

from Silva's angry knife blade, I suspect that he was for them, practically speaking, a true monster. I would never presume to correct them on that account. In such circumstances, many of us are sympathetic to the use of the monster epithet.

One of the fascinating aspects of Shapiro's experience is how people responded to his story after the fact. I have been suggesting that monster stories are encapsulations of the human feeling of vulnerability—the monster stories offer us the “disease” of vulnerability and its possible “cures” (in the form of heroes and coping strategies). Few monster stories remain indefinitely in the “threat phase.” When fear is at a fever pitch, they always move on to the hero phase. Hercules slays the Hydra, George slays the dragon, medicine slays the alien virus, the stake and crucifix slay the vampire. Life and art mutually seek to conquer vulnerability. “Being a victim is a hard idea to accept,” Shapiro explained, “even while lying in a hospital bed with tubes in veins, chest, penis, and abdomen. The spirit rebels against the idea of oneself as fundamentally powerless.”

This natural rebellion may have prompted the most repeated question facing Shapiro when he got out of the hospital. When people learned of Daniel Silva's attack on seven victims, they asked, “Why didn't anyone try to stop him?” Shapiro always tried to explain how fast and confusing the attack was, but people failed to accept this. Shapiro, who was offended by the question, says, “The question carries not empathy but an implicit burden of blame; it really asks ‘Why didn't you stop him?’ It is asked because no one likes to imagine oneself a victim.” We like to see ourselves as victors against every threat, but of course that's not reality.

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Believers in human progress, from the Enlightenment to the present, think that monsters are disappearing. Rationality will pour its light into the dark corners and reveal the monsters to be merely chimeric.⁹ A familiar upshot of the liberal interpretation of monsters is to suggest that when we properly embrace difference, the monsters will vanish. According to this view, the monster concept is no longer useful in the modern world. If it hangs on, it does so like an appendix—useful once but hazardous now.

I disagree. The monster concept is still extremely useful, and it's a permanent player in the moral imagination because human vulnerability is permanent. The monster is a beneficial foe, helping us to virtually represent the obstacles that real life will surely send our way. As long as there

chimeric: mythical, illusory, or imaginary.