Abstracts

Nicholas Bailen, "Monsters and Superheroes: A Comparison of Two Types of Fictional Characters and the Similarity of their Societal Impact and Implications"
The classic monsters most often served as representations of society's fears and anxieties. Whether it be Dr. Frankenstein's attempt at playing God by creating life or Dr. Jekyll's insatiable desire to indulge in his vices, monsters reflect the moral values held by society, and the consequences of going against those values. In recent years, superheroes have replaced monsters in mainstream media, representing societal fears as well as solutions. Monsters represent beings who have abilities that far exceed those of any human, and are not restricted by the laws of reality or the social norms of humanity. Essentially, both monsters and heroes represent true freedom. The superhero exists within the same realm of human desire, but is more relatable to society due to their fundamental desire to operate on the side of moral good. In this essay, I compare The Incredible Hulk to Frankenstein's Monster and The Batman to both Jekyll and Hyde and Dracula. These characters not only resemble each other in appearance, but also share many behavioral and emotional similarities. Through this comparison, I highlight not only the common traits between the two sets of characters, but explore the social implications of these connections.

Rochelle Buchanan, "Monsters of Racial Injustice"
The premise of my research has been to highlight the simmering hatreds seeded by the long, festering history of white violence and police brutality against African Americans that has taken hundreds of lives each year. Though it remains to be seen if the 2020 uprisings will resolve the long-standing issues of racial injustice fought again and again in this country, this research explores the problem of racial injustices as the monsters in our society.

Angelica Desrosiers, "Is Netflix Justifying Serial Killers?"
Netflix has become one of the biggest, most influential media sources of the twenty-first century. From its early days of distribution and streaming, the company has turned to the development and production of its own movies and series, exempt from many of the norms followed by traditional media. Recently, Netflix has produced several movies and shows revolving around serial killers. Unlike many earlier Hollywood films that took steps to make serial killers appear monstrous, Netflix shows like *You* and documentaries like *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil, and Vile* (starring former teen heart-throb Zac Efron as Ted Bundy) romanticize serial killers. Productions like these seem to glorify and justify violence, and run the risk of blurring the lines between moral right and wrong.

Caroline Early, "Beowulf to the Mere Wife: The Ways Beowulf has Evolved for the 21st Century"
Beowulf is a classic poem that's been read for hundreds of years. Maria Dahvana Headley's *The Mere Wife* is a book that has been out for less than three years. These two works are telling the same story. They are both monster stories; however, their historical context and purpose for writing could not be more different. When comparing the two stories, the shift in the story is seen in the characters. The shift in the characters' images plays a big part in showcasing how the story evolves. In my essay I am exploring how a monster story can be updated and reworked for the 21st century.

Caitlyn Filingeri, "The Attraction of a Killer"
Monstrosity is defined as, "something deviating from the normal, an object of great and often frightening size, force." In this course we have broken down what it means to be a monster and what makes someone a monster. We have studied the ideal image of a monster in the class such as Frankenstein, zombies, vampires, etc. We don't look at the average-looking human being and identify them as a monster because we aren't able to distinguish them like we are with the monsters we learn about. But like these monsters, serial killers are dangerous, murderous threats to society. These killers are able to fall asleep at night next to their significant other as if they live a normal life. They show zero remorse for what they did and that is what makes these individuals monsters. My capstone paper explains how numerous serial killers fulfill the role of monstrosity as real-life monsters right before our eyes. I examine numerous documentaries that interview the family members of these dangerous humans. Relatives and spouses act as if they are blind to the fact that they may know someone who is capable of these heinous acts. They convince themselves that it isn't the person they know, but how well do you actually know them despite knowing them their entire lives?

Kevin LaFrance, "A Mother and Son Against the World: How *The Mere Wife* Uproots Ideas in *Beowulf* to Make Grendel and His Mother more Empathetic"
Grendel and his mother are two of the most infamous monsters in English literature. They've struck terror in the hearts of both their audience, and the people of Heorot Hall, for centuries, with only the heroic Beowulf to end their reign. For a time, Grendel and his mother were seen as nothing more than monsters, beings desiring nothing more than to kill and drink the blood of humans. This was until authors began to undo the ideas presented in *Beowulf*, with one such novel being Maria Dahvana Headley's *The Mere Wife*. While *Beowulf* worked to push down Grendel and his mother for the sake of building up the hero, Beowulf, *The Mere Wife* works to have the audience empathize with this monstrous pair by connecting the audience to their struggle and reframing Beowulf as a monster, rather than a hero. Headley's work shows how easy it is for literature to create characters as being monstrous or sympathetic.

Elizabeth Liquori, from *Symbols in the Void*
This project takes a creative approach revolving around the word 'Monster'. A brief synopsis for this story includes:

> *"She's heard about these 'shadows' before, the ones that extinguished every last bit of light a person had. No traces, no survivors, and yet Leo wasn't dead. She had lived alongside these creatures long enough to know her heart still beat.*
> *"She wondered how many other unfortunate souls had found themselves in her shoes. How many people were able to live in relative peace within the shadows' domain? Were there others like Ren who saved humans from death?*
> *"All Leo knew was that she'd find a way to make sure she was the last."*

This work follows a homeless teen named Leo, who stumbles upon a village full of beings who feed on the souls of humans that encounter them. Leo is spared by a younger 'shadow' named Ren, who doesn't agree with the way his ancestors and elders kill for the sake of killing. This project is a small piece of a larger story and only covers about a third of the plot, but it is the start to an exploration of the idea that not all 'monsters' are, in fact, monsters.

Imagining Monsters
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Kayla McLean, "Black and Blue"
Alan is a teenage boy, troubled by generational trauma. Alan's father abuses him and his mother relentlessly. In turn, Alan inherits his father's toxic traits. He takes out his inner turmoil on those around him, further continuing the cycle of abuse. It's up to Alan to break the cycle, but first he has to conquer his own demons.

Nicole Moavero, "Celebrity Drama Transformed to a Heroine vs. Monster Narrative"
The dramatic Internet feud between Taylor Swift and Kanye West in 2009-2016 has turned into a good vs. evil narrative of epic proportions, told through phone conversations, screenshots, interviews, and more. Is Taylor Swift a victim? Is Kanye West a villain? Or is it vice versa? Using some of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's seven theses, I analyze the cultural rhetoric of the feud between these two celebrities and determine how both were being painted by the general public as either good or evil.

Julie Ornberg, "Serial Killer Superstars: A Cultural Boomerang"
It can be tricky to conceptualize the ideal monster when the monster itself is human. It becomes nearly impossible when people, themselves, go unrecognizable as a threat to society. In this piece, I explore the ways the serial killer develops a sense of notoriety like that of a celebrity, on account of the way media—particularly film—portrays specific killers, like Jeffrey Dahmer and Ted Bundy. I explore the reasons why these killers have kept their relevance in popular culture despite their heinous crimes against humanity. In this analysis, I focus on Ed Gein, the killer who inspired the popular films *Psycho, Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and *The Silence of the Lambs*. As I unravel two movie scenes in particular, from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* and Tobe Hooper's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre,* I arrive at various conclusions as to how serial killers maintain a sense of notoriety based on multiple interpretations, despite their true monstrous nature.

Kirsten Rasmussen, Monster Cycle [poems and essays]
Literal, other-worldly monsters are nearly always portrayed as evil, inhumane creatures. But how can something not human be expected to act humane? Even humans acting monstrously tend to be following what they perceive to be a morally sound path, despite humanity's generalized code of ethics. My project explores the line between right and wrong through a collection of poems and prose told from the point of view of different "monstrous" voices. Each piece takes you through an in-depth account of both human (robbers, killers, etc.) and literal (demons, vampires, etc.) "monsters" to make readers question whether or not all beings we perceive as monsters are truly monstrous.

Emily Rainville, *Apollo the Space Pug*
Apollo the Space Pug is a children's story that captures the essence of resilience and dedication to achieving one's goals. Apollo, a young pug that stands out amongst his peers for his colossal eyes and an even loftier dream of being the first pug to reach the moon, embarks on a journey of a lifetime. Apollo's dreams might just come true when he boards the Flash3000, but he encounters various stops along the way. Does Apollo have what it takes to make it to the moon? Or will the harsh opinions of others hinder his lifelong dream?

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Lisa Rondinelli, "The Pride Before the Fall"
In the year 2100, Earth has plummeted into a severe sustainability crisis, with thousands of people dying from starvation daily. Eve, a mere twenty-four year-old, is launched into space as a last-ditch effort in the hopes of obtaining anything to help ease the severity of the crisis. But while she is away, an unexpected explosion impacts the earth, altering the DNA of humans so that they develop a spectrum of monster-like mutations. The explosion was so powerful that it not only affected humans, but the Earth itself now faces another extreme problem. When Eve returns a year later, she finds Earth to be severely overgrown. The creatures left on earth naturally fall into four categories based on what they believed in before the explosion. Those who believe in science, those who believe in faith, those who distrust the government, and the government themselves. Faced with unprecedented challenges to fix a seemingly impossible situation, Eve is left to navigate things on her own and find the solution to rebuild a broken society.

Olivia Sidman, "The Monster Within: Alcoholism, Domestic Violence, and Repressed Trauma in Stephen King's 1977 Horror Classic *The Shining*"
Stephen King's 1977 novel *The Shining* is well-known for its eerie, haunted atmosphere and moments of sheer terror and violence. However, beyond the external supernatural horror of the novel, there are much darker, harrowing examinations of the complex human condition to be inferred. King now admits that Jack Torrance, the story's antagonist, is a reimagination of himself and the monster he feared becoming as a result of his own personal struggles with alcohol. Throughout the course of the novel, the reader is situated within the psyches of all three main characters: Jack, Wendy, and Danny Torrance, which demonstrates the various thought processes and reactions that each participant in a dysfunctional family dynamic undergoes, especially as the abuse gets increasingly more violent and frequent. *The Shining* is a multi-dimensional work of fiction that, on the surface, entertains and thrills the audience, but also divulges the twisted, but profound correlation between alcoholism, repressed childhood trauma, and domestic abuse.