The Monster's Sacrifice—Historic Time: The Uses of Mythic and Liminal Time in Monster Literature

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Introduction

Monster literature may be considered a subcategory of the horror genre, which has its roots in Gothic literature. Although much has been made in recent years of the increasing popularity of horror fiction among teens (Reynolds, Brennan, and McCarron 7–10), the fact is monster stories have been popular with all ages in all ages. From Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, which appeared in 1816, to Deborah and James Howe’s Bunnicula, published in 1979, to Eric Kimmel’s Hassidic tale Gershon’s Monster, published in 2000, monster literature has enjoyed an enthusiastic audience among adults and children alike.

Kevin McCarron states in his essay “Point Horror and the Point of Horror” from Frightening Fiction, “It is noticeable that critics of adolescent horror fiction rarely, if ever, accept that the primary concern of the genre is precisely what it appears to be—death and the fear of death” (21). This fear of death is at the heart of all monster literature and may be understood as the fear of losing one’s historical identity, the fear of relinquishing one’s place in time. The struggle created between categories of time that results from temporal constraints imposed on monsters is the genre’s central focus.

While human beings may experience and occupy three temporal realities, monsters are limited to only two. Humans experience linear time, or beginning to end historic time, where the majority of human life is passed; mythic time, which may be entered through the performance of rituals; and liminal time, which human beings may journey into through separation from their community. The monster is restricted to mythic time and liminal time only, being unable to maintain its existence in linear time.

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In order to understand the monster's experience in time we must first understand what constitutes monsterhood. The tenth edition of *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* offers a starting point, defining monster as: “1 a: an animal or plant of abnormal form or structure b: one who deviates from normal or acceptable behavior or character 2: a threatening force” (752). Jerome Jeffrey Cohen's definition deepens our understanding: “monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual” (7). I would add age-related to Cohen's list; why will become clear as we proceed. Essentially, any individual or group that can be marginalized or viewed as standing outside the norm may be monstrosed.

Monsters are typically liminal in their physical make-up, often displaying characteristics of more than one species, and this is part of what makes them horrific. They are neither one thing nor the other. Their bodies are chaotic, incapable of complete definition, and, thus, resistant to our complete understanding or control (Cohen 6–7).

Monsters are also spatially liminal. They are boundary creatures, lurking in closets, cemeteries, deep woods, and castles on barren mountaintops. They inhabit spaces and places at the far limits of civilization, locations distant from our daily lives (see Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Stoker's *Dracula*, and Mayer's *There’s Something in my Attic* for examples of the monster's spatial liminality).

Finally, monsters are liminal in the way they experience time, which brings us to the center of this discussion. The primary concern of monster literature is existence in linear time. For the monster, the consequences of its temporal constraints are emotional isolation and estrangement from human society, human companionship, and human love. Most of human existence takes place within, and has as its core significance the one temporal reality that is unavailable to the monster: historic time.

In her book *From Mythic to Linear*, Maria Nikolajeva supplies the key to understanding the heart of monster literature: “contemporary Western children's fiction is written from a philosophical viewpoint based on linear time, which has a beginning and an end, and recognizes every event in history as unique” (5). This underlying precept, that human life takes place in linear fashion from birth to death, creates a potent dynamic in monster narratives. When ordinary, historic time is juxtaposed with the other temporal realities that function in monster literature, narrative tension and suspense result.

In choosing texts for examination in this essay I used three criteria. The works had to be familiar to most readers, the examples had to represent diverse age-delineated categories, and each work had to present a different perspective on monsters. I could as easily have chosen, and would recommend, books such as *Monster*, by Walter Dean Myers, a young adult realistic fiction novel; *Alison's Fierce and Ugly Halloween* by Marion Dane Bauer, a chapter book; *Bunnicula*, a middle reader by Deborah and James Howe; or *Sabriel* by Garth Nix, a high fantasy young adult novel; or any of Mercer Mayer's monster picture books.
Human existence spans three categories of time. Linear or historic time is where we spend the greatest part of our lives. It is our working and waking, this week and tomorrow time zone. It proceeds in linear fashion, so that each of its events is a unique, one-time experience. Religious historian Mircea Eliade, analyzing myth and ritual in his book The Sacred and the Profane, describes historic time as “man’s deepest existential dimension; it is linked to his own life, hence it has a beginning and an end, which is death, the annihilation of his life” (71). This, as we shall see, is the temporal experience denied monsters.

Our second temporal reality is circular time, or mythic time. It is “indefinitely repeatable” (69) time in Eliade’s definition: “it is reversible in the sense that, properly speaking it is a primordial mythical time made present. . . . From one point of view it could be said that it does not ‘pass,’ that it does not constitute an irreversible duration. It is an ontological, Parmenidean time; it always remains equal to itself, it neither changes nor is exhausted” (69). Mythic time “appears under the paradoxical aspect of a circular time, reversible and recoverable, a sort of eternal mythical present that is periodically reintegrated by means of rites” (70). It is the time of festivals, time which serves to revivify and reinvigorate our world and our lives. In mythic time we “recover the strong, fresh, pure world that existed in illo tempore” (94).

Halloween is an example of mythic time. Children ritually dress up as monsters, temporarily relinquishing their historic identities on a specified date each year and perform rituals of asking for candy and mildly disturbing the peace. The stroke of midnight on New Year’s Eve is another moment in which we experience mythic time. This magical hour represents the end of the old year and, simultaneously, a new beginning for the world and for the individual (Eliade 73). It symbolizes a destruction of the old, a cleansing, a new state of being. In this spirit, the individual makes New Year’s resolutions to quit smoking, start exercising, and so on. After midnight, routine life begins again; people go home and go to bed. Historic time, linear time is reinstated. The celebration of the Eucharist in the Christian tradition is also an experience in mythic time. Through the re-enactment of this sacrament, the Christian worshipper believes the Christ’s presence is invoked. By eating the body and drinking the blood of the Christ, the faithful enter the mythic, repeatable time of the Last Supper. The purpose of the invocation of mythic time is to allow the participants to share the presence of and re-experience the salvific act of their God “who gives life and saves from death” (Gu zie 56–57).

Circular time is also monster time, the time when monsters perform their own rituals re-enacting the moment of their creation. For example, vampires awaken each night and must have fresh blood to sustain their monstrous existences; they ritually re-enact the moment of their own creation by biting a new throat, sucking new blood. Likewise, werewolves are compelled to stalk
and attack humans at the full moon, just as they were stalked and attacked. It is, of course, the attack that initiates the werewolf's change of status from human being to monster.

The third of our temporal realities is liminal, or marginal, time. It is a time of transition from one state of being to another or from one category of time to another. Eliade defines it as a "solution of continuity" (68). That is, liminal time represents a break between historic and mythic time, where rules of status and boundary do not apply. New Year's Eve before the stroke of midnight exemplifies liminal time. Before midnight, the revelers binge and carouse. This is transitional time between the old and the new year, time when normal boundaries disintegrate. Thus, the New Year's Eve party has certain orgiastic characteristics, such as the celebrants' over-indulgence in alcohol and kissing strangers at the stroke of twelve, both representative of the defining element of liminal time, a dissolution of boundaries. It is a dangerous transitional period.

It is the lack of limits and rules in liminal time that constitute the danger for human beings. Nighttime is our most common experience of liminal time. When it is dark and we are all alone, when we sleep and dream, our normal physical and psychological barriers disappear. In darkness, with its dim shapes and shifting shadows, and in sleep, which has aspects of both life and death, we are at our most vulnerable. This is the time when monsters roam, the time when monsters can attack us.

We also experience liminal time in rites of passage, as Victor Turner describes in his essay "Betwixt and Between: the Liminal Period in Rites De Passage." Here, liminal time is also entered via the segregation of the individual from his group. This isolation "comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions; during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (235).

In many traditional societies adolescent boys are sent away from the tribe or community into the bush to begin their transition from childhood to manhood. They are segregated from their community. Adolescent girls are often hidden away, separated from the social group at the onset of their first menses, their transition from childhood to womanhood. In contemporary secular society, the whole of the teenage years is, to some extent, considered a liminal time. The adolescent is not quite child, not quite adult. The teenager enjoys neither the full privileges of childhood nor of adulthood. They are, in a sense, beings without status, without a rightful place in society—just like a monster.

Although human beings live out their lives in all three of these temporal realities, historic/linear, circular/mythic, and liminal/marginal time, monsters are limited to only two: mythic and liminal time. They cannot maintain their existence in history and must relinquish their hold on linear time.
Vampires, for example, do not, for all practical purposes, exist from dawn to dusk during our work-a-day, linear time. In the temporal period during which we conduct our daily lives, the vampire lies in its coffin, unable to hold a job, meet friends for lunch, or celebrate holidays. It is trapped in a suspended animation of liminal time, without status (Melton 630; Stoker 57). This, of course, is when vampires are most vulnerable to destruction, for they cannot defend themselves. At dusk, the vampire awakens in mythic/circular time. Each evening is the same; it awakens, it thirsts, it seeks a new throat and fresh blood. *The vampire does not age, for it does not exist in historic time.*

Similarly, werewolves are at the mercy of circular time as it is revealed by the moon's cycle. Every twenty-nine days when the full moon recurs, the cursed human transforms into the werewolf and is compelled to hunt and kill (Steiger 119–121). In the interval between full moons — if the werewolf lives any length of time after being cursed — it is forced, in order to protect its secret, to remove itself from human society. It thus relinquishes its historic life and begins an existence that is physically, spatially, and temporally liminal. When the full moon reappears after twenty-nine days, the cursed human transforms to the werewolf. When it transforms it enters mythic time, re-enacting the moment of its creation as it performs the inescapable ritual of stalking and then slashing the throat of another human victim. This is one of the core experiences of the monster: it repeats and repeats and repeats, ad infinitum, its own creation. The authorial decision to create a character unable to maintain its existence in historic time impacts both the monster character and the reader, and creates high levels of narrative tension and suspense.

1. *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak

In Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, we learn in the first sentence that Max has begun his symbolic transformation to monster: “The night Max wore his wolf suit” (1). It is nighttime, the liminal time traditionally designated for monsters’ existence. Further, Max has taken on the liminal morphology of monster, showing traits both human and lupine. His behavior in this state places him at odds with society, at its outskirts, as he breaks social norms by making “mischief of one kind and another” (1–2).

Max’s mother spatially and temporally isolates him. She labels him a “Wild Thing” (i.e., a monster) and sends him to bed in his room, by himself, “without eating anything” (5). She removes him from the comforts of ordinary life, ordinary time. Max is placed, literally and symbolically, in “time out.” That is, time out of time. In this story, time functions almost as a character. The author requires nature, or an aspect of nature, to act as antagonist to the protagonist; time is the conflict against which Max must struggle. Initially, he loses the battle; he cannot control his fate in historic time and he relinquishes his historical existence when he is banished from linear time.
In "time out," Max enters liminal time where ordinary boundaries and rules cease to exist: "That very night in Max’s room a forest grew . . . and an ocean tumbled by with a private boat for Max" (7–13). What we see in the illustrations on pages 10 and 14 is how much Max is enjoying his journey into liminal time, and the reader is meant to enjoy it, too. Although our deepest values of love and relationship lie in historic time, we are still drawn to the unlimited freedoms, the wildness of liminal time. It calls to the wild thing in us all.

Sendak’s illustrations through these first pages of the story reflect Max’s isolation. On page 3, we see Max in his wolf suit chasing his dog with a fork. Then, as Max enters liminal time, although we see jungles grow and an ocean appear, we see also that his new temporal reality is bereft of other characters. He is alone, segregated from his community, liminalized.

Max boards the boat and sails, "in and out of weeks and almost over a year" (13). That is, he does not follow a historically fixed route, but a nebulous one that moves him through time rather than geography. Likewise, when Max docks, it is not in a historic place. It has no historically established name; it is simply “where the wild things are” (13).

At the far reaches of liminal time, the dangers of this transitional period become apparent: other characters once again begin to appear in Sendak’s illustrations. And, of course, they are not historical, but morphologically liminal, creatures. A sea monster rises from the depths—a sea monster with scales, wings, horns, a Beatles’ haircut and a goatee. Max’s face registers fear when the sea monster shows up (16) and reader tension builds as we too begin to worry about Max’s safety. The pull and counter-pull on the reader exerted by historic time and liminal time build suspense and anxiety for the reader. We are no longer so drawn to liminal time as we become concerned about Max’s historic existence.

But, by the time he is close to making landfall and spies the wild things on shore, his expression has changed. Max wears a deep frown, his brow is drawn in a threatening manner, and his paw is on his hip in a gesture of superiority. He has clearly made the decision to again enter into his struggle with time (17–18). And Max wins. He becomes master of his own fate, and master of the wild things: “Max said ‘BE STILL!’ and tamed them with the magic trick of staring into all their yellow eyes without blinking once and they were frightened and called him the most wild thing of all and made him king of all wild things” (19–21).

Here the reader is treated to a moment of triumph when Max has successfully navigated the hazards of liminal time with its lack of boundaries and rules and emerged with a new status: king of the wild things. Max has vanquished chaos and established order, and so he transitions out of liminal time and into mythic time.

Max cries “let the wild rumpus start!” (22–24), and the full moon, arguably humanity’s most widely-recognized symbol for circular time, appears.
All of the wild things wave and flail their arms, paying homage to the round, pale orb suspended overhead. Once again the reader is drawn back to the charms of the mythic and liminal in the wild rumpus (25–26). All of the monster characters are celebrating, Max is enjoying himself, and the reader is meant to as well.

But, as always, our hearts are in historic time. Although Max has managed to conquer and control both liminal and mythic time, the victory is hollow. Human love is absent outside historic time, and the love of monsters is not so comforting a thing as the love of mothers, as Max discovers: “we'll eat you up—we love you so!” (31). His need for human love and an ache for the familiar make Max weary of the festival and yearn to return to the historic present, to his historic existence “where someone loved him best of all” (29). Ordinary life, everyday, comforting linear time calls to him: “from far away across the world he smelled good things to eat” (30). And so Max again boards his private boat and sails “back over a year and in and out of weeks and through a day” (33), transitioning from mythic time to the historic present.

The illustration on page 36 shows Max arriving in his normal, jungleless room, ready for the challenge of historic time with its demands and structures. His wolf suit is beginning to slip off. We understand that he has made it back to ordinary time and is reclaiming his historic existence at a precise moment in linear time, the moment when his supper “was still hot” (37).

In Young People Reading: Culture and Response, Charles Sarland writes, “In the social construction of reality that culture is, it is necessary to learn the boundaries of cultural order, and to learn what those boundaries are it is just as necessary to learn what is beyond them as to learn what is within them. In the learning process, then, the concept of the cultural ‘other’ is crucial . . . for identify[ing] and question[ing] those boundaries” (63). This is what Max accomplished in his journey, then: he stepped into other times with other rules and returned to linear time with a new appreciation of its attributes of love and comfort.

Max’s experience was an unusual one; he was able to struggle with time and win, renounce his monsterhood, return from his isolation, and reclaim his spot in history. He was able to rejoin his community as his original self. Most monsters—the vampire, for example—cannot turn back the clock. They are cursed, liminalized, isolated from their former historic existences for all time.

2. Thirsty by M. T. Anderson

In his vampire novel Thirsty, M. T. Anderson introduces us to a world troubled by liminal creatures. He tells us the vampires are temporally and, for the most part, spatially marginalized: “At night, they move through the empty forests” and “[t]he news says that they are mostly in the western part of the state, where it is lonely and rural” (9).
He traces the beginning of the vampire problem to the Vampire Lord Tch'muchgar, and situates him in illo tempore, that is, in original time, mythic time. “It is said that the spirit Tch’muchgar ravaged the land with an army of Darkness, and . . . his dominion extended over the whole expanse of mountain and forest now covered by the 508 and 413 area codes. It is said that it was he who then first laid the curse of vampirism on humans and made vampires live past death and suck the blood of the living” (10). The imprisonment of Tch’muchgar also occurred in mythic time and is ritually re-enacted each year down to the present: “in ancient times the Forces of Light expelled him to a prison in another world and came in the form of shining beings to tell the Pompositticut tribe what rituals should be done each year in special ritual sites to keep Tch’muchgar locked away forever. . . . W]e still do the festival” (10).

Once Anderson has grounded the story in mythic and historic time, he gives us a closer look at Chris, the main character. Chris is a teenage boy caught in the liminal time of adolescence. He is a teenager experiencing the pain of growing away from his childhood world, longing for a more mature existence. He is “betwixt and between,” in Turner’s words, unable to shed the one world, unable to acquire the other.

Chris describes his long-time friendships with Tom and Jerk. He tells us how, when they were children, they spent afternoons running through the woods, had sleepovers at one another’s houses, watched Twilight Zone reruns together, and had philosophical discussions about the existence of God. They supported each other when Tom’s grandmother went crazy and when Chris’s grandfather died. Now though, Chris is beginning to feel disconnected from his childhood world, his old friends. He views Tom with a critical eye: “Recently I have been noticing that his imagination isn’t really as good as I thought it was. It mainly revolves around things just being louder and more explosive than they really are” (30).

Chris wants to be a part of a more grown up, privileged world. He longs to take on a new, sophisticated, in-control status: “I picture myself with different friends. They are artists and dress in black, and we say cool things to one another and laugh about wrecking slick cars” (31). And yet, because he is living in the liminal, “betwixt and between” time of the teenager, he yearns to discuss the new emotions and sensations he is having with his childhood friend, to maintain the connection with his childhood world: “I want to talk to Tom alone about some things, mainly things like feeling strange wild thirsts and longings in your chest when the evening falls, and what to do about desire, but it’s difficult to bring that kind of thing up just after lunch. . . . I want to know why I’m having trouble sleeping sometimes and what this strange hunger is” (28).

Shortly after we are introduced to Chris’s liminal life as a teenager, we discover he isn’t just transitioning into adulthood; he is evolving into a vampire, also an experience of liminal time. This second layer of liminality doubles the
narrative tension for the reader. The young adult reader identifies with the boy wanting to become man, and throughout the novel continues to hope that Chris will be able to regain his humanity, will be able to conquer the curse of vampirism that threatens his historic existence. The isolation created by Chris's vampiric evolution is very similar to what he is already experiencing as an adolescent. In fact, Chris has mistaken the signs of vampirism as signs of adult love: "I have been feeling strange little percolations in my chest. Whatever it is, I don't like it. It's a desire for something, but I can't tell what. It makes me uncomfortable sometimes during the day. It has been disturbing my sleep occasionally at night. It is like a leaping or a squelching or an anguish about nothing at all. Maybe it's love these percolations, that's what I think" (25).

A secondary character, Chet the Celestial Being, enters the story in the role of elder, a common figure in rites of passage in traditional societies (Turner 237), who acts as guide for the neophytes. In this role, Chet instructs Chris in his vampiric evolution and explains Chris's strange new emotions, the peculiar sensations he is experiencing: "Your thirst is only beginning now. When you get angry, you become vampiric. And vice versa. When you get thirsty, you get angry without reason. Increasingly. You feel prone to violence. You feel prone to drink blood. In four months your blood-thirst will have overwhelmed you" (Anderson 45). Chet explicitly draws, for Chris and the reader, the parallels between the liminal time of teenagehood and the liminal time of the evolving vampire: "You have the curse in you. I don't know why. But puberty has set it off within you. Hormones" (43). And, "You, Christopher, are on the cusp. You may move through both human and vampiric society with impunity. To humans, you are a human; to vampires, a vampire" (44).

Chris is further isolated and liminalized by his mother. Twice in the course of the novel she uses the traditional parental punishment of segregating the child from his community: time out for younger children, grounding for the adolescent. Just as in Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are, the mother in Thirsty removes her child temporarily from the pleasures of his everyday life as punishment for breaking familial and societal norms. She isolates him from his activities and the camaraderie of his peers.

In the first instance, Chris's mother believes she is disciplining her adolescent son for lying to her. In reality, she is punishing an emerging vampire for tasting blood for the first time ... his own: "My teeth are fine, but my braces were yanked completely off my canines ... My mother says she is grounding me for a week or until I tell her what really happened" (137). The second instance of imposed isolation by Chris's mother comes at the end of the novel. "I am grounded for staying out after midnight," Chris says (239). His parents, once again, are trying to impose temporal and spatial limitations on their liminal adolescent. Suspicious that Chris may be a vampire, but unwilling to wholly accept the possibility, they continue to deal with Chris as a human being, punishing him with deprivation of his historic life.
As evolving vampire, Chris is forced to relinquish his historic existence bit by bit; he begins living in the isolation of liminal time. Early in the novel we see the telltale signs, which Chris mistakes for love. He has more and more trouble sleeping at night, for example. He finds himself lying awake, alone in the most desolate hours. Chris speaks eloquently of that time of night that is not a part of historic human existence, but a part of liminal time, time where he now feels himself trapped and friendless: “But after they went to bed, and the dishwasher stopped running and sighed, and the house was silent, it seemed like I had found a vast abandoned lot of night where no one was allowed, and I was staggering in that place alone, with walls that held me from all who slept. . . . Now I feel that again because I can’t sleep” (58).

Chet the Celestial Being tells Chris he is aware of another sign of Chris’s evolving vampirism, another marker of the loss of his historic existence: “I saw that you had no reflection in the lake” (41). One of the ways by which we constantly measure the quality of our physical existence is via the looking glass, either natural or man-made. We also use our reflection to monitor the effect that time, linear time, is having upon our historic selves. Chris, clinging to historic life, becomes obsessed with his reflection. He seeks constant reassurance that he still exists, that he is still human. “I pick up the spoon and lick off all the milk. My reflection stands out clearly, inverted. I turn from one side to the other. . . . For a moment, I’m proud of my reflection. Then I look closer, and I’m not so happy. My hair is lanky and hangs down. . . . My eyes look sunken and dark and my features look haggard and ugly” (61). Age and disease are concerns of those who exist in linear time. They are signs of life within history: when they end, life ends. Chet tells Chris, “You will stop aging in a few years, and you will be immune to disease” (43).

Unable to stop or even slow the loss of his historic existence, his inevitable isolation from human society in historic time, Chris fantasizes facing the end of history with Rebecca, the girl he loves. Existing in mythic time becomes a bearable option for him only if history and human society no longer exist: “I think about if we were the last two people on earth, because I’ve made her into a vampire, which is very romantic, and we’ve withstood the radioactivity and all the madness of nuclear war. Outside, the ancient crumbling city is razed beneath the blood-red sunset moon” (79).

Chris’s fundamental belief in his humanity—his confidence that his existence is woven into the fabric of historic time and his faith that he has a past to cling to, a present to change and a future to hope for—takes a lethal blow when Chris finds out that his fate was predestined from the moment of his birth. In fact, the only thing that allowed him to have a historic existence for even a few years, ironically, was the vampire curse, the curse of mythic time. Chris was stillborn, strangled by the umbilical cord. A nurse, unnoticed by everyone except Chris’s parents, took him into another room in the hospital and resurrected him. Chris’s mother tells him, “She’d brought you back to life. . . . It was a miracle. She brought you back” (155). Chris imagines how it
happened there, in the dark, with the nurse “quickly chanting, or sprinkling me, or biting softly some hidden fold, some pudgy leg beneath the wrap—feeling my little dead toy heart quiver, thump with new life, thump again” (156). At the end of the novel, although Chris is still arguing with himself, he acknowledges that he is completely isolated from linear time, from human companionship, from human existence: “Night is growing thick. House is dark. Sighing breaths rising and falling in soft white throats. Three right here, right in this house. And I’m hiding behind the doorway. There is no hope for me. That is all I know” (248).

3. Blood and Chocolate by Annette Curtis Klause

Although there is temporal isolation of the teen protagonist due to her monsterhood in Annette Curtis Klause’s Blood and Chocolate, in a nice reversal of tradition the novel’s emphasis is not on the return to or loss of the protagonist’s historic existence as it is in Where the Wild Things Are and Thirsty, but rather on the maintenance of her mythic time existence. Vivian is a werewolf by birth and proud of it.

Human beings are intrigued by mythic time. The unrestrained impulses and freedoms of the werewolves in Blood and Chocolate appeal to our untamed, uncivilized side, to the primordial beast in our souls. But while we are drawn to mythic time, we also recognize the danger it represents to us as human beings, for much of the meaning and definition we ascribe to our lives is lost in mythic time due to its cyclic nature. Mythic time denies our historicity.

Klause successfully creates a pull on the reader’s sympathies from both the mythic and the historic. In Blood and Chocolate the character is torn between the two existences, and we feel the competing desires as well because of our attraction to the mythic and our commitment to the historic. We are accustomed to desiring the return of historic time and the reintegration of the character into history. Much of the tension we experience in Where the Wild Things Are and in Thirsty comes from our desire to see Max and Chris make it home, literally and figuratively, to see them reclaim their historic lives. While we find the mythic alluring, emotionally we relate to the historic.

Klause opens her book by providing an existential connection for us: “Flames shot high, turning the night lurid with carnival light. Sparks took the place of stars. The century-old inn was a silhouette fronting hell, as everything Vivian knew was consumed in fire. . . . ‘Daddy!’ Vivian screamed. But it was too late” (3–4). Here is the human, historic experience of loss, forfeit of home, privation of family. Vivian’s grief connects us in historic time. Her home will not rebuild itself with the full moon, her father will not come back to life through any performance of ritual; both are gone. Both meet destruction in historic time. We relate, we mourn with Vivian, we feel connected to her.
The author also emotionally engages us through Vivian's sexual curiosity about humans. Her encounters with the human teenager Aiden are new, unique events, historic rather than circular. She is in unfamiliar territory, as are human teenagers beginning to experiment with sex: "When would he kiss her? Would she like it? She had only kissed her own kind. Could it compare?" (50). Throughout the book the author provides common ground for the character and the reader through the experience of change, the primary fact of historic time. The novel leads us through Vivian's rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, from innocence to responsibility.

The author shows the reader from the beginning of the novel that the heart of the story lies in mythic, circular time; each section of the book is named for a different full moon. Part of the traditional werewolf curse, of course, is that the cursed human's transformation to wolf is dictated by the cycle of the moon and, specifically, the appearance of the full moon every twenty-nine days. Thus, the novel begins at the Ghost Moon, moves on to the next year's Midsummer Moon, and carries us through the Thunder Moon, the Satyr's Moon, and the Harvest Moon.

The author also emphasizes the overarching importance of mythic time and the isolation from human society it creates through the retelling of the werewolf's creation myth early on in the story:

The stories said that by ritual, sacrifice, and sacrament, they opened their souls to the Forest God, the great hunter who took the shape of the wolf. To reward them for their devotion, his mate, the Moon, gave them the gift to be more than human. They could throw aside the pelts of hunted animals and grow their own, abandon their knives of flint and use their teeth. Their children's children still carried the beast within, and all were subject to the moon. (14)

Even the "scientific" explanation for their werewolfism is cloaked in the shadows of eons of time, in the Earth's distant, prehistoric past: "Those who preferred science to myth said they descended from something much older—some early mammal that had absorbed protean matter brought to Earth by a meteorite" (30–31).

The author has given her contemporary werewolves some margin of freedom; they may transform themselves to wolf-form anytime they please, but still, come the full moon, the choice is no longer theirs: "Like all her people, at the full moon she had to change whether she wanted to or not, the urge was too strong to refuse" (29). In fact, it is not just their compunction to transform that is dictated by the eternal cycles of the moon. The laws which govern their behavior toward humans, laws meant to keep them distanced from humans, were given to them by the Moon goddess: "When the Goddess, the Lady Moon, gave wolf-kind the gift to change, she warned the first loups-garoux to pity humans for their soft, immutable flesh, for wolf-kind had once been like them. 'Use your eyes,' the Goddess said. 'Look at them and praise my
name for changing you; kill them and kill yourselves’” (56). Likewise, their method (ritual) of choosing a new werewolf leader, passed down through the ages, is enacted beneath a full moon, and the law regulating who may participate is dictated by the moon’s recurring cycles: “Bone and flesh, flesh and bone, a man takes time to grow them. Two-five-two number the moons that it takes for a man to know them” (139).

Aunt Persia, the werewolf equivalent of the human gypsy queen in traditional werewolf stories (i.e. the keeper of magic and cultural secrets) proclaims, “It is time . . . to choose a leader in the Old Way” (38). The reader enters into the werewolf pack’s mythic time, moon time, as the ritual of deciding leadership is re-enacted:

a rustling began in the woods across the clearing, beneath the rising moon. A pale figure took form in the darkness, and out stepped Persia Devereux dressed in silver robes. In her hands she carried a silver bowl, as ripe and as full as the moon. She sang a moaning soft song that throbbed like the heart of a beast . . . . The old woman offered each fighter the bowl. “Drink of the Moon,” she said. And as she passed down the line, backs furred, limbs twisted, ears sprouted tufts (142).

Because the werewolves’ chief temporal reality in Blood and Chocolate is mythic time, and because they have to maintain their existence with conspicuous public notice in the center of human linear time, a constant, isolating tension exists between the two in the novel. The author details the history of this tension for the reader:

In the 1600s, her ancestors had fled from werewolf hysteria in France to the sparsely settled New World, and by the end of the century had settled in wild Louisiana. In nineteenth-century New Orleans the Verdun triplets broke the ban on human flesh and the pack moved in haste to West Virginia . . . . Last year the forbidden appetite had won again, and the pack took flight from the hills that had been its home for one hundred years and arrived refugees in the Maryland suburbs. (10)

The werewolves’ survival depends in large part on these mythic time characters isolating themselves from linear time characters. Vivian’s mother, Esme, is a waitress, and each month, as the full moon approaches, Esme has to change her schedule: “Esme worked the day shift around the full moon. Biting customers didn’t make for good tips” (57). Vivian, enamored of a human boy, or a “meat-boy” as her pack-mates refer to him, has the same problem when he invites her to a party to be held the night of the full moon:

But on Thursday night when she flung up her bedroom window and looked at the sky, she realized that the moon would be full on Saturday. There was no way she could go to that party with Aiden. The hair prickled roughly on her arms. She climbed hastily onto the porch roof outside her window, leaped to the yard, and the change was upon her almost before she reached the cover of the riverbank weeds.
The nearer to full moon, the quicker the change, the less control; and the
night Earth's sister loomed round and whole there was no choice—a loup-
garou must change no matter what. Saturday, Vivian thought with dismay as
she shuddered to all fours. (54-55)

In addition to these human/werewolf, historic/mythic time isolations, there
are also overarching werewolf liminalizations contained within the novel.
Vivian's pack is experiencing liminal time in a different way than they have
before; the pack is currently leaderless, causing a dissolution of the status
quo; the usual boundaries and rules have ceased to exist: "With more than
half of them dead, no one knew his or her place anymore. There was constant
squabbling. Survival depended on their blending in while they organized and
decided where they would move and settle for good, but at any moment the
pack was likely to explode in a ball of flying fur. They needed a leader badly,
but no one could agree who" (10-11).

Within the liminal time the pack is living through, there is the "betwixt
and between time" which Vivian, as an adolescent, is experiencing. She has
emotionally outgrown her pack-mates: she is bored by them; she desires new
experiences and new relationships. Vivian is intrigued by human society. She
wants a human boyfriend. Throughout the novel Vivian courts Aiden, the human
teenager, and snubs the advances of the werewolf male most likely to claim
leadership of the pack. By the end of the novel, Vivian has become truly caught
in liminal time. She has isolated herself from humans and werewolves and is
literally stuck "betwixt and between" in a form which is half human, half wolf.

At the novel's close, order has been returned to the pack by a new leader,
thus enabling their transition out of liminal time, and Vivian at last has cho-
sen loyalty to her mythic time heritage and her mythic time fellows. Once she
has made that decision, the liminal form she has been trapped in dissolves
and she transforms to pure, fully-committed, adult werewolf. She has chosen
isolation from the human world of historic time and gained inclusion in the
mythic time community of the pack, thus reversing the traditional scenario
in which the monster character attempts to reintegrate into historic time.

The decision to remain human is not as easy as the decision to remain
monster, for monstrosity is unchanging; it is part of mythic time. The mon-
ster never has to make new decisions, only the same ones over and over again.
But, because human beings are historic creatures, because we occupy linear
time as "the decision to be human," as Chris tells us in Thirsty, "is not one
single instant, but a thousand choices made every day. It is choices we make
every second and requires constant vigilance. We have to fight to remain hu-
man" (Anderson 248).

4. The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson

Dr. Henry Jekyll doesn't put up much of a fight. In fact, he goes out of his way
to protect and sustain his monster. Rather than remain human and abide by
the rules of linear time, Dr. Jekyll indulges in the mayhem of liminal time and becomes a monster. The well-respected doctor in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* echoes Chris's epiphany in *Thirsty*: "It was on the moral side, and in my own person, that I learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both" (83).

Dr. Jekyll, while building a practice, helping the poor, and earning his community's respect, is also vulnerable to and has acted to satisfy certain less-accepted appetites. These he has kept hidden from his public. Having desired to maintain his good, wholesome self, and at the same time yearning to let his monstrous, gluttonous side run rampant, he finally, in his mature years, discovers a potion that allows both; and he quickly becomes addicted to the liminal-time lifestyle of Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll says, "Men have before hired bravos to transact their crimes, while their own person and reputation sat under shelter. I was the first that could thus plod in the public eye with a load of genial respectability, and in a moment, like a schoolboy, strip off these lendings and spring head long into the sea of liberty" (88).

After his initial liminal time experience, Dr. Jekyll begins to drink the potion with increasing frequency. As he becomes more embroiled in Mr. Hyde's depraved lifestyle, Dr. Jekyll isolates himself to an ever-greater degree from the company of his old friends and from his public; he begins to relinquish his place in historic time. He gives it up without a fight and lives more and more in liminal time as the monster, Mr. Hyde.

In addition to being inextricably bound to the material and emotional resources of the historic Dr. Jekyll, the liminal time existence of the monster is also a leach upon these assets. Mr. Hyde has no concrete existence in historic time. He is a creature of the night, the hours when human boundaries are shadowed and indistinct. At night, when humans sleep and dream, when the margins of reality are blurred, when humans are most vulnerable, Mr. Hyde comes to life. Dr. Jekyll ponders the possibility that had his good side been more conscious than his evil side, an angel might have come forth rather than Mr. Hyde, but, "At that time my virtue slumbered; my evil, kept awake by ambition, was alert and swift to seize the occasion; and the thing that was projected was Edward Hyde" (86). The novel, in fact, was born in liminal time; the essentials of it came from a nightmare of Robert Louis Stevenson. When his wife woke him in the middle of the dream, he complained she had disrupted a "fine bogy tale" (qtd. in Callow 201).

Stevenson defines Mr. Hyde as a creature of liminal time initially, by having his first appearance come at night. A secondary character, Richard Enfield, was "coming home from some place at the end of the world, about three o'clock of a black winter morning" (13). He sees Mr. Hyde "stumping along" (13) and witnesses Hyde's first monstrous act: he tramples underfoot the most pure, the most vulnerable aspect of humanity; a little girl. Witnessing Mr. Hyde's
scorn for historic existence elicits two emotional responses in the reader. The first is anxiety; Mr. Hyde's disdain for the historic exposes the vulnerability of the ordered historic to the chaotic liminal. We realize the liminal Mr. Hyde does not play by the rules that keep us safe in historic time. The second effect is to make us dislike the character. We feel emotionally disconnected from Mr. Hyde, for he not only disregards, but tramples over, our values.

Though the reader sees right away that Mr. Hyde is not a historic creature, Mr. Enfield does not yet understand that Mr. Hyde is a monster from the liminal time of darkness and nightmare. With the other witnesses to Mr. Hyde's sin, Enfield uses the values of historic time to try to control him. The gentlemen threaten Mr. Hyde with the ruination of his historic existence: “We told the man we could and would make such a scandal out of this, as should make his name stink from one end of London to the other. If he had any friends or credit, we undertook that he should lose them” (14). Mr. Hyde responds to this threat with “a black sneering coolness[,] . . . carrying it off . . . really like Satan” (14). The author again presents Mr. Hyde’s indifference to traditional values: we know Mr. Hyde is going to be trouble. Stevenson has Mr. Hyde appear most often at night, and this serves to maintain the reader's anxiety, for the nighttime scenes play on our instinctive fear of darkness. The streets are always dark and deserted and silent. We are alone with the monster.

When Mr. Utterson and Inspector Newcomen of Scotland Yard go searching for Mr. Hyde, even though it is during daylight hours, Stevenson still describes a pervading quality of night: “It was by this time about nine in the morning, and the first fog of the season. A great chocolate-coloured pall lowered over heaven . . . . Mr. Utterson beheld a marvelous number of degrees and hues of twilight; for here it would be dark like the back-end of evening; and there would be a glow of rich, lurid brown” (35–36). This “chocolate-coloured pall” is also a piece of the liminal time of Stevenson's nightmares. He wrote that his dreams often contained “a certain hue of brown” that he “feared and loathed” (qtd. in Callow 204).

Stevenson has Mr. Hyde's crimes become more serious each time the reader sees him, so that the alarm the reader experiences in Mr. Hyde's presence will increase over time and the antipathy the reader feels toward him will strengthen. As Mr. Hyde's strength increases, we also begin to lose our emotional connection to Dr. Jekyll; we disrespect him for protecting the liminal instead of the historic. In Mr. Hyde we see the liminal not just threatening the historic, but draining life from it and destroying it. Our struggle as historic creatures is to impose order and control, to keep the chaos of liminal time and its monsters at bay.

In Where the Wild Things Are, we relate to Max throughout the story. We want him to control the monsters of liminal time and be able to reclaim his place in history. In Thirsty, we feel emotionally connected to Chris because his values are our values; he clings to his historic life as we cling to ours. We align ourselves with him because he defends the historic to the bitter end. In
Blood and Chocolate, we are drawn to Vivian, in part, because of her wild, uninhibited werewolf nature. But we care about her because she experiences her life existentially, in a human way.

Mr. Hyde exploits the historic. He clings to it, not for love, but because it is the lifeline for his liminal existence. Mr. Hyde does not have a job. It is Dr. Jekyll's fortune that supports his depraved lifestyle. After Mr. Hyde tramples the girl during his first appearance, he offers remuneration to her family. He enters with a key through Dr. Jekyll's cellar door and comes back with "a matter of ten pounds in gold and a cheque for the balance on Coutts's, drawn payable to bearer and signed," with Dr. Jekyll's name (15).

Dr. Jekyll, his protector, goes so far, against the advice of his lawyer, Mr. Utterson, as to make Mr. Hyde the beneficiary of his will. The will provides,

In case of the decease of Henry Jekyll, M.D., D.C.L., L.I.D., F.R.S., and C. all his possessions were to pass into the hands of his "friend and benefactor Edward Hyde," but that in case of Dr. Jekyll's "disappearance or unexplained absence for any period exceeding three calendar months," the said Edward Hyde should step into the said Henry Jekyll's shoes without further delay and free from any burthen or obligation beyond the payment of a few small sums to the members of the doctor's household. (19–20)

Dr. Jekyll provides shelter for Mr. Hyde. As mentioned before, Mr. Hyde has a key to, and occupies, the spatially liminal cellar of Dr. Jekyll's fine house and, with Dr. Jekyll's money, leases a house of his own in Soho, distanced from the whole milieu of Dr. Jekyll's historic life. Dr. Jekyll plays on the good will others harbor for him in order to protect Mr. Hyde. The doctor begs Utterson to look after Mr. Hyde if something should happen to him: "I only ask for justice; I only ask you to help him for my sake, when I am no longer here" (31). And Utterson, because of his fondness for Dr. Jekyll, "heaved an irrepressible sigh. 'Well,' said he, 'I promise'" (31). The person of Dr. Jekyll is Mr. Hyde's shield from legal prosecution for the crimes he commits: "His terror of the gallows drove him continually to commit temporary suicide, and return to his subordinate station of a part instead of a person. . . . [H]ad it not been for his fear of death, he would long ago have ruined himself in order to involve me in the ruin" (101).

Dr. Jekyll at last realizes his historic existence may be threatened for all time when he wakes one morning as Mr. Hyde, not in the Soho house, but in the bed of Dr. Jekyll:

I began to reflect more seriously than ever before on the issues and possibilities of my double existence. . . . I began to spy a danger that, if this were much prolonged, the balance of nature might be permanently overthrown, the power of voluntary change be forfeited, and the character of Edward Hyde become irrevocably mine. (91–92)
And so, at last, cognizant of the risk which liminal time represents, Dr. Jekyll swears off the drink and reclaims his historic existence:

a new life began for Dr. Jekyll. He came out of his seclusion, renewed relations with his friends, became once more their familiar guest and entertainer; and whilst he had always been known for charities, he was now no less distinguished for religion. He was busy, he was much in the open air, he did good; his face seemed to open and brighten, as if with an inward consciousness of service. (45–46)

But, like other monsters doomed to re-enact ad infinitum the moment of their creation, after two months Dr. Jekyll drinks the potion again. He relinquishes his historic existence a second time. The monster, caged for so long, rampages into linear time to commit an act of historic annihilation: Mr. Hyde murders a man.

When the drug wears off, and Dr. Jekyll comes into being once more, he is horrified by the murder committed by Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll weeps and prays in remorse. He begins to realize, though, that the murder has solved his problem of addiction to a spatially, temporally, and morally liminal existence: “Hyde was henceforth impossible; whether I would, or not, I was now confined to the better part of my existence; and oh, how I rejoiced to think it! With what willing humility I embraced anew the restrictions of natural life! With what sincere renunciation I locked the door by which I had so often gone and come, and ground the key under my heel!” (95–96). But, because Dr. Jekyll so often made the decision not to remain human but to become monster, the monster wins out: “I sat in the sun on a bench; the animal within me licking the chops of memory; the spiritual side a little drowsed, promising subsequent penitence, but not yet moved to begin” (97). And suddenly,

a qualm came over me, a horrid nausea and the most deadly shuddering. These passed away, and left me faint; and then as in its turn the faintness subsided, I began to be aware of a change in the temper of my thoughts, a greater boldness, a contempt of danger, a solution of the bonds of obligation. I looked down; my clothes hung formlessly on my shrunken limbs; the hand that lay on my knee was cored and hairy. I was once more Edward Hyde. (97)

Soon, when he imbibes the potion it is to reclaim his identity as Dr. Jekyll, rather than to create Mr. Hyde. And, before long, the supply of the potion’s key ingredient runs low, and despite his desperate, far-ranging efforts, the doctor is unsuccessful at obtaining more. He is doomed to give up his existence in historic time:

I am now finishing this statement under the influence of the last of the old powders. This, then, is the last time, short of a miracle, that Henry Jekyll can think his own thoughts or see his own face . . . in the glass . . . this is my true hour of death, and what is to follow concerns another than myself. Here then, as I lay down the pen, and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end. (102–3)
But what of Edward Hyde? With Dr. Jekyll, for all intents and purposes, dead, he no longer has the refuge of the historic personality to preserve his liminal existence. The monster has become even more isolated, for he has moved from being a leech on the historic to becoming a destroyer of historic time, a murderer, hunted by the law. He is doomed. Mr. Hyde cannot continue his liminal existence without a safe haven in linear time.

In Dr. Jekyll’s laboratory, in Dr. Jekyll’s clothes, in the midst of all the trap- pings of Dr. Jekyll’s historic life, Mr. Hyde ends his own liminal existence:

there lay the body of a man sorely contorted and still twitching. They drew near on tiptoe, turned it on its back, and beheld the face of Edward Hyde. He was dressed in clothes far too large for him, clothes of the doctor’s bigness; the cords of his face still moved with a semblance of life, but life was quite gone: and by the crushed phial in the hand and the strong smell of kernels that hung upon the air, Utterson knew that he was looking on the body of a self-destroyer.

(66)

And so, Dr. Jekyll, unwilling to exercise the vigilance required to maintain his humanity, ends up able to exist only in liminal time, forced to forever relinquish his historic existence because he too often chose the temporally and morally chaotic life of a monster.

At the novel’s end, the liminal is banished by the pressures of historic values and order. Once Dr. Jekyll is deprived forever of historic time, the leech, Mr. Hyde, is cut off from his lifeline and trapped forever, alone, in linear time. His only means of escape, and the reader’s only means of reclaiming security in historic time, is through Mr. Hyde’s self-destruction.

Conclusion

The consequence of monsterhood is isolation from historic time. Historic time, as Eliade says, “constitutes man’s deepest existential dimension” (71). It lends a profundity and intensity of experience to those who live out their lives in its reality because it disallows permanence. For the monster, there is security in the continuity of mythic time, where the sun sets, the moon rises, and creation rituals are re-enacted. Liminal time provides the monster a dark and limitless hiding place and does not impose any moral pressure. But experience in these realms lacks the depth of meaning available in linear time.

The profound result of creating a monster character is the trifurcation of time into linear, mythic, and liminal realms within the novel. The very different natures and qualities of these temporal realities provide opposing lures for the reader. While we yearn for a resolution in the narrative that will rein- stitute historic time and human normalcy, we simultaneously crave the experience of the mythic and liminal with all of their accompanying liberties and dangers. As Stephen King writes in The Danse Macabre, “much of the horror story’s attraction for us is that it allows us to vicariously exercise those antisocial emotions and feelings which society demands we keep stoppered up un-
der most circumstances, for society's good and our own" (66). The effects of the pull and counter-pull exerted by the interactions of linear, mythic, and liminal time are narrative tension and suspense, both of which forge a deeper connection to, and absorption in, the story.

It is logical, given our Western philosophical belief in time's linearity, that the same rules of temporal experience apply to the monster whether it appears in a picture book, a middle reader, a young adult novel, or adult literature. Further, these rules, which govern the monster, are consistent, as well, between eras. Max and Mr. Hyde, although created in different centuries, are still both ultimately controlled by the same principle—that is, the author's and the reader's commitment to the historicity of time.

Similarly, the rules are the same whether the monster is presented as the product of a child's imaginative play and/or fear as in Where the Wild Things Are, as real within its fictional world, as in Thirsty and Blood and Chocolate; or as representational of a pre-Freudian perspective on the conscious and unconscious, as in The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The monster (in Western literature) is always dictated to, and the tension and suspense of the monster narrative is always supplied by the underlying philosophical tenet that human lives, and the events of those lives, are unique and precious precisely because of their historicity.

Works Cited


