The following list covers a broad historical range of American and British texts, beginning with Renaissance treatments of monstrosity, moving through Gothic literary traditions in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and ending with contemporary figures of monstrosity, such as the vampire and the zombie. There are several difficulties with maintaining cohesion with such a list: in addition to transhistorical and transatlantic disparities, there is also the problem of mixing genre, since I move freely between fiction, non-fiction, drama, and poetry (although my list is largely comprised of either novels or essays).

In thinking about how to look at these texts as a single body, my first impulse is to adopt a method of historical materialism regarding monstrous bodies and the historically-contingent social ideologies they are embedded in. In other words, I would be reading each of the monstrous figures in the backdrop of what its production context construes as normality versus abnormality. This would be a simple way to describe a common thread of monstrosity as the threshold for the imagining normality while also accounting for transhistorical / transatlantic differences as relativist or progressive.

Under such a framework, my list would be roughly broken down into three historical periods with three different prevailing ideologies about monstrosity and normality. Broadly speaking, the first, beginning with the Renaissance period and lasting throughout the eighteenth century, treated physical monstrosity as a sign for deviance. Whether cast as deformed beggars or Swift’s creatures in *Gulliver’s Travels*, the monster signified the *other* of society as refracted through the lens of physiological normality. The next phase, beginning with Gothic traditions toward the end of the eighteenth century and stretching through to the mid-twentieth century, imagines monstrosity as a deviance that fails to signify. Between Burke’s concept of the sublime, the unspeakable horror of Machen’s *Great God Pan* and, later on, Lovecraft’s representations of cosmic horror, the monster in this phase loses its signifying compass. Here, the horror the monster evokes is horrifying precisely because it reveals the impossibility of the distinction between normality and monstrosity. In the third phase, which I see beginning in the early 20th century (or even as early as the beginning of the 19th century, with Hogg’s “Confessions”), monsters look increasingly normal. With Crichton’s depictions of androids in *Westworld* or Rice’s vampire or Levin’s Stepford wife, the monster remains a monster in pathology only, having lost its traditional function of signifying the other. This third phase is in some ways a radicalization of the second phase, since the monster no longer fails to signify, but rather, it signifies incorrectly (or from another perspective, it signifies uselessly, since it reveals the self rather than the other).¹

However, while this periodizing framework is useful in getting all of the texts on the table at once, its limitations means that I also want to push back against it. For one, as I mentioned, such an approach is inherently progressivist and relativist, and I do not want

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¹ If postmodernism is a radicalization of modernism’s great realization that realism does not always represent reality to suggest instead another level of removal that reality itself is unstable, then the difference I am drawing between the second and third phases of monstrosity might correspond to the paradigmatic shifts in literary modernism going into postmodernism. This is something I need to think through more carefully.
to simply chart the monster along a trajectory of historical development with no regard
for contingency, not to mention proffer a lazy solution of matching the monster with its
conditions of production (broadly speaking, pre-modernist, modernist, and
postmodernist). To counterweigh my approach, I want to also look at this list structurally,
around the idea of monstrosity as negative exemplarity.

In terms of classification, I argue that monsters are uniquely given the privilege of
being both category and example. Specifically, looking at Bacon, I want to argue that for
his classificatory ontology, knowledge discourse always develops dialectically between a
knowledge category and the empirical examples that give it validity; when Bacon
construes the category of monstrosity, the empirical impossibility of typifying the
specific “deformed person” means that this dialectic is never complete. Instead, the
monster becomes the stand-in that validates its own category – a problem because it
separates empiricism from exemplarity, giving root to a paradoxical dual
conceptualization where on the one hand monsters are categorically monsters because
they look like monsters, and on the other hand, where monsters look like monsters
because they are categorically monsters. This isn’t a question of whether representation
precedes or succeeds its idea, but rather, a question of what the monster looks like
ontologically if the category of monstrosity is sustained by the differing iterations of not-
normal.

By looking at the relationships between the three phases I outlined earlier under
the lens of this structural framework of examining the monster as a negative example, I
hope to stay away from the pitfalls of generalizing historical periodizations to instead
come up with a more substantial conclusion about the shifts in concepts of monstrosity as
they relate to what I am describing as negative exemplarity.

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2 I have attached a small portion of a section I was working on about Bacon and exemplarity, which never
made it into the article draft you had read earlier in the year. It is a few paragraphs that might more
coherently explain some of the thoughts I am expressing here.
Primary texts (by date)

1. *Beowulf* (c. 800-1100)

2. Shakespeare, William. *Richard III* (c. 1592; drama)


5. Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726; novel) and “The Lady’s Dressing Room” (1732; poetry)

6. Pope, Alexander. *The Dunciad* (1728; poetry)


8. Burke, Edmund. Selections from *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. (1757; essay)


10. Aiken, John and Anna Laetitia Aikin. “On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror” and “On Romances.” (1773; essay)


15. Hoffman, E. T. A. “The Sandman” (1816; short story)

16. Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. (1818; novel)


20. Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.* (1886; novella)


23. Wells, H. G. *The Island of Dr. Moreau.* (1896; novel)


27. Matheson, Richard. *I am Legend* (1954; novel)


29. Rice, Anne. *Interview with the Vampire.* (1976; novel)


33. Whitehead, Colson. *Zone One* (2011; novel)

Theory (by author)


8. Freud, Sigmund. “The Uncanny” (1919; essay)