

us a chance to “walk on the wild side.” But in the denouement^o of most stories, the monster is killed and the psyche restored to civilized order. We can have our fun with the “torture porn” of Leatherface and Freddy Krueger or the erotic vampires, but this “vacation” to where the wild things are ultimately helps us return to our lives of quiet repression.

Any careful reading of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, for example, will reveal not only a highly sexualized description of blood drinking, but an erotic characterization of the count himself. Even John Polidori’s original 1819 vampire tale *The Vampyre* describes the monster as a sexually attractive force. According to the critic Christopher Craft, [the] Gothic monster tales *Frankenstein*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Dracula*, [and] Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* rehearse a similar story structure. “Each of these texts first invites or admits a monster, then entertains and is entertained by monstrosity for some extended duration, until in its closing pages it expels or repudiates the monster and all the disruption that he/she/it brings,” he writes.

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A crucial but often-ignored aspect of monsterology is the role those beasts play in our moral imaginations. Recent experimental moral psychology has given us useful tools for looking at the way people actually do their moral thinking. Brain imaging, together with hypothetical ethical dilemmas about runaway trolley cars, can teach us a lot about our real value systems and actions. But another way to get at this subterranean territory is by looking at our imaginative lives.

Monsters can stand as symbols of human vulnerability and crisis, and as such they play imaginative foils for thinking about our own responses to menace. Part of our fascination with serial-killer monsters is that we (and our loved ones) are potentially vulnerable to sadistic violence—never mind that statistical probability renders such an attack almost laughable. Irrational fears are decidedly unfunny. We are vulnerable to both the inner and the outer forces. Monster stories and films only draw us in when we identify with the persons who are being chased, and we tacitly ask ourselves: Would I board up the windows to keep the zombies out or seek the open water? Would I go down to the basement after I hear the thump, and if so, would I bring the butcher knife or the fireplace poker? What will I do when I am vulnerable?

denouement: the ending of a story; the climax and resolution, when everything is explained and made clear.

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