

Ana Pena
Fictions of Disability
Prof. Julia Rodas

Monster/Monstrosity

Sometimes, the way the narrators of these stories actually tell the story is with the intentions of making people like Helen, Merrick “the elephant man” and Ysrael “no face” a target. Paul K. Longmore in his theoretical text “why I burned my book and other essays on disability” in chapter seven “screening stereotypes” he talks about how movie makers take advantage of people with disabilities to make them the monsters, criminals, villains and crippled characters of the stories that they are telling throughout the films. In the movies, the person with the disability is portrayed as if he/she is not a human being but a creature or monster. “Further, the depiction of the disabled person as “monster” and the criminal characterization both express to varying degrees the notion that disability involves the loss of an essential part of one’s humanity” (135). Also, I can connect this to the elephant man because he wanted to be accepted as a regular human being, but due to his appearance, the human side of him was taken away. But also, Treves represents him as a “freak” or “monster.”



On the other hand, Longmore states, “That “spread effect” is evident in an extension of the notion of loss of humanity, the idea that disability results in loss of self-control” (135). I can connect this with the film *The Miracle Worker*. There is one scene where Hellen starts to act out of control, just like a monster. James Keller said referring to Hellen’s behavior, “she only dug Martha’s eyes out. Almost dug. It’s always almost, no point worrying till it happens, is there?” (255). Her brother talks about her as if she was an uncontrollable monster. In this paper, I want to discuss the use of the word “monster or monstrosity” from a disability standpoint. I am going to be using some of the texts that we have used in class like the one I used above to demonstrate how the word “monster or monstrosity” is used to describe, identify and as a stereotype against a person with disabilities.



The story “The Elephant Man” by Sir Frederick Treves narrated the story of a man that suffered from a deformity on his body. His name was Merrick. At the beginning of the reading Treves talks about the way that Merrick was exhibited to the public as a monster, and as an animal. He was exhibited as, “the most disgusting specimen of humanity” (182). Merrick was a

man like any other man. Despite his image, he was intelligent and loved to read. He had the desire of falling in love and he wanted to be accepted and viewed as a normal person. “Here was a man in the heyday of youth who was so vilely deformed that everyone he met confronted him with a look of horror and disgust”, “He was taken about the country to be exhibited as a monstrosity and an object of loathing” (185). I think this quote shows how people with disabilities are viewed or perceived as an object or just as a creature. Something that the world needs to pay to see. As if Merrick was not a human with fears, desires, feelings, goal, and aspirations in life.



The other two stories that I would like to add are “*No Face*” and “*Ysrael*” by Junot Diaz. These stories are connected to one another. “No Face” is a story about Ysrael a young boy who wears a mask to cover his disfigured face. This reminded me of Merrick/The elephant man who also covers his face with a mask “In this mask was a wide horizontal slit through which the wearer could look out” (184). The story narrated a day in the life of Ysrael/No face and showed

how he was constantly harassed and bullied due to his condition “the storekeepers toss water on the road to keep the dust down; he sweeps past them. No Face! a few yell out but he has no time for them” (1). Moreover, everyone was curious to see his face as if it were an object that needed to be exposed or exhibited to the public. Other boys his age and the people in general instead of having sympathy for him, they treat him as if he was a monster. “What the hell are you doing? You haven’t started eating cats, have you?” a motor driver yells, while another joined in, “He’ll be eating kids next” (2). This quote shows how people thought of him being a monster. How they discriminated against him just because he looks different from the rest.



On the other hand, “Ysrael” is a story narrated by Yuniór who has an older brother named Rafa. These two brothers are sent by their mother to spend the summer at their uncle’s house. One day Rafa and Yuniór took the bus to Ocoa because Rafa wanted to see Ysrael/No face without the mask. This reminded me of Treves, when he found out about Merrick/The

elephant man “when I first became aware of this phenomenon the exhibition was closed, but a well-informed boy sought the proprietor in a public house and I was granted a private view on payment of a shilling” (181). Just as Yuniar and Rafa, Frederick Treves wanted to see the spectacular creature/monster from a closer perspective. Everybody in Ocoa knew about Ysrael/No face and his condition, “Even on this side of Ocoa people had heard of him, how when he was a baby a pig had eaten his face off, skinned it like an orange” (6). In my opinion this quote represents the reason why people were so curious about seeing Ysrael’s face. I think that the way that people talk about Ysrael and his story was with the intentions of scaring the kids. That maybe work with the little ones but for young men like Yuniar and his brother Rafa that was just creating more curiosity making Ysrael a target just like the showman and Frederick Treves at some point made of Merrick/The elephant man.



As an independent source I would like to talk about the 1985 film “Mask” directed by Peter Bogdanovich. In the movie, Rusty Dennis is the mother of Rocky, who suffered from a

facial deformity called craniodiaphyseal dysplasia known as CDD or lionitis. His mother Rusty struggled to fight for Rocky's acceptance in the public school system. The day that his mother and him goes to the school to register him, every teenager in the school stare at him with a face of disgust as if they were looking at a monster or creature from another planet, "What's the matter, never seen anyone from the planet Vulcan before?" his mother Rusty replied to the expression of the teenagers. This film reminded me of "Ysrael/No face" and the way that everybody looked at him. I think that Rocky and Ysrael have a lot in common such as the fact that people were curious about them, people looked at them as monster or creature. later on in the film, Rusty meets the director of the school and tells him that he has to accept Rocky in the school otherwise she would take him to court. Mr. Simms who is the director of the school acts just like everyone else towards Rocky, he doesn't even want to look at him and Rocky says "Don't worry, Mr. Simms. I look weird, but otherwise I'm real normal." To me this was a way of letting the director know that even though he looks at him as if he is a monster, not to worry because he is just like the other teenagers in the school.

Moreover, on his first day of school, when he gets inside the school a group of teenagers yell at him "Hey kid why you don't take off your mask" referring to his face as a terrifying mask, exactly what everyone wanted to do to Ysrael/No face. Rocky also reminds me of Merrick/The elephant man who, due to his disfigured face, is assumed to be unintelligent, Treves says "It was not until I came to know that Merrick was highly intelligent, that he possessed an accurate sensibility and worse than all a romantic imagination" (185). Just like Rocky who in the plot of the movie is describe as "an intelligent, outgoing, humorous teenager." Many times physical disabilities are associated with the terms unintelligent, monstrosity or creature. They both prove

everyone wrong because they were very intelligent individuals capable of having feelings for others and being loved by their loved ones.

To sum up, I think that the life of Hellen, Ysrael, Merrick, and Rocky have a lot in common. I think that the words “monster and monstrosity” are used to define their life and mark them forever. However, I think that they demonstrated to be more than words and what people thought of them. I think that the way that they would narrate their own story would be completely different from the way that the movie makers and narrators tell their stories. The word “monster or monstrosity” says more about the person that uses it to describe another person with disabilities than the person with the disability itself.

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