences during her confrontation.⁵³ As the epitome of evil and symbol of eternal damnation in a medieval Christian worldview, the devil is the ultimate antagonist; he is the realization of evil, "the utter absence of love, the origin of despair, and must be called an anti-God,"⁵⁴ and his attacks on people like Julian affront the individual's understanding of the self as well as an ideology fundamental to the formation of identity of medieval people across England and most of Europe by challenging the boundaries that compose each.

And, not only does the devil repulse by mere virtue of his role as evil incarnate in the mind of medieval (and modern) Christians, but black "steknes"—linear gashes—and spots speckle his body, evoking images and memories of the symptoms suffered by victims of the Black Plague, which ravaged between 30 and 40 percent of England's population a

⁵²Peters, "The Reality of Evil," 199.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., 196.

mere 44 years before Julian recorded her shewings in her short text.⁵⁵ Though the Great Plague had passed at the time Julian was writing her longer work, resurgences of the disease were not unheard of, and its fatal threat would have resided in the minds many of the people living in medieval England, further extending the threat Julian's devil poses to her, and also to readers of her text. The devil's body possesses a number of characteristics that evoke horrifying experiences on both a physical and a spiritual level for the people living in the time that Julian was writing in.

Walter Map's Demon at the Cradle

Keeping with the relationship of horror to medieval religious identity, I now turn to an episode from Walter Map's 12th century *De Nugis Curialium*, a collection of stories and anecdotes of occurrences in the lives of medieval courtiers. The episode of the demon at the cradle begins as such:

A certain knight found that his first-born of a wife who was very dear to him, and a worthy and well-born woman, had its throat cut in its cradle on the first morning after its birth, and so with a second child a year later, and with a third in a third year; despite all the watchings of himself and his friends which proved lamentably futile.⁵⁶

After the birth of a fourth child, a weary stranger comes to the knight's door and asks for lodging in the name of God and finds himself "devoutly welcomed." Sometime after

⁵⁵Ian Mortimer, "The People," *The Time Traveler's Guide to Medieval England: A Handbook for Visitors to the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 36. According to Mortimer, the Black Plague arrives in England in 1348 and continues to decimate England's population through 1349. Georgia Crampton, editor of the TEAMS edition of *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich* notes that the plague would have arrived in Norwich in January of 1349, when Julian would have been about seven years old.

⁵⁶Walter Map, "Second Division: of the same Apparitions, XIV," *De Nugis Curialium (Courtiers' Trifles)*, trans. Frederick Tupper and Marbury Bladen Ogle (London: Chatto & Windus, 1924), 98.

midnight, the stranger awakes to find a reverend matron bent over the cradle “seizing to cut [the child’s] throat.” The stranger manages to stop the matron before any harm can come to the child. After stopping the mysterious woman, the heroic stranger accuses her of being a demon, though the rest of the household pleads for her release, as she has the appearance of the most devout and Godly women in the town. The stranger pays no heed to their pleas, brands the demon on its face, and demands the woman whose resemblance the demon has taken to be brought to the house. Sure enough, the woman bears an appearance identical to the demon, even down to the branding on her face. The stranger concludes that because of the woman’s devotion to God, the demon conspired to attack her and ruin her good name, which would have also ruined her. Since they now know the identity of the demon and its aims in attacking, the knight releases the demon, which flies out the window with “great weeping and wailing” at the episode’s end.⁵⁷

Map’s demon triggers the first mechanism of horror by making its physical threat immediately visible in the first sentence of the tale, where the throat cutting of the knight and his wife’s newborns are introduced. Like the other examples examined thus far, the demon also poses a threat beyond the mere physical. By assuming the guise of a recognizable person, the demon calls ideas of identity, stability, and trust into question, and that the form it chooses to take happens to represent a figure known for her piety only furthers the thought that perhaps nothing is quite as it seems. The demon’s pantomime of a reverend matron also makes its attacks on children disturbing on both a religious and a social level: a good Christian does not kill, and a mother does everything in her power to

⁵⁷Ibid., 99. Here I have provided a brief synopsis of the story, as I fear this text may be much more unfamiliar to readers, regardless of level of familiarity with medieval literature.

protect the young and the innocent from the very atrocities this monster inflicts upon them.

Dealing with the second mechanism of horror—which again, posits that a monster’s impurity is a necessary component in affecting horror—proves slightly more difficult in this instance than with Julian’s encounter with the devil, as reactions from characters in regards to the demon’s identity and violence do not exist as explicitly; the text provides no Harker-esque repulsions and images of disgust, nor editorializing of the events as “oggly” *à la* Julian. However, this reaction need not necessarily present itself in a text to qualify itself as horror, but rather this reaction likely occurs in the process.⁵⁸ Fundamentally though, the ability for a text to make use of this mechanism necessitates only the existence of a monster’s impurity as an aberration in what would otherwise be a normal world. Working from this, the demon proves quite a hybrid, impure form. Aggressively evil while inhabiting a form of purity, Map’s demon soils the idea of purity altogether. And this is no mistake, as the real matron “hath provoked by her good deeds the envy of demons against her, whence it cometh to pass that this base messenger of theirs, this baleful instrument of their wrath, hath been moulded, as far as possible, in the likeness of this good woman, that she may shed upon this noble soul the disgrace of her wicked deeds.”⁵⁹ The demon actively targets a particular woman, as Julian’s devil singles her out, for the purpose of sullyng the woman’s good name and planting doubt in the minds of her peers with regards to her piety; both its body and its motivations are impure.

The mark the stranger brands on the face of the demon, which subsequently appears on the woman it impersonates, proves useful in establishing the conceivability of

⁵⁸Carroll, “The Nature of Horror,” 28.

⁵⁹Map, “Apparition XIV,” 99.

this monster. The connection between the mark on the face of the demon and of the woman, which the entire rest of the household observes, implies a clear physical, very real connection between the two. Revisiting Peters' analysis of the traces Julian's devil leaves behind, a connection between the natural world and the supernatural makes the thought of this demon possible, as it occurs within a text that reflects a real, physical, recognizable setting where occurrences like this defy the norms of experience. Thus, the thought of this demon is, once again, made possible. By creating a setting that reflects reality and disrupting its stability, the demon creates a conceivable image of horror. And, referring to Cohen's first and seventh theses, if a culture is responsible for producing its own monsters, which embody said culture's fears and anxieties, then it stands to reason that the horror this demon evokes would likely have had a profoundly horrifying effect on readers. This effect is important, as the monsters of the Middle Ages might not seem to have any power to horrify in the eyes of a modern reader.

Caesarius of Heisterbach's Devilish Tormentor

Though Julian's and Map's texts certainly evoke a surprisingly modern brand of psychological horror, I by no means intend to say that all attempts at horror work in this way, even though they might appear to have intended it. Take for example, the story of the devilish tormentor from Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum*. Like Julian's bout with the devil in her vision or the altercation with the demon at the cradle from Walter Map's book, the story of the devilish tormentor clearly intends to evoke an effect of horror. However, a number of factors impede this, and the story proves one decidedly less tied to and understanding of the self, and one in which modern readers may find it difficult or even impossible to locate any sense of horror even with appropriate historical and

cultural contextualization. The story begins with the death of a Bavarian duke. Sometime after his death, his ghost visits his wife who asks him about his condition in the afterlife, which the duke reveals to be rather grim: he has been damned to suffer eternal torment at the hands of a devilish tormentor. This confuses the wife, as her husband had given generously in his life, always making sure to pay his alms and welcome strangers in from the elements. However, the duke confesses that, though he did these things, he did so not for reasons of charity or goodness, but because he wanted people to think he was charitable and good.⁶⁰ This explicit moralizing meant to emphasize the value of true charity and generosity and its importance to happiness and spiritual fulfillment in the medieval Christian afterlife undermines its ability to evoke horror.

The mechanisms of horror that signify horror's presence in both Julian's and Map's encounters with devils are decidedly absent from Heisterbach's story of the tormentor, despite its intention to horrify. To begin, the devil in this story does not appear to pose a physical threat to anyone. Though the duke's torment could not be explained to his wife "even if all the leaves on all the trees were to become tongues,"⁶¹ the text never reveals what these tortures might entail in any detail. This vague description of the horrors and torments suffered by the duke make it difficult to imagine the physical threat presented by the devilish tormentor: he has no paws like Julian's devil, nor is he explicitly violent like Map's demon. Furthermore, the devilish tormentor himself never receives description in any great detail—he simply looks like "a gigantic black man" that drives the duke along as a plowman would drive an ox. The tormentor clearly carries an ominous air about him, and

⁶⁰ Caesarius of Heisterbach, "Book XII, Chap. XIX," in *Medieval Ghost Stories*, translated and compiled by Andrew Joynes, (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2001) Originally published in J. Strange, editor, *Dialogus Miraculorum Caesarii Heisterbacensis Monachi* (Cologne, 1851).

⁶¹Ibid.

possesses a decidedly supernatural quality. Yet, without a concrete image provided for a reader, it proves impossible to decide whether or not this devil actually appears horrifying. This lack of image makes it impossible for a reader to determine the categorical classification of the tormentor, and thus whether it possesses any particular interstitial qualities about it. As has been shown, this state of impurity is a key in catalyzing a horror effect that undermines ideas of what should and should not be possible, which in turn serve to undermine an understanding of identity. Without these ingredients, the tormentor is incapable of existing as much more than a shadow; it is perhaps unsettling, but not horrifying.

In light of this, it may be argued that perhaps the duke himself is agent of horror in this story. When the ghost of the duke visits his wife, the castle she sleeps in “was shaken as if there had been a severe earthquake.”⁶² The castle experiences a similar seismic disturbance upon the spectral duke’s departure. Clearly, the ghost possesses an enormous otherworldly power. Yet, it never feels dangerous; this incredible energy never causes any visible harm within the text, and the duke’s ghost never directs it at anyone in particular. And, the duke’s ghost might at first glance appear to occupy a space of liminality, somewhere between living and dead, but this fails to hold up upon closer inspection. Though he’s a spirit, he’s very much still the duke and is entirely recognizable: there appears to be no impure hybridity that defines him. And perhaps most damaging to interpreting the duke’s ghost as the agent of horror in the story is his wife. When confronted with the image of her dead husband, the wife does not run away. Instead, the duke’s wife welcomes him with open arms and invites him into her bedroom to discuss his

⁶²Ibid., 51.

fate: “She was not at all afraid and, because it was cold, she threw a part of the bed-cover around his shoulders.”⁶³ Not only does the duke’s wife not fear the ghost, she embraces him and performs a genuine act of charity for him, something the duke was incapable of in life. Recalling Carroll, horror texts are unique in that they attempt to create an effect on and elicit a reaction from the reader analogous to one presented in the text. If this is the case, then a reader is cued to empathize with a supposed agent of horror in this instance, rather than reel back in disgust and repulsion. This obviously does not successfully implement the mechanisms of horror in a way that creates any meaning through horror and fear.

Conclusions

The texts explored in this chapter are by no means the only examples of medieval horror occurring between *Beowulf* and the emergence of the Gothic novel in Europe. The collections of both Walter Map and Caesarius of Heisterbach contain multiple encounters with all manners of horrors, the mystic Margerey Kempe struggles with horrific vision, and Barry Beardsmore even locates moments of horror growing out of a medieval folklore tradition in the 70th tale of the Middle French *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, written sometime during the fifteenth century,⁶⁴ illustrating a widespread presence in the Middle Ages. Some of what horrified medieval readers might fail to merely even scare readers of today, while other themes still hold prominently within the horror cannon of Western culture. While episodes like Julian’s confrontation with the devil might at first seem unlikely candidates for inclusion in the horror genre, modern cultural artifacts like *The Exorcist* and even more recently, *Paranormal Activity*, deal with the same themes as in

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Beardsmore, “Two Middle French Horror Stories,” 84.

Julian's diabolic confrontation and still manage to frighten masses of people.⁶⁵ Showing that texts from the Middle Ages possess a recognizable brand of horror so often with what is modern, the notion of horror's coming of age during the modern era is jarringly subverted. Horror, like everything else, evolved through the development of time, alongside history and culture. As Jeffrey Cohen notes:

Monsters are our children. They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return. And when they come back, they bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our place, but they bear self-knowledge, *human* knowledge—and a discourse all the more sacred as it arises from the Outside. These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perceptions of difference, our tolerance toward its expression. They ask us why we have created them.⁶⁶

While these stories might not appear horrifying to a modern audience, this seventh and final thesis of Cohen's states the importance of historicism in understanding people through the monsters that they produce. Since these monsters are produced by people as a product of deep-seated fears—fears we might no longer identify with or understand—they must be examined through a historical lens; their apparent lack of horror is simply a misunderstanding of a time centuries removed from our own. It only makes sense that

⁶⁵"The Exorcist," *The Numbers.com*, accessed Dec. 12 2012, <http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/1973/0XRCS.php>. The *Exorcist* alone has a lifetime total gross of just over 4.41 million dollars, and *Paranormal Activity* has been similarly successful since its release in 2009.

⁶⁶Cohen, "Monster Culture," 20.

fears surrounding the salvation of the soul and safety from the embodiment of true evil would operate as the central locus of horror in these texts. These fears might be considered premodern in the sense that they embody a set of cultural preoccupations and fears that fail to translate to a modern reader, but this does not render these fears somehow lesser or invalid than a modern reader's.

Though those we perceive as different from us in our own times are most often the victims of Othering, so too can entire historical periods be rendered monstrous and Other. Our understanding of our past affects our present and, although the fight to accurately represent a period so temporally distant from our own accurately may seem futile—especially when our understandings (or more often, misunderstandings) of those who differ from the perceived norm affect these Othered bodies in very real ways—letting these misrepresentations continue to diffuse through our culture is simply triggering the first mechanism of horrors in the real world, horrors few would readily label “art.”

A Horrifying Pleasure: the Relief from Horror and its Affirmation of the Self

He went like one that hath been stunned,
 And is of a sense forlorn:
 A sadder and a wiser man,
 He rose the morrow morn.

-The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1798

As illustrated in the previous chapter, horror operates on a number of levels and targets an individual's constructed understanding of his or herself, destabilizing this understanding in order to create a breakdown in meaning that propels an audience into a space beyond that of subject-object, into the realm of the Kristevan abject. This phenomenon fosters an effect of existential unknown, a horrifying meaninglessness that triggers the fourth mechanism of horror that creates a wholly unpleasurable experience, a horror far greater and beyond the mere threat of mortal peril. To achieve this kind of horror, a reader must necessarily possess an understanding of the self as a self, something denied to the people of the Middle Ages most recently by Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve*. Readers cannot experience a horror that threatens to momentarily destabilize their understanding of a personal self if one does not understand their own individuality in the first place. By looking to Freud's foundational writings on both the pleasure principle and the *Fort-Da* game in tandem with Carroll's premises of horror and the framework established in the previous chapter, the intimate relationship between pleasure, horror, and the self becomes difficult to deny.

Horror Texts and the Laboratory of the Self

The texts explored in the last chapter simply do not work as horror without some sort of relationship to the self, because they create what I will refer to as a “laboratory of the self.”⁶⁷ In this laboratory, a character in a work of fiction acts as a cue to readers as to what they should be experiencing, as we have already seen; when Jonathan Harker is disgusted by Dracula, so too should the audience be disgusted by Dracula. Horror texts, in essence, set up apparatuses which allow a reader to experiment with alternate realities and histories in the way that any good piece of speculative fiction does: it creates a conceivable scenario and takes a reader on a journey through what might make the terrifying leap from fiction to fact, from page to reality, without ever putting a reader in any real danger. In this set up, a reader can experience horrifying events through the medium of the text itself, without ever having been even proximal to any “real” danger like the ones the text sets up. Borrowing from Descartes’ distinction between “Objective Reality” and “Formal Reality,” Carroll explains:

The objective reality of a being is the idea of the thing *sans* a commitment to its existence. We can think of a unicorn without thinking that unicorns exist. That is, we can have the idea or concept of a unicorn—i.e., a horse with a narwhal horn—without thinking that the concept applies to anything. A being that has formal reality exists; that is, its idea is instantiated by something that exists. In this mode of speech, Dracula might be said to have objective reality, but not formal reality.

Twisting Descartes’s vocabulary somewhat, we can say that the particular objects of art-horror, our Draculas, are objective realities (but not formal realities).⁶⁸

⁶⁷The term itself is borrowed with permission from Dr. Gina Brandolino, University of Michigan—Ann Arbor.

⁶⁸Carroll, “The Nature of Horror,” 29–30.

To summarize, the difference between objective reality and formal reality is one of conceiving and one of existing. Take for example, Julian's devil. We can feasibly conceive of what a devil with black-streaked red skin and animal paws would look like; Julian goes at great length to make sure we can, describing the devil's visage in great detail. Conceiving of Julian's terror as a possible (though not necessarily plausible) object proves easy. However, claiming that this devil is in fact real, that a person could encounter the same entity as Julian does in our formal reality would reach pretty far away from any grounding in empirical truth. The interplay between objective and formal realities, when paired with an understanding of the pleasure principle, allows the apparatuses of the laboratory of the self to function as it does.

Pleasures of Horror

While perhaps not immediately obvious, horror and pleasure are intricately linked to each other, and moreover, are linked to each other through their relationship to individuality and the self. The pleasure principle, according to Freud, is a key psychological drive that describes human desire and pursuit of pleasure. Of the principle, Freud says:

The governing purpose obeyed by these primary processes is easy to recognize; it is described as the pleasure-unpleasure [*Lust-Unlust*] principle, or more short the pleasure principle. These processes strive toward gaining pleasure; psychical activity draws back from any event that might arouse unpleasure. (Were we have repression.) Our dreams at night and our waking tendency to tear ourselves away

from distressing impressions are remnants of the dominance of this principle and proofs of its power.⁶⁹

In light of this, pleasure and horror seem admittedly incompatible. If horror is a mode of pleasure seeking, but can only be achieved by creating unpleasure, then how can it possibly be a pleasurable experience? It may help to think of the pleasure principle in this way: people do not actively seek pleasure, but rather they seek the relief from unpleasure, as this in itself a pleasurable action. Unpleasure might be thought of as a metaphysical object carried at the chagrin of its bearer, and encounters with pleasure simply lightens this unpleasurable load. In this sense, horror as described by Carroll acts as a near perfect model of the system: in order to create a pleasurable experience (i.e. the return to a stable understanding of the self), one must first experience an unpleasurable disruption in this stability, which is exactly what horror does. When a horror text is successful in creating the its desired affect, a reader should carry with him or her a sense of this horror like a sort of metaphysical object. When a reader realizes that the danger and menace presented in a horror text is strictly confined to the page though, the reader no longer carries this horror “object” and reaffirms their understanding of their individual identity. Again though, this system seems needlessly circuitous. Freud has a response to this as well.

Horror provides an element of control over a reader’s unpleasure. In his observance of a young child’s behavioral pattern of throwing his toys away and then finding pleasure in recovering them—a phenomenon referred to as the *Fort-Da* game—Freud speculates that creating the necessary precondition of unpleasure can actually lead to a greater degree of relief. Though the toy’s separation from the child may have been unpleasurable, it was still

⁶⁹Sigmund Freud, “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,” in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay. (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 1989), 301-302.

desirable because he could then recover it. More importantly though, the game appeared to model the child's relationship with his mother, who would leave early every morning and return in the afternoon:

The child cannot possibly have felt his mother's departure as something agreeable or even indifferent. How then does his repetition of this distressing experience as a game fit in with the pleasure principle. It may perhaps be said in reply that her departure had to be enacted as a necessary preliminary to her joyful return, and that it was in the latter that lay the true purpose of the game.⁷⁰

This game functions as a manifested neurosis, symptomatic of the repressed memory of unpleasure felt by the child that he experienced as a result of his mother leaving. This is significant, as the game shifts the control away from sources external to the child and into his own hands. In his game, the child can be thought of as conquering the source of his unpleasure and, in mastering this experience, relieves himself of said unpleasure. This cathartic release is the reason for the game in the first place; it brings a sense of order to what is otherwise chaotic

The relationship of the child to his mother and the unpleasure he experienced act as an analogy to what happens to readers of horror texts. . In playing the game, the child comes to feel that he, a specific individual, controls the memory of his mother's coming and going, as well as the emotions that come with it:

At the outset he was in a *passive* situation—he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an *active*

⁷⁰Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay. (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 1989), 600).

part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery that was acting independently of whether the memory was in itself pleasurable or not.⁷¹

Like how the mother leaving is a particular fear of the child's, the horror of horror texts is one capable of evoking culturally and historically particular fears: the failure of technology and modernism, the power and reality of a supernatural evil, etc. Because these fears are often experienced on a large scale and are often large themselves, they often might feel uncontrollable or all powerful, much like how the child Freud observed could not exert control over when his mother left. But, by binding these fears in a text, we find something similar to the *Fort-Da* game, because a text can be "controlled"; a reader must consent to pick up and read a text, and is always free to close a text and walk away from it. The act of reading itself, especially when considering horror texts, becomes an iteration of the *Fort-Da* game, only somewhat reversed. Instead of throwing the text away from him or herself as the child would, he or she brings it closer, only casting it aside after the horror contained within is mastered. In distancing the text from oneself, a reader is literally relieved from horror and unpleasure. Again, we have laboratory established, where a reader can experiment over and over again with horror until it is understood, mastered, and rendered safe.

The Relief from Horror in Medieval Texts

This process of relief occurs in any text that makes use of the three mechanisms of horror, as the unpleasurable agitation they cause are what defines horror. Though the process may be difficult to visualize in texts like Caesarius' or Map's, it does occur within the texts of each. The difficulty in locating these texts' process of relief lies in their apparent

⁷¹Ibid., 600.

lack of resolution. At the end of Map's story of the demon at the cradle, the demon simply flies off into the night once its exposed for what it is. The text provides no resolution to the story and leaves it up to readers to experience the pleasure of relief from the horror it creates on their own. In a similar fashion, the story of the devilish tormentor from Caesarius' collection of miracle stories concludes abruptly and without much resolution as to the fate of the duke; all readers are told is that his cries of sorrow can be heard for a long time after he disappeared once and for all. In this, these two examples actually function like many modern horror stories in that they take full advantage with a general fear of the unknown to establish their mood and create a lingering horror.

But Julian's book is a little different from Map's or Caesarius' in that it acts as a meta-example of the process writers use to create horror in texts. As has been shown, Julian's sixteenth showing tells the story of a horrifying encounter with a devil that leaves her shaken. After this, God opens Julian's "ghostly eyes" [spiritual eyes],⁷² which serves to reaffirm her identity as a faithful and pious Christian. "I saw the soule so large as it were an endless world and as it were a blisfull kyngdom; and be the conditions I saw therin, I understode that it is a worshipful syte. In the midds of that syte sits our Lord Jesus, God and man ..." [I saw the soul so large that it seemed like an endless world and as if it were a blissful kingdom; and in the conditions I saw therein, I understood it was a worshipful sight. In the middle of that site sits our Lord Jesus, God and man]⁷³ says Julian, restoring and invigorating the faith she was doubtful over and that caused her spiritual weakness and subsequent demonic attack. God has revealed to Julian her individual soul, something realized much more strongly and fully only *after* her ordeal with the devil that destabilizes

⁷²Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, line 2791.

⁷³Ibid., lines 2792-2805.

her understanding of her identity. This stabilizing of the self is confirmed further, when Julian writes of God telling her that she must “trust thou thereto, and thou shalt not be overcome” [trust yourself, and you shall not be overcome].⁷⁴ But in light of these events, she now has the ability to take on the devil and exert a mastery of him in the way one exerts mastery over a horror text and mastering a repressed source of unpleasure.

The conclusion of Julian’s tribulations with the devil models the pleasure horror offers a reader when said reader is relieved of it. Shortly after the reaffirming of Julian’s faith, the devil comes to her again:

After this the fend came agen with his hete and with his stinke and made me full besy. The stinke was so vile and so peynfull, and also dredful and travellous. Also I heard a bodily jangling as it ha be of two bodies, and both, to my thynkyng, janglyd at one time as if they had holden a parlement with a gret bysynes. And al was soft muttering, as I understode nowte what they seid.⁷⁵

[After this the fiend came again with his heat and his stink and filled me with fear. The stink was so vile and so painful, and also dreadful and troubling. Also I heard a bodily jangling that must have come from two bodies, and both, to my thinking, jangled at one time as if they were having a debate with great. And all they said was a soft muttering, as I could not understand what they said.]

While the devil no longer makes physical contact with Julian, he clearly attempts to pose a threat to her and his presence is still unnerving, as his stink repulses her and his heat can be felt by her. The “jangling” bodies who commiserate inaudibly also add a mysteriously

⁷⁴Ibid., line 2832.

⁷⁵Ibid., line 2847-2851.

ominous quality to the scene that further suggests a malevolent intent on the part of the devil that comes close to the horror created in the previous diabolical scene.

And yet, Julian trumps the devil and his minions with little to no effort. Shortly after these “fends” appear, Julian keeps God’s words fresh in her memory:

And I thowte to myselfe, menand: Thou hast now gret bysynes to kepe the in the feith, for thou suldst not be taken of thi enemy ... And anon [the devil and bodies] wer all gone and all passed, and then left nothing but stinke, and that lested still awhile. And I scornyd him, and thus was I deliverd of hem be the vertue of Chris passion. For therwith is the fend overcome, as our Lord Jesus Criste seid aforne.⁷⁶

[And I thought to myself, meaning: you have now a great task to keep the faith, for you should not be taken by the enemy ... And right away [the devil and bodies] were all gone and passed, and left nothing but stink, which lasted for a while. And I scorned him, and thus I was delivered from him by the virtue of Christ’s passion.

And there is how the fiend is overcome, as our Lord Jesus Christ said before.]

God’s words have given her the spiritual reinforcement to Julian that was necessary for her to assert herself over the devil, and in doing so, conquer an pervasive fear of her faith’s inadequacy and subsequently, her fear of succumbing to the devil’s temptations. Julian *needed* to understand how horrified of the devil, hell, and all their implications she was before she could understand that she possessed the strength to overcome the possibility of their temptations. But like horror, it appears the reality of Julian’s fears do not dissipate immediately. The stink of the devil lingers for some time, similar to how an agent of

⁷⁶Ibid., line 2866-2869.

horror's objective reality might linger in the mind of a reader. Though the horror is gone, the potential for fear has been mastered for now, but not likely for forever.

Like, the Fort-Da game, there existed necessary preconditions of unpleasure before a relief from unpleasure could provide a pleasurable experience. While writing on her experiences near the end of the book, Julian says: "Our good Lord God shewid the enmite of the fend, wherby I understode that all that is contrarious to love and to pece, it is the fend and of his parte. And we have of our febilnes and our foly to fallen, and we have of mercy and grace of the Holy Gost to risen to more joye" [Our good Lord God showed me the enmity of the fiend, through which I understood that all that is contrary to love and to peace, it is the fiend and his part. And we have of our feebleness and our folly to fall, and we have mercy and grace of the Holy Spirit to rise to more joy].⁷⁷ Julian's words approximate Freud's own when analyzing the reasons the child might have felt compelled to repeat the Fort-Da game over and over. Though Julian's experience only occurs once, it is nearly the same as an iteration of the child's game; even the act of writing her shewings down could be interpreted as an attempt at mastery of the fear presented to her by the devil and his many fiends. Even more telling about her writing is that she seemed to understand this connection between unpleasure and the affirmation of the self, which implies that she understood the value of horror as a writer. Julian's encounter with the devil could have easily been written as non-horrifying as Caesarius' devilish tormentor; the fact that it was not, speaks volumes about how Julian understood not only her mind, but the minds of people like her from her own time. Whether Julian's text was intended as autobiographical or as instructional matters little when the evidence illustrates that, either

⁷⁷Ibid., line 3137-3141.

way, she was implementing the mechanics of horror in a way that communicated fear and horror. And, while this does not invalidate the horror present in Map's telling of the demon at the cradl, Julian's text presents such an explicit model of understanding of how these mechanics operate that her writings make it very difficult to deny how the relationship between horror, pleasure, and the self was evident to her. Julian's "shewings" almost become a confessional manual in which she admits to a reader that she understands these intimate and profound connections when read in this way.

Conclusions

As mentioned before, Greenblatt's most recent work places a heavy emphasis on a lack of justification of pleasure-seeking in the Middle Ages. Lying just beneath the surface of this claim rests an implication of incompleteness, an oversimplified rendering of the medieval understanding of self. The analysis here seems especially unstable or misguided in light of the evidence showing that we absolutely can read certain medieval texts as horror texts, especially in the Late Middle Ages. No, Julian might not have pursued pleasure in the ways Greenblatt means the word; never does she indulge the body. But, she indulges the mind and her spirit, and her "shewings" clearly illustrate this. By using horror to first destabilize her understanding of her self and her individual identity, and then reaffirm it and creating a pleasure of assurance, safety, and stability of the self as a result of horror, she achieves a type of pleasure that affirms herself in a way she would likely wanted to have experienced. And beyond Greenblatt's claim, Julian's clear understanding of how horror works counters charges from any critic that assert the lack of a "subject" or "self" or "individual" in the Middle Ages. Again, horror *cannot* work without an assumed

understanding of the self; without this component, a text cannot horrify, it will merely scare. The two affects are related, but not the same.

So then, readers can find instances of horror in medieval texts if only they look closely enough, and more importantly, paying attention to a variety of contexts in which a text was produced. But what does this mean for critics and scholars? The presence of horror and its usage by medieval writers goes far beyond merely chronicling the history of genre-evolution; it helps us better understand the people of the Late Middle Ages and help us understand them in the way Cohen proposes in his theses in a way that contributes to a vast body of criticism and scholarship surrounding the medieval understanding of the self.

Cohen says:

We live in an age that has rightly given up on Unified Theory, an age when we realize that history (like “individuality,” “subjectivity,” “gender,” and “culture”) is composed of a multitude of fragments, rather than of smooth epistemological wholes. Some fragments will be collected here and bound temporarily together to form a loosely integrated net—or better, an unassimilated hybrid, a monstrous body. Rather than argue a “theory of teratology” I offer by way of introduction to the essays that follow a set of breakable postulates in search of specific cultural moments.⁷⁸

Dealing with such complicated issues of the self or subjectivity requires an understanding that there is no one correct approach or definition with which to follow or operate under; the topic is far too complex, and to simplify it for the ease of argumentation would be enormously reductive, likely leading to inaccurate and misleading scholarship on the

⁷⁸Cohen, “Monster Culture,” 3-4.

subject. In this, the value of historicizing texts becomes abundantly clear: what looked like a self to the people of the Middle Ages might not look exactly like a self we would recognize today. This in no way invalidates the existence of a self in the Middle Ages, but rather forces critics to look at aspects of culture, history, and literature (both medieval *and* modern) in different ways than critics, scholars, and historians typically have.

Epilogue

So then, readers can find instances of horror in medieval texts if only they look closely enough and, more importantly, by paying attention to a variety of contexts in which a text was produced. But what does this mean for critics and scholars? The presence of horror and its usage by medieval writers goes far beyond merely chronicling the history of genre-evolution; it helps us better understand the people of the Late Middle in a way that contributes to a vast body of criticism and scholarship surrounding the medieval understanding of the self. As Cohen says:

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⁷⁹Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3-4.

today. This in no way invalidates the existence of a self in the Middle Ages, but rather forces critics to look at aspects of culture, history, and literature (both medieval *and* modern) in different ways than critics, scholars, and historians typically have.

But far from simply deepening our insights about the people of the Late Middle Ages, what the results of this study communicate is that critics and scholars' continued efforts to rigorously question and interrogate what, how, and why texts are canonized in our culture, and what impact this has on our culture at large. While Jeffrey Cohen is correct in asserting that we create our monsters (and all cultural artifacts), they also create us. We exist in a feedback loop. While it may not seem to have any immediate bearing on our current culture, the ways not in just how we select what we value as literature in our culture, but how we value reading those texts absolutely shape our understanding of our present and our past.

The Middle Ages and its literature has been unfairly marginalized, Other-ized, and inaccurately caricatured to serve the purposes of others scholars, despite a veritable wealth of evidence that reaffirms the complexity of the period's writings and the people that read said writings. By reading texts like Julian of Norwich's sixteenth showing, Walter Map's cradle demon, and Caesarius' devilish tormentor with more careful attention to how we as critics reading in our own time construct understandings of difference between ourselves and temporally foreign eras, we can see that the people of the Late Middle Ages did in fact have an acute understanding of the self as fully formed and just as valid as the ones we encounter in our modern lives. This should not come as a surprise to any critic who values the practice of historicizing and contextualizing literature in culture, as the analysis in this work merely adds to a body of work that calls for a multiplicity of

perspectives and angles of analyses in order to identify, approach, and understanding problems in our criticisms and scholarship.

At the heart of this analysis lies a quiet but powerful assertion about that state of our process of canonization and how literature and other forms of storytelling are approached in our culture. Literary scholars have long understood the importance of *what* texts they canonize, and discourses about methods of selection have argued a variety of points. But rarer is the assertion that *how* we read what we venerate is equally important. Perhaps the ways we read are governed by what we read. Consciousness and understanding of how we read, an awareness of how texts affect us and how our own cultural and historical contexts affect our interactions with texts, must be considered in order for critics to achieve the fullest understanding of our literary heritage as possible.

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