



SEA MONSTERS
EDITED BY THEA TOMAINI
AND ASA SIMON MITTMAN



SEA MONSTERS

THINGS FROM THE SEA,
VOLUME 2

EDITED BY
ASA SIMON MITTMAN AND
THEA TOMAINI

TINY COLLECTIONS

SEA MONSTERS: THINGS FROM THE SEA, VOLUME 2

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LINES IN THE SAND

INTRODUCTION · THEA TOMAINI

This Tiny Collection gathers four essays that explore issues of the Ocean, Sea Life, and Monstrosity. The essays were presented on 16–18 October 2014 in Santa Barbara, CA, at the BABEL Working Group’s Biennial meeting entitled “On The Beach: Precariousness, Risk, Forms of Life, Affinity, and Play at the Edge of the World.” They were part of a session entitled, “The Nature of the Beast/Beasts of Nature: Monstrous Environments,” sponsored by MEARCSTAPA, or Monsters: The Experimental Association for the Research of Cryptozoology through Scholarly Theory and Practical Application. The organizers of the session were Asa Simon Mittman (MEARCSTAPA President) and Thea Tomaini.

While sitting on the banks of the lagoon outside the UCSB Student Union, Asa and I began a discussion with the contributors as to the order in which they would appear. We made a picnic of the meeting over giant veggie burgers oozing barbecue sauce, and home fries piled high on trembling paper plates. They looked like cafeteria lunches at the grammar school in Brobdingnag. It became a surreal moment, we being well-mannered academics in swell conference clothes with smeared red faces and hands, talking about monsters. From this scene emerged an idea: rather than present each paper separately in a traditional format, the presenters would employ a format that paralleled the liminality of the sand line and the movement of waves. Asa and I proposed that the presenters withdraw and decide among themselves over the next few hours how their ideas would flow and waft and crash, roll in and draw out, all four together, washed up for the audience to discover and interpret like found treasure. It was an astonishingly mad and monstrous idea, and it was groovy to boot. The paper by Megan E. Palmer was presented in three parts, appearing as interludes between the other papers. In this way, the papers generated a collective meaning in addition to the discrete meanings of each paper. They formed a new creature, at once familiar and startlingly new, which, like an arcane creature of the sea, defies categorization. Asa and I were thrilled. We approved with spiky, sanguine teeth.

The collection begins with “Ocean is the New East,” by Alan Montroso. It addresses the sovereign/subject relation found in stories of medieval travels to the East and compares it to present-day attitudes toward the ocean and its creatures. Citing *The*

Book of Mandeville's accounts of travels in the Mediterranean, Montroso likens the sense of wonders of a medieval journey to the exotic appeal of the ocean and sea life. Like the strange lands and unfamiliar life forms found in Mandeville's book of travels, the ocean and its many marine animals are labelled as "monsters" by wide-eyed observers who both marvel at new sights, places, and creatures, and are eager to conquer and subdue them. Montroso establishes this construction, and then moves towards deeper waters, and unexpected ironies. His discussion of John Gower concerns apocalyptic visions that extend themselves to contemporary eco-narratives warning humanity of the dangers of human arrogance. Montroso calls us to an awareness of these issues with distinctive blue ink — our recognition of the flaws of human sovereignty in relation to the subjectivity of the nonhuman comes to us in letters formed from water, reflective of sky.

Megan E. Palmer's essay appears in three parts, echoing the structure of her presentation, as interludes between the other essays. This is not to say that Palmer's essay is broken up, nor is it to say that its paragraphs represent interruptions, either of the essay itself or of the others. Instead, the sections on "Great Fishes and Monstrous Men" create a flow back and forth between the essays that imparts meaning to the whole group, in addition to the meanings they generate as individual essays. Palmer introduces broadsides and ballads of the Early Modern period that depict various forms of "monstrosity," from the human to the animal, and creatures believed to represent an in-between state. Palmer examines an important paradox: the inhumanity inherent in *human* cruelty, as illustrated in the broadsides' recountings of human reactions to wondrous sea creatures. To deepen the paradox, she connects these horrific reactions to the revulsion, evinced in the broadsides, felt for those with birth defects and aberrations of appearance thought to be caused by sin.

Haylie Swenson offers a specific example of a situation that depicts a breakdown in communication between humanity and the creatures of the sea. Her essay, "On the Backs of Whales," appears between the three sections of Palmer's paper. She discusses the appearance of a whale that was stranded on the coast of Holland in 1547. The many people who flock to see the Egmond Whale, as it is called, treat it as a marvel. Some react with fear, others with wonderment, but all with an undeniable curiosity about a creature so strange to them. Swenson's essay also discusses the legend of St. Brendan and his encounter with a living island — another whale. Swenson inserts into her essay interpolations of her own — thoughtful pauses in which

her memories of experiences with the ocean and sea life ground her discussion of the medieval and Early Modern incident in the immediacy of relatable human experience.

Erin Vander Wall's essay, "Quickening Sands," plumbs the depths of quicksand. Neither land nor water, quicksand redefines the relationship between them. It is monstrous, deceptive, and, when it is animated, deadly, as in Sir Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor*, where it consumes both Lord Ravenswood and his horse. Vander Wall states that we must view quicksand via two perspectives: a scientific one that acknowledges it as an ecological phenomenon, and a literary one that acknowledges its uncanny properties. The result is a set of shifting attitudes about quicksand that parallels our shifting attitudes about monstrosity: we waver from a desire — or perhaps a need — to rationalize and explain the natural world and a desire or need to have a channel for our fears. Quicksand occupies a liminal space: it is animated yet inorganic, a shifting series of meanings. Vander Wall's discussion of Walter Scott's novel connects the location of Lord Ravenswood's death — Kelpie's Flow — with the legend of the kelpie, a figure of Scottish myth with which Scott was familiar, so that the very land becomes indigenously monstrous.

These essays, and the images that accompany them, are representative of the sessions of the 2014 BABEL Biennale: they explore progressive theories of eco-criticism in presentations that are at once grounded in current scholarship and that look beyond orthodox methodologies and approaches. As each of these four contributors read their papers, the audience of the session could see, in the windows behind them, the blue stretch of the Pacific in late afternoon, washing right up to the campus of UC Santa Barbara and out again, the ocean's calm wide hands slowly pulling the sun down.



OCEAN IS THE NEW EAST

ALAN S. MONTROSO

On a recent visit to the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, I lingered a little while longer than usual in my favorite exhibit: the Sant Ocean Hall (see opposite page). Wandering with no *telos* in mind, I let myself bask before bioluminescent beings, tremble in awe at the improbability of the extremophiles, and gaze up like a supplicant at the model of Phoenix, a North Atlantic right whale. Deeply affected by these strange strangers,¹ I stretched my imagination towards the inconceivable and wondered at the sheer breadth of possibilities for ways of living in the still-occult thalassic regions of Earth's oceans. I found solace in the evidence that so many vast and heterogeneous lives can flourish without the intrusive light of the sun or human reason, and that such animacy is possible in the darkness, which is, according to Stacy Alaimo, a "world where the Copernican revolution is irrelevant."² I then with some discomfort imagined myself embodying an oceanic form, imagined breathing without oxygen, thriving at thermal vents, and manifesting light with my own body. I imagined myself as an aqueous and somewhat amorphous body squeezed and strangled by the *just* bearable pressures of the deep sea. I attempted a posthumanist thought project similar to what Alaimo describes in "Violet-Black," her contribution to *Prismatic Ecology*, in which she insists that "thinking with and through the electronic jellyfish, seeing through the prosthetic eye, playing open-ended, improvisational language games with deep-sea creatures, being transformed by astonishment and desire enact a posthumanist practice."³

Responding to the highly-stylized illustrations in books from the Census of Marine Life, Alaimo finds in such affective imagery more elastic ideas about what it means to

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- 1 Timothy Morton coined the term "strange strangers" to emphasize the radical unpredictability and utter strangeness of any encounter with another being within the interconnected mesh of existence. See Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
 - 2 Stacy Alaimo, "Violet-Black," in *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory Beyond Green*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 245.
 - 3 Alaimo, "Violet-Black," 247.

live in the world; following Alaimo, I assert that highly stylized depictions of radically inhuman forms of life can be put to work towards the dethronement of terrestrial ideas of sovereignty. Each Smithsonian display, like each vibrantly hued illustration of marine life, defamiliarizes this planet and renders a world that simply will not surrender to humanity's hubristic desire for authority. And yet, as I wandered from station to station examining these oceanic bodies summoned from the abysses of the sea — lifeless, entombed in glass jars and carefully arranged for an American viewing public — I could not ignore the hierarchical relation between observers and observed, nor that human science and politics still fashion a sovereign/subject relation between humans and the myriad strangers that populate the seas. These marvelous displays represent discrete islands of monstrous creatures that expose humanity's desire to safely navigate strange waters. I call these displays "marvelous" intentionally, for my wandering about the various exhibits reminded me of a medieval journey to the marvels of the East and, more specifically, of *The Book of John Mandeville's* description of the monstrous islands of the Mediterranean and off the coasts of Africa and India. For the ocean, it seems, is the new East, compared with the way the medieval Western hegemony represented the East in its travel literature. The inhabitants of Earth's oceans are put on display to be navigated, plundered, studied and represented by the sovereign powers of Western thought.⁴ Like *Mandeville's* tale of fish that deliver themselves to the shore for human consumption, we expect the seas to divulge their mysteries for our ravenous desire to control by means of knowledge-making.

In Chapter 13 of the Defective Version of *The Book of John Mandeville* (TBJM), the narrator announces that, having completed his tour of the Holy Lands, he intends to "telle of yles and diverse peple and bestes" (1380).⁵ This rather lengthy chapter is rich in peculiarity and marvel, a veritable encyclopedia of the monstrous. An

4 Geraldine Heng draws a similar conclusion as she reads Mandeville's travels as relying on the techné of the romance genre to organize and display the wonders of Oriental space to the stationary colonial eye of the text's Western — and specifically English — readers. See Chapter 5, "Eye on the World: Mandeville's Pleasure Zones; or Cartography, Anthropology, and Medieval Travel Romance," in *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 239–305.

5 All quotations from Mandeville are taken from the *The Book of John Mandeville*, eds. Kohanski and Benson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007).

allegory-generating female spirit grants riches and doles out commensurate consequences for her supplicants' greed. Gendered diamonds mate and spawn resplendent children, challenging notions about the inertness of lithic objects. Nudists, cannibals, blood drinkers, as well as pygmies, Blemmyae and Cynocephali roam these foreign shores. *TBJM* fulfills the European desire to believe the East is wholly *Other*, a monstrous and invitingly dangerous land abundant in resources and passively awaiting representation by the Western imagination.

Yet, although its descriptions of the diverse beings of the East are certainly fantastical, *TBJM* also lends a proto-scientific explanation for the monstrous by repeatedly attending to the omnipresent and unbearable heat of this region; the Mandeville-narrator⁶ offers a climatological cause for the wonders he claims to encounter. Ethiopians hide from the sun under feet large enough to shield their bodies; men on the isle of Hermes suffer their “ballockys hongeth down to her shankes” because it is “soo hoot ther” (1557). In such extreme climates precious stones spill from river banks, reptiles grow to enormous proportions and fish are so “plenteuous” that they offer themselves up for consumption. Heat is generative, and the corporeal peculiarities of the deserts as well as the fecundity of the tropical East are, in *TBJM*, responses to extreme climate — much like the extremophiles surviving sulfuric blasts of scorching heat from deep sea vents. In *Idols in the East*, Suzanne Conklin Akbari investigates the role of medieval climate theory within encyclopedic, visual and literary representations of monstrosity and bodily diversity, and observes of *The Book of John Mandeville* that “in each land described, climate is adduced as the cause of the physiology of the inhabitants.”⁷ Although medieval climate theory is, as Akbari convincingly argues, often problematic in its ability to both construct and reify premodern categories of racial difference, I argue that the way it is deployed in *TBJM* evidences an attempt to think the porosity of bodies, the imbrication of environmental forces, and the

6 Since the author of *The Book of John Mandeville* remains unknown, and thus the self-proclaimed “I, John Mandeville” is likely an authorial creation, this essay will henceforth refer to the in-text Mandeville as the “Mandeville-narrator.” See Ian Macleod Higgins, *Writing East: The ‘Travels of Sir John Mandeville’* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) for an excellent summary of previous attempts to identify an author for this text.

7 Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 146.

malleable materiality of life. Like contemporary scientific attempts to understand the intimacy between animals and environs once thought uninhabitable, the Mandeville-narrator offered something like a medieval ecological justification — unaccompanied by moralizing critiques or interpretations — for the diversity of beings he describes. Climate affects bodies, and each coastal country and island in *TBJM* is a unique ecology, an *oikos* or home to the various and varying creatures that inhabit these spaces.

And each of these biomes is an island, seen from a — albeit imaginary — ship as it sails past these tableaux of nature's monsters. *The Book of John Mandeville*, like the contemporary museum, presents discrete displays of wondrous beings and paradoxically invites the pleasure of scopophilia just as its narrator attempts to demystify the monstrous with climatological language. Yet a vital element remains shockingly absent from Mandeville's narratives of circumnavigation, the same element that is missing from the Sant Ocean Hall: water! As the wanderer at the Smithsonian moves between each display and notes the cerulean and violet lights signifying the sea, the absence of the ocean becomes impossible to ignore. These disparate acts of representing monstrous ocean life — separated by more than half a millennium — similarly erase the very water that makes aquatic life possible. As terrestrial mammals we are ill-suited for survival in the sea, and we create strange islands of meaning to facilitate our wonderings and justify our collective sovereign gaze. From a late fourteenth-century travel narrative to contemporary museums and illustrated guides to ocean life, we find evidence of the human desire to substitute the seas' waters with scientific discourse.

[But the water comes . . .](#)

The ocean arrives, it is what we must face — and are already facing — as glaciers melt and sea levels rise, and our shores and their cities are submerged. In light of this oceanic encroachment and the futility of sustainability rhetoric in environmental and ecological writing, Steve Mentz encourages us to abandon the pastoral mode of representing nature by imagining instead the often uncomfortable relationship between human body and radically inhuman sea.⁸ Mentz proposes that we adopt a “swimmer poetics,” because “swimmers live in the world and enjoy it, but being in the water means knowing that stability cannot last.”⁹ Following Mentz, I too insist that we explore the poetic imagination’s ability to conceive how we might navigate an aquatic ecosystem — and through such exploration, I propose that we get a little wet ourselves.

When the Mandeville-narrator does direct his gaze at the ocean, he discovers the same apocalyptic narratives that haunt our present ecological moment via the avenging floods that punish humanity’s hubris. Near Cyprus he describes the sunken city of Satalia, and tells the story of a young lover who, after the death of his beloved, visits her tomb by night and “lay by here and went his way” (353). His act of necrophilia, of a touch not sanctioned by *any* human society, engenders a monstrous head that flies about the city, and eventually leads to the sinking of Satalia. The disembodied head is easily read as a monster of prohibition which, according to Jeffrey Cohen’s “Seven Theses,” “exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that can not — must not — be crossed.”¹⁰ Yet the flood as well is punitive; like the deluge by which God

8 In his contribution to a cluster of essays in *PMLA* that interrogate the utility of “sustainability” rhetoric in ecocritical writing, Mentz urges us to step out of the pastoral fantasy of sustainability and imagine instead an ecology of instability, an ecology that responds to the precarity and uncertainty of our dynamic planet. He argues that “A literary ecoculture that pines for pastoral stasis will not be able to make sense of such a world. But an ecocriticism that treats dynamic change as a fundamental feature of all natural systems — a feature, not a bug — may help us recognize that change is the ‘natural’ value, the condition and structure-breaking structure of all systems.” “After Sustainability,” *PMLA* 127, no. 3 (2012): 591

9 Mentz, “After Sustainability,” 590.

10 Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 13.

punishes the vices of mankind, the sea overwhelms Satalia to penalize the necrophiliac's border-crossing, his mating with the dead and performing sexuality outside the fiercely protected institution of marriage.¹¹ Flood narratives work to reinforce the norms of human culture.

Yet, even here and in his moralist recalling of the sunken Biblical cities of Hebrew scripture, the Mandeville-narrator fails to narrow his focus upon the water itself and instead dwells only on anthropocentric narratives of the drowned. If oceans in *The Book of John Mandeville* remain somehow devoid of their watery contents, as only a frame for their littoral/literal monsters and a police force for the hegemony, where might we look within the medieval literary canon for an encounter with water itself?

I turn to the *Visio Anglie* of John Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, finding in his nightmare vision of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt a monstrous ocean that lends itself to more than its intended allegorical reading. In fact, although it is clear that this surging sea of rebellion represents just one of many efforts to dehumanize the third estate's violence in response to a harsh poll tax, Gower describes an ocean storm for approximately 140 lines before acknowledging his metaphor. Unlike earlier and more thinly veiled metaphors of monstrous farm animals in Gower's unwieldy allegory, this sea which represents the swell of social rebellion is nevertheless neither anthropomorphic nor even entirely legible as a metaphor.

After a lengthy passage in which dream-Gower describes his unmoored mind and practically prays for death to take him, he stumbles upon a ship — representing the Tower of London — that bears members of the nobility, and he boards it. The ship sets out to sea only to suffer a most horrible encounter — horrible, but not apocalyptic. Almost immediately a storm descends upon the ship, and “On high the hanging balance stirred the wet / Of skies that earthly power could not contain. It poured upon the seas in unchecked streams / And swelled the sea, which overwhelmed the

11 Here I follow Dana M. Oswald who reads this monstrous episode as punishment for the “young man’s inability to integrate himself into the economy of marriage and community” in her chapter on “The Monstrous Feminine in *Mandeville’s Travels*,” in *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 140.

land” (1629–1632).¹² Without the terra firma underfoot, humanity loses its sovereignty, its authority to organize the world and its elements. The land is passive, unable to resist the might of the sea. This storm too confuses human understanding of the ocean, for water harasses from above instead of remaining below, the winds and rains as much a part of the ocean as the waves beneath the ship. Engulfed in the stormy, salty sea, Gower imagines a sea-creaturely perspective, experiences the full immersion of oceanic life, and, when he notes that even great whales fear the storm, he shares in an affective togetherness with the sea’s creatures and allies himself with the lesser monster in the face of the greater: OCEAN.

For the ocean comes, and Gower knows that our landed structures are insufficient for resisting the raw force of the sea. And even if he intends an allegorical reading of his dream vision, Gower nevertheless imagines a realistic encounter with the profoundly inhuman ocean and describes the water itself with a litany of Latin adjectives: “turpis, amara, rudis, vilis, acerba, gravis” (1640). The liquid but arrhythmic noise of which list summons the very sounds of such a chaotic element as water. Even if the moral valences of adjectives like “turpis” and “vilis” — etymons of our contemporary ideas of turpitude and vileness — betray Gower’s political agenda, his condemnation of the common Londoner as “amara,” “rudis,” and “acerba” also acknowledges the brackish and bitter qualities of the unknowable ocean, just as “gravis” suggests the gravity of not-knowing. The presence of such a literary list, via this disruption of the text’s poetic rhythms, evidences Gower’s attempt to think not only about the ocean, but as the ocean, to undertake a becoming-sea, to let the tongue taste the bitterness of brackish water, to cross the monstrous boundaries where human language falters and fails to bind a boundless referent. When he writes, “Que mea mens hausit, iam resoluta vomet” (2132), or “What my mind swallowed, soon it shall spew out unravelled,” he gestures towards the porosity and penetrability of bodies, and suggests that the poet must be infused with watery thoughts in order to create together alongside the ocean, not in lieu of it.

12 All translations from the *Visio Anglie* are taken from *Poems on Contemporary Events: The Visio Anglie (1381) and Cronica tripartita (1400)*, ed. David R. Carlson and trans. A.G. Rigg, *Studies and Texts* 174 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2011). In cases where the Latin is cited and followed by a translation, that translation is my own.

Gower's poetic representation, his extended metaphor which is far too capacious to work as metaphor, illustrates instead the poetic mind's ability to approximate the nonhuman condition, to think the ocean not by generating knowledge or scientific discourse (which only engenders anthropocentric narratives that reassert human sovereignty) but by succumbing to the horror of non-knowing, of welcoming the ocean inside while simultaneously letting language slip off the deck of the ship and resound against the beating waves of the sea-storm. And even if the poem eventually admits that God's intervention is able to settle the waves and contain the swelling ocean, Gower nevertheless concedes that humanity is never sovereign over the sea.

Therefore, if we take seriously Alaimo's invitation to enact the posthuman practice of thinking like aquatic life, might we take the idea farther, make the leap to try and think like water itself? Here I end with Michel Serres who describes his encounters with the ocean while sailing with the French navy:

It sometimes happened then that my attentive gaze immediately changed into that of the sea itself, whose unique eye, a green spherical abyss, was contemplating, ecstatic in its bitter tears, the blue ubiquity, the black presence of the divine . . . I was seeing like the sea."¹³

Might we, then, attempt to sense, to feel, to see not only like the monsters of the deep, like the abyssal creatures that refigure our conceptions of the probable, but attempt the impossible: to become ocean, to sense with liquid eye and taste with salty tongue? Can we, like, Gower and Serres, think like the greatest of inhuman entities on this planet and succumb to such a radically inhuman elemental force? The ocean is a monster, an inscrutable guardian at the edges of human civilization, and if we are to live alongside such an unpredictable being, we cannot attempt to tame it with pastoral representations or subdue it with impossibly objective knowledge; nor can we continue to poison the sea with apocalyptic narratives of deluge or devastatingly tangible pollutants. Instead, we should cultivate the kinds of affective thinking—as the ocean that the poetic imagination makes available to us.

13 Serres, *Biogea*, trans. Randolph Burks (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2012), 11.

GREAT FISHES AND MONSTROUS MEN (SHORELINE)

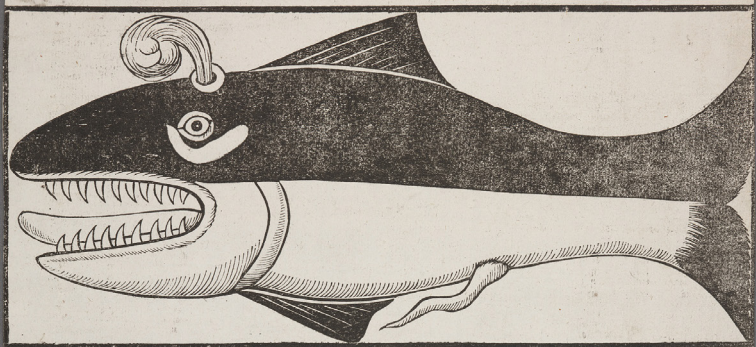
INTERLUDE I · MEGAN E. PALMER

If we judge by its popular broadsides, early modern England was awash with monsters. Broadside, ephemeral as flotsam, offer tantalizing but fragmentary glimpses of how (and why) monsters were conceived. One such sheet, “a most true and marvellous strange wonder” (1568) (see next page), relates how a group of monstrous creatures apprehended in the waters near Ipswich nearly draw a boatful of men out to sea to be “lost and utterlie cast away,” but through God’s will and the industriousness of other sailors, the men are saved; the monsters (a group of “wonderfull stronge” “fisshes”) are brought to land, then vanquished and consumed.¹

At least, this is how the broadside’s narrator, Timothy Granger, tells it. His words arrive like waves, short bursts of description and detail that are often circular and repetitive, full of kinetic energy though shallow in their lack of analysis and too agitated to be reflective. But the narrative also has a strong undertow. Its pull can be felt, as we shall see, in the wondering anatomization of the creatures; it can also be felt in a glancing but crucial allusion to the well-known Pauline metaphor of the dark glass. This undertow uncovers an event with rather different contours: the members of a peaceable pod of orca whales swimming outside their usual migration routes — precipitously close to England’s coast, as it turned out — were hauled in by sailors, lashed to trees on land, and hacked to death with axes by gleeful townspeople for their strangeness and their size. The broadside’s perspective is thus remarkably dual, its surface depiction of human heroism and its undercurrent of human brutality rushing energetically in opposing directions.

1 “A Moste True and Marvellous Straunge Wonder, the Lyke Hath Seldom Ben Seene, of .XVII. Monstrous Fisshes, Taken in Suffolke, at Downam Brydge, within a Myle of Ipswiche. The .XI. Daye of October. In the Yearre of Our Lorde God. M.D.LX.VIII” (1568), Huntington Library Britwell 18306, EBBA 32270.

A Moste true and matuiculous strange wonder, the lyke hath
 seldom ben seene, of **XXV** Hontrous fishes taken in Suffolke, at Dowman byrge, within a myle
 of Spwiche, The **XX** daye of October, In the reace of our Lorde God, **MDLXXV** 33.



Where you shall understande, that the beginners first venturers
 to take these fishes, were **Nicholas Oldwins**, and **John Carraby**,
 with theyr men: after came **John Waters**, and **Robert Hauller**, w^{ch}
 theyr men, being all Swaleses & Shipmen dwelling in Spwiche,
 with other judicious manne of the countrey ther about, whiche when theyr
 hardes of it, came together to helpe, and for the taking of them.

All of these **XXV** fishes, there was a male, and a female, that was
 more strange and monstrous then the other **XX**. For the least of these **ii**
 fishes, were **xxviii** foote longe: and as bigge in the middle eche of them,
 as **iii** quarters of a mynnetie, and of a marvellous great strenght, as it is
 well known to appear in the mouth of other places, by the thyle men above
 named. For they two one of these fishes to a boat, to bryng hit to Spw^{ich}
 litch wharfe, and being to that byr boat, swam alonge byr the boat
 all the way that was in it, to myne the feet a marvellous fowle pace, so
 all that they could see this was when the tyme came in, so: they had made
 preparation before, w^{ch} the water was too, to the great ropes about theyr
 rylles and stynes with small boates, and by such meanes as they could.
 And as **3** fadde before the tyme commyng in, the fysh hanginge water,
 swam alonge with the boat in fast toward the **xx**, that if they had not bene
 verie of other boate and such beides as they had read, that boat and
 all they in it, had ben lost and drettel coft away. But as God wold bene-
 fy, by the helpe of the fyshes boate or beides, among the fyshes alle, w^{ch} brought
 him by force to a convenient place, and t^her him fast to a tree with strong
 Cable ropes, and to bryng them one by one, founde meanes to bryng
 them to Spw^{ich} wharfe. After they layre layr with great labour and
 trouble, byr the breacking of theyr bynnelace & great Cable rope, w^{ch}
 halping them by, theyr boate of these marvellous greatnes dretlyng and
 to myne. Some of them laye upon the wharfe, **ii** bayes and a myght before
 theyr boate bene, and yet they dretche them with **xx** & other weapons
 to holl them. The reuer wherem theyr boate was coloured red, by
 the blood that flied from theyr boates, whyle theyr boate a tynnyng
 water beinge to seepe that a boy might well cpe thear in. There was
 also **ii** Swaleses a hole byr cutting out one of the fyshes, and as many
 as they were fowle to put on boates to stand in to cut it out, it was to
 becape full of gaudynges fyshes to a myne height in the water, from
 the top of the backe to the borne and his bones as barres as flones, that
 the Swaleses mar all theyr dyce theyr example a bout them. The other **xx**
 fishes were **xxviii** foote longe, and som of them **xxi** foote, and byr accor-
 dyng to theyr length. But the **ii** biggest, male and female, was **xxviii**
 foote longe, and as bigg in the middle **iii** quarters of a mynnetie. Hanginge
 a reace four. The water was, gaudynge above a reace boate. The bo
 gylt, reedy, one beinge wapped w^{ch} a pound na halfe, w^{ch} inches &
 a half longe, and above **ii** inches in compass a boate, but none of the biggest.

Also a great long tang, a marvellous byr bigg, as a peard betweene the
 eyes, upon theyr wyde more holes, as bigg that a man might put in both his
 fishes at once, out of the which theyr dyce a great quantite of water
 whyle they were a takinge, that they had almoste swam **ii** boates man
 and all, with fownting of water: for the boate w^{ch} afferde byr waye
 from the fishes, as big as any boate, and so fall boate & weel all them that
 were within theyr venche moste cruellie. Also they were white beneath
 the eyes a hand broad, theyr eyes blacke, and no bigger then the eyes of
 Calfe. Theyr backes as blacke as ynke, so much about theyr eyes
 was seen the face out, as in a dyne Claret. Theyr bellies as blacke as
 ynke, and byr these laches theyr backe of them are great slacks of
 gaudyng, and som of them were a reace and a halfe longe, byr the eche,
 & strong, and of a great of hane ones wherewith the face part of his belly,
 Also the male, one of the **ii** biggest had a yere, that when it was out, was
 more then **iii** quarters of a yere long, and as bigg to ward his boape as
 a mans one fente hall, byr the thyle. His thyle was **iii** weares long,
 and **ii** perces broad byr the middle, a wonderfull stronge for **ii**
 tall men to be upon his rylle, as he liding his rylle byr, once thier the
 rylle. Also wherem he had fyce byr his rylle it was of such manerous longe
 strenght, and bygnnes, that when it fell the verye grand wold ruge, and
 thake therwith. The fysh was cut out in peeces, and great alway to
 dymere in the tyme that he was byr, and was byr good maner, byr
 rather as hals, (so much of it as was byr) uncties) and the meate of them
 built fytter the red wyere. And as theyr cut out it was wapped byr
 peeces, so that the verye boape of this one fysh, was **xx** honyes
 bare casches, byr many litle peeces that was gotten above byr
 craters that had byr, wherem a Carter booke of gaudyng that came out
 of his belly, so that all together it was a boate byrre honed and an.
 The man of Spw^{ich} had byrme to a tyme byrme whyle theyr were
 byrre, as theyr hane fence, they might hane made it **xx** marche more
 of them then is so to bold. But now theyr be barrell byr to make **xx** of,
 and will not be sold to a great peece of monney.

¶ And this you maye see, the prefer and true description, of these
 strange fishes, wherem is to be noted, the strange and marvellous
 hande boopes of the Lord, whiche he doth in all his fishes, and byr
 in his byrre, the Lord, whiche he doth in all his fishes, and byr
 them, to our end and cte.

Printed at London in Fleetstreet, at the signe
 of S. John Evangelist by Thomas Colwell.

GREAT FISHES (INRUSH)

Diving into the broadside's depiction of the events surrounding the intrusion of the "Moste true and marveilous straunge wonder . . . of .XVII. Monstrous fisshes, taken . . . within a myle of Ipswich" feels overwhelming from the first. This sensation arises partially from the aspect of the monstrous in which the broadside is most interested: magnitude. The *Oxford English Dictionary* says the word "monster" originally referred to "a mythical creature . . . frequently of great size and ferocious appearance" and, later, "A creature of huge size."² In the text, Granger refers to the overwhelming physical presence of the "fisshes" (remarking, for example, on their "marvaylous greatnes, strength and wayght"). The broadside's layout reinforces this emphasis on great size, for the woodcut illustration dwarfs the tightly packed print. Horizontally, the illustration is wider than both columns; vertically, it covers as much space as three-quarters of the main text. While it is contained — barely — by a thin black border and by its placement between title and text, the huge "monster" dominates the broadside and overwhelms Granger's neatly printed verbal narration, communicating additional ferocity with its large, bared teeth and its widely opened eye. The woodcut is lively, but its design is relatively uncomplicated; the way it is employed suggests an encounter with a creature both wilder and more starkly simple than its human opponents, who are exemplified by the ornate, overcrowded blackletter of the narration. Visually, then, we also feel an opposition of powerful energies: an inrush of verbal human mastery; a backrush of fierce "monstrous" silence.

To brace ourselves within these opposing currents, a larger cultural context will be useful; I shall therefore turn to an examination of two representative broadsides of similar date, guided by recent critical insights in the field of monster studies. Numerous scholars have shown how the monster prowling liminal zones in early England is, in the words of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "a kind of cultural shorthand for the problems of identity construction, for the irreducible difference that lurks deep within the culture-bound self."³ The monster without is really a dweller of the dark

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- 2 "monster, n., adv., and adj.": *OED Online*. June 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:2048/view/Entry/121738?rsk=RB1b1p&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed June 25, 2016).
 - 3 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 5.

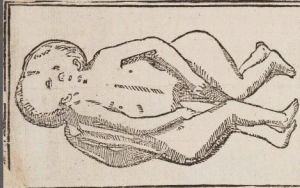
spaces within, and it thus must be abjected — or at least objectified. For, as Surekha Davies argues, monsters regarded as natural (rather than as portentous) increasingly inspired curiosity rather than horror in the early modern period, becoming popular as exhibits and wonder-cabinet dwellers. Davies notes that “the close link between emotion and cognition in the case of monsters was part of a broader response to unexplainable phenomena.”⁴ That is, the emotions evoked by encountering a monster (from interested surprise to paralyzing terror) also inspired all manner of discussion and digestion of the encounter (from credulous popular accounts to detached, proto-scientific analyses). David Cressy demonstrates the cultural stakes of such a sharp focus on monsters: “More than simply an abomination of tissue, monstrosity pointed to social pathology and religious failing, a disturbance of the natural order.”⁵ Indeed, broadsides from this period tend to demonstrate an acute awareness of how monsters reflect the otherwise unseeable dark recesses of human desire and behavior, the “irreducible otherness” deep within communities and individual readers alike. Brought to light, these benighted creatures inspire emotional responses that require intensive cognitive processing precisely because they remind us of the depths we cannot (bear to) plumb.

The most common of these evocative monsters in sixteenth century broadsides are human — specifically, children born with birth defects.⁶ Broadsides treating

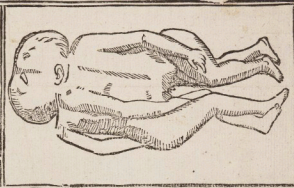
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- 4 Surekha Davies, “The Unlucky, the Bad and the Ugly: Categories of Monstrosity from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman with Peter J. Dendle (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 49–76, 52.
 - 5 David Cressy, “Lamentable, Strange, and Wonderful: Headless Monsters in the English Revolution,” in *Monstrous Bodies/Political Monstrosities in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers and Joan B. Landes (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 40–66, 47.
 - 6 The second most common category is animal monsters, as we shall see below. Approximately 250 broadside ballads of the sixteenth century survive; no catalogue of all broadsides from the period has been made. It should also be noted that the broadside ballad survivals represent a tiny percentage of those printed in the sixteenth century — Tessa Watt estimates that between 600,000 and 4 million were printed in the second half of the century alone. Most of the extant ballads, and many non-ballad broadsides, appear in the collections of three libraries: the Huntington

**The true fourme and shape of a monstrous Child/
Which was borne in London Stratford in North Hampton Street.
The year of our Lord 1571. CCCC. LXXI.**

¶ This is the face parte.



¶ This is the backe parte.



This Child was borne on Friday being the xxij. daies of January, betwixt six and seve of the clocke in the morning and lived two houres, and was christned by the goodwife, and she both Women Chyldren, having two bodies, coping together with .iiii. armes, and .iiii. legges perfecte, a from the shoulder upward the face, two eyes, one nose, and one mouth, and three eares, one being upon the backe side of the head, a little above the nape of the backe, havinge three greines upon the backe, where the Child was borne out of the Mother. The fathers name is Richard Southorne, who is now dead, and the Mother is yet living in the same Village. And this Child was brought by to Lambeth, where it was seene of manye honorable men and women of the Court, and also of the Countrey. To witness that this is a Cruelty and no Miracle, but a warninge of God, to moue all people to amendment of life.



Do that do see this Child disfigured here,
Two bodies in one, disguised to beholde,
I thinke with you let us, when such things do appere,
All is not well, as wife heades may be boldre:
But god that can in secretes thew the figure
Can bringe much more to pas, by poure deuine.

¶ And we that lue to see this wonder, howe
The gale is gotten to make this miracule great,
Let one by one that thus beholde it no the,
Be warned as the wonder thus conceale:
To lue to mendre the wonderous shape we see,
Contrarie much, in all that ought to be.

¶ For as we finde this figure semeth strange,
Because it shewes proposition not in vaine,
So bare in minde howe nature can choyse and chaunce,
Wondrously workes in willes that be indure,
From measure to more, from more to much excess,
Where Nature willes, desire should be lesse.

¶ Sinks. W. Cherton.

¶ Imprinted at London in Fleetstreet beneath the Crowdfat the
figure of St. John Evangelist, by Thomas Colwell.

them generally contain woodcut illustrations that are relatively true to physical descriptions of the infants. For example, “The true fourme and shape of a monstrous Chyld . . .” (1565) describes a set of conjoined twins with four arms, four legs, and “from the Navell upward one Face, two Eyes, one Nose, and one Mouth, and three Eares, one beinge upon the backe syde of the Head.” The illustrative woodcut impression matches this description well (see previous page).⁷ The visible presence of the creature under discussion serves both to show and to warn. The message is relatively straightforward: the birth is a sign sent by God telling people to abjure wickedness (like conceiving out of wedlock, as the named father and the unnamed mother of these twins had done).

Depicted here, then, is what Cohen calls the “monster of prohibition,” which “exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture,

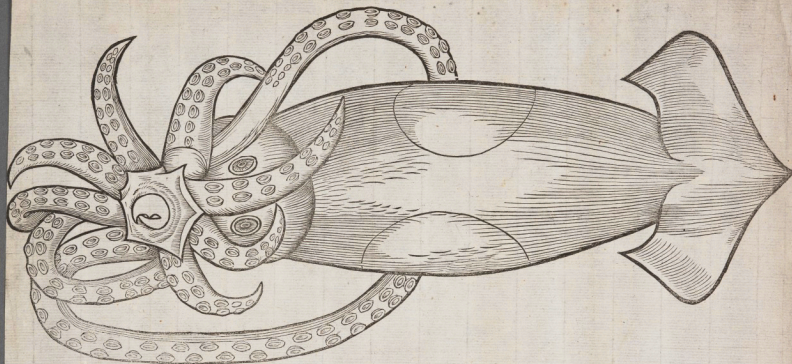
Library (Britwell Collection), the British Library (Huth Collection), and the Society of Antiquaries, London. The Britwell and the Huth were once a single collection, assembled by Ipswich postmaster and antiquarian William Stevenson Fitch (d. 1859); see <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/page/provenance2>.

In the seventeenth century, a third category emerged: half-human outliers with decidedly unusual features, such as the creature which resembles a woman with two heads, born wearing “a flaunting ruff . . . starched with white and blew,” and “pinked shoes” adorned with red rosettes from “Pride’s Fall” (entered in the stationer’s register 1656, first extant printing between 1663 and 1674; see University of Glasgow Library Euing 269, EBBA 31879). Such “monsters” seem to be a satirical expansion of the species of cheap print that, as David Cressy has shown, linked “monstrous” births with topical cultural conflicts. As far as I have been able to discover, no early English broadside refers to monstrous plants.

- 7 Wear to the cut — like the breaks in its border — indicate that it was used elsewhere, perhaps on another ballad or a chapbook also commemorating the birth, or perhaps on a publication describing a different set of conjoined twins. This kind of reuse brings up important questions about historical truth; such questions are less germane in the cases of broadsides which describe events also depicted in other sources, like the Granger broadside: its orca also appear in John Stowe’s *The Annales of England* (1592, STC 23334), 1130.

The Description of a rare or rather most monstrous fish taken on the East coast of
Holland the 26th of November Anno 1764.

The Works of God how great and strange they be
Picture plate before heart map of ice.



It were then hard to give from the picture shape and fashion of a fish strange and marvellous taken out
of the lake in Holland, having on his former head that is in some much like the beaver's but they which in
that Country they were wont to wear in that a Berlin his eyes like an owls a month as a poppy
eye his tail wide and colour covered blue to a purple's Cap which fish's body were from and below of much
shells and pieces of shadders who hath painted of his fishes like to others and kept them for a time
and for the most credit he sold, yet that understand that the 10 of December the said fish was brought to the
City of Amsterdam where it was openly shown and for several of the City's men as other strangers what
this monster was to other towns and places of late day's acquaintance and therefore into by that I mean, to
the conference being shew'd) and having show the King and government of all countries not to doubt with
according to our belief but for Christ his former sake to power his mercy upon us, and grant us grace
to amend, and to doe those things which are pleasant and acceptable in his sight whose Jesus Christ
our King Amen.

It then the former fish used for
A Change from his face
The many eyes in the beaver
It was in the water
A number men are used now
It was in the water
It is in the water
The water was not much
The water was not much
It is in the water
It is in the water

Can be released from the land,
It is in the water
It is in the water
It is in the water
It is in the water
It is in the water
It is in the water
It is in the water

Printed at London in Pauls Church-yard by Thomas Dunton at the sign of the Anchor

to call horrid attention to those borders that cannot — *must* not — be crossed.”⁸ By crossing into a form of culturally proscribed activity (sex outside of marriage), the parents have engendered a “monster” that is horrifying partly because it is helpless, because it inspires more pity than fear. Whereas, as we shall see, the speaker of the orca broadside seems unaware of the emotions evoked by the brutal treatment of its “monsters,” this ballad’s speaker encourages readers to act on their emotional responses to the “wonder” and “live to mende the wondrous shape we see.” That is, an empathetic audience member is reading with the grain here and coming away with the text’s explicit message. And, as David Cressy points out, early modern English accounts of monstrous births usually put to good didactic use the pity and fear they evoked: “the monster was simultaneously an admonition or warning and a mon-
strance or demonstration of divine power and wrath.”⁹

Similarly, most animal-monster broadsides also admonish and warn, evoking emotion in order to strengthen the explicit messages of their narratives. They often, therefore, make allegorizing equations between the shape of a monster and the particular sins committed by mankind. One such is “The discription of a rare or rather most monstrous fishe taken on the East cost of Holland” (1566), which boasts a large woodcut impression of a squid (see previous page).¹⁰ Tentacles radiate from its prominent beak, snaking behind its bloated oblong body and around its uncanny, glaring eyes. The layout of the broadside underscores the creature’s uncontainability: the title at the top of the page does not so much enclose it as float above it like so much inconsequential jetsam. This monster communicates only menace — and appropriately so, since the broadside’s aim is to turn sinners from their “maners mad and monstrous.” It exists to show, as Cressy puts it, “social pathology and religious failing.” The

8 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture: Seven Theses,” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3–25, 13.

9 Cressy, “Lamentable, Strange, and Wonderful,” 45.

10 “The discription of a rare or rather most monstrous fishe taken on the East cost of Holland the .xvii. of November, Anno 1566. The workes of God how great and straunge they be / A picture plaine behold heare may you see” (1566). Huntington Library 13187, EBBA 32405.

monstrous animal body signifies behavioral excess, and it inspires not pity but loathing for its “shaples shapes.”¹¹

These two broadsides are typical for their genre and time: they aim to call up emotional responses with illustrations of monstrosity. Then, audiences are encouraged to channel their emotions into an evaluation of their morals and behaviors so that no more such creatures are created. The monsters, both a demonstration of unwholesome desires made flesh and a warning for those who would entertain such desires, are disturbing, unappealing, even ugly. As such, they swim in familiar teratological waters.

Granger’s fishes, though, come to us from murkier seas. The depiction of monstrousness diverges from that of other contemporary broadsides (like the two discussed above) in that the creatures are described in admiring terms. We hear, for example, of the dominant male’s “great long tung” and “marveyulous byg head”; all of the “fisshes” have “one great blacke Fin . . . verie thykke, & strong.” The size that is a marker of their monstrosity is also an opportunity for admiration, and they become not just monsters but marvels (from Anglo-Norman *merveille*, miracle): not just frightening but awe-inspiring.

And these monsters differ in an even more crucial respect from those of other monster broadsides: they come without a moral. While the conclusion to the broadside says these monsters are “the straung and marveyulous handye workes of the Lord,” they portend nothing, demonstrate nothing about the degradation of contemporary human values, ask for no change in human behavior.¹² At least, they do none of these things on the shoreward surface of the text, its (admittedly often choppy) flow of words directed towards shaping human mastery over the unknown, the wild, and the mute.

11 Cressy, “Lamentable, Strange, and Wonderful,” 47.

12 The absence of an explicit moral message is particularly strange if the one other work attributed to Granger is indeed by the same author: it is an insistently moralizing ballad on the subject of various kinds of fools (“He is a Foole, that in youth wyl not prouyde, / In age must he sterue, or in pouertie abyde”). See Granger, “The .xxv. orders of fooles” (n.d., STC 12187).

ON THE BACKS OF WHALES

HAYLIE SWENSON

On the 8th of May, 1547, a large fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) became stranded on the coast of Holland near the tenth-century abbey of Egmond.¹ The 68-foot-long whale lay on its back on the cold sand “with his belly turned upwards. The belly was mottled, white and black; the back was black.”²

This description of the Egmond whale was written by Adriaen Coenen, a fishmonger and sketchbook artist who recorded the event in his *Whale Book*, or *Walvisboek*, a compendium of illustrated entries about whales and other aquatic creatures, including mermaids, squid, dolphins, and swordfish.³ Coenen worked from 1584 to 1586 on the *Walvisboek*, which is currently housed in the Royal Zoological Society in Antwerp. Working with Dutch compilations that he either owned or borrowed, Coenen relied on typical sources in making *The Whale Book* — Pliny, Isidore, Albertus Magnus, and Mandeville’s *Travels*. However, he seems to have relied as much on what Florike Egmond and Peter Mason call “first-hand observation close to home, practical experience and the exchange of information with others in the know in his immediate

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- 1 Florike Egmond, Peter Mason, and Kees Lankester (commentaries), *The Whale Book: Whales and Other Marine Animals as Described by Adriaen Coenen in 1585* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 111. In keeping with the texts under consideration, most of which use “fish” as a term for all kind of pelagic creatures, including mammals and fish, by “whales” I mean a variety of sea creatures, including fish and pinnipeds as well as cetaceans.
 - 2 Egmond and Mason, *Whale Book*, 111.
 - 3 For a high-resolution digital facsimile, see *Vlaamse Erfgoedbiblioteek*, “Adriaen Coenen, *Dat eerste boock van menich derleij walvischen ende ander selseme groote wonderlijke visschen*,” accessed July 2015, <http://anet.be/digital/opacehc/ehc/o:lvd:2789552/N>. For this page, see <http://doc.anet.uantwerpen.be/docman/docman.phtml?file=ehcpreciosa.8a2cca.s0063.jpg>. In addition to the *Walvisboek*, Coenen also produced a *Fish Book*, or *Visboek*. For a high-resolution digital facsimile, see *Nationale bibliotheek van Nederland*, “Blader door het Visboek van Adriaen Coenen, accessed October 2015, <https://www.kb.nl/bladerboek/visboek/browse/book.html>.

surroundings.”⁴ Although Coenen draws on the usual host of monsters and wonders — for instance, the *Visboek* includes mermaids, sea monsters, and wild men — many of his images are naturalistic enough for species identification; as Egmond and Mason point out, his careful cataloguing “offers rare insights into that time-span of climatic change around 1580 that introduced the culmination of the Little Ice Age in Europe.”⁵

As with nearly all of his entries, Coenen’s description of The Egmond Whale is accompanied by a watercolor painting of a strikingly realistic, if disproportionately round, animal (see next page). In the image, a group of monks clusters around the whale’s fluke, taking tentative steps onto his back, while a group of villagers stands behind him.⁶ The whale’s eye is perfectly round, many times the size of a man’s head, and it is difficult to tell whether the whale is alive or dead. While the hesitation on the part of the monks and most of the villagers suggests a possibly still-living whale, a sense of caution is not shared by everyone.⁷ Two men peer inside the whale’s mouth; one runs his hands over the baleen plates.

4 Egmond and Mason, *Whale Book*, xi.

5 Egmond and Mason, *Whale Book*, viii.

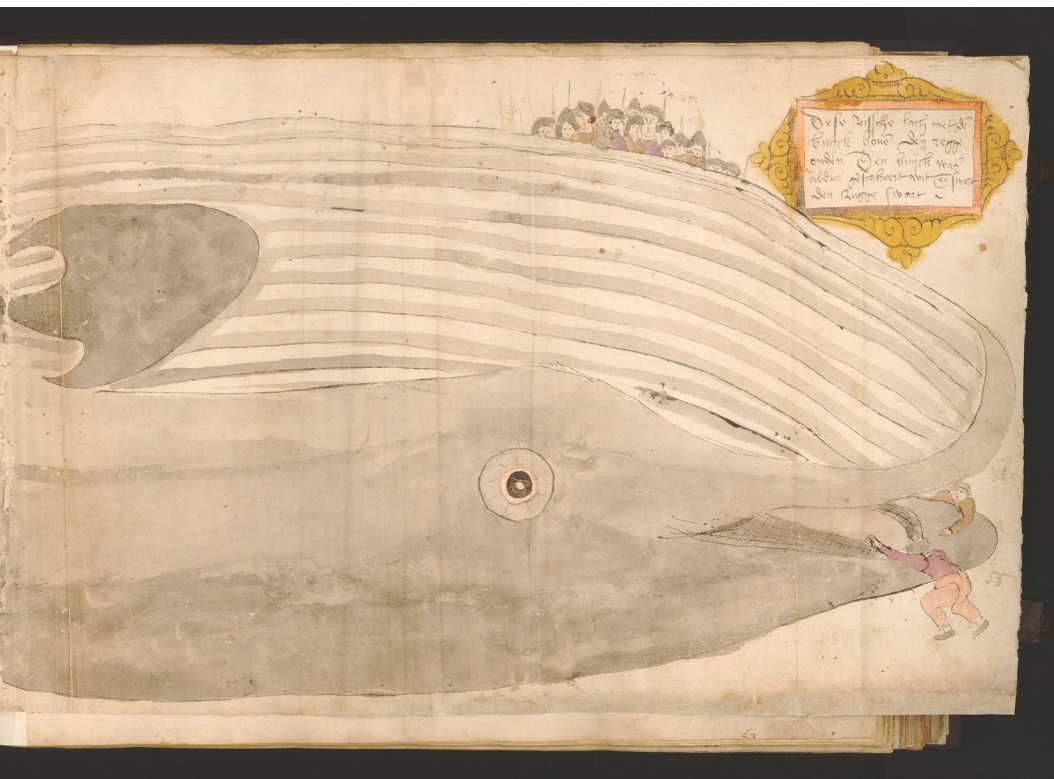
6 It is difficult to accurately sex whales, especially from an image, and my use of the masculine pronoun here is not meant to definitively sex the whale or to unthinkingly rely on the universal “he.” Instead, my use of the masculine pronoun is meant to echo Egmond and Mason’s translation of Coenen, which often uses “he” instead of “it.” Whale penises — which are often unextended and thus unseen, hence the difficulty in sexing a whale — are frequent causes for wonder in images of beached whales, and they are included in many of Coenen’s images. See also Palmer in this volume, 35 and 43.

7 Although perhaps it should be, as beached whales — their stomachs filled with gases from decaying fish — have a tendency to explode. This is graphically evident in a viral video from the Faroe Islands in which a man in protective clothing pokes at the stomach of a dead beached whale. The stomach explodes, sending the whale’s stomach contents flying and the man running for cover: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2013/nov/27/sperm-whale-explodes-man-opens-stomach-video>. My thanks to M.W. Bychowski for drawing my attention to this video.

1577

Dit is die farnie dem die vest die sijnont is mppromd
 op den 8 dach in mei Anno 1577 dat van den een kint
 die ander toe is voer lant of die farnie was is die
 van sijn navel tot die sijn toe 24 voet lant wide
 die sijn toe is voet lant 44 die deesse was lant 74
 voet alre voet van aff dunn wide was die 2 dree
 dat comt o ffe oft tot die noec toe 12 voet 1/2 dat
 omke oft tot die kenne over lant die den lant 6 voet





Dese wyfliche kint m'ist
kintre boude den wyf
enden den kintre was
aldre g'f'roest mit en s'ne
den kintre swast

Whales can find themselves stranded for many reasons, including disorientation, old age, or illness. Without human intervention or a lucky wave to draw them back out to sea, they do not last long. Normally all-but-invisible to those of us stuck on land, and signaled only by the occasional faraway plume of water vapor, a stranded whale thus seems to be a whale at its most vulnerable, a subdued monster that can be approached, touched, rubbed, and climbed with eagerness, fear, and desire. A whale appears, and we cannot help but climb aboard.

An image from Antwerp's Plantin-Moretus Museum, painted by an unknown artist and closely modeled after Coenen's watercolor, could represent an imagining of the scene a few minutes later.⁸ The nervousness has worn off a bit, and the villagers are beginning to clamber over the whale. A man holding a staff stands with a foot buried in the whale's genital slit. Near the whale's head, two villagers lounge as though sunning themselves. Their casual posture and apparent mastery of the belly of the whale is belied by the way the monks are still clustered around the fluke, hanging back. As in the original image, here the villagers — many of whom are still standing, apparently on the beach, peering up at the whale — carry sticks, or possibly spears.

In depicting this strange mix of fear, fascination, and carnivalesque desire that revolves around scaling a whale, these images evoke other works that dwell on the backs of swimming and stranded marine mammals. From medieval examples of Jascopus, the massive animal island visited every Easter by Saint Brendan and his monks, to the whales that beach themselves in medieval Iceland and over which men kill each other, to present-day incidents of captive cetaceans that form intimate, and sometimes dangerous, relationships with their handlers, whales draw us close and incite us to wonder: what can we see from the back of a whale? This article explores that question. Rather than foster a sense of human mastery, I argue, textual encounters with whales and other marine creatures instead emphasize the essential vulnerability of both pelagic and terrestrial bodies, as the interactions between humans and

8 The image is listed as "Aangespoelde vinvis te Egmond [*Rorqual washed ashore at Egmond*], Drawing, 1547. Object number: PK.OT.00826." A facsimile of it appeared in a 2012 exhibit at the Folger Shakespeare's Library, "Very Like A Whale," curated by Michael Witmore and Rosamond Purcell. For a color image, see *Museum Plantin-Moretus*, "Aangespoelde vinvis te Egmond," accessed July 2015, <http://search.museumplantinmoretus.be/Details/collect/277601>.

cetaceans both engender and betoken crises in which we all have a share. Passages of this essay explore my own experiences of closeness with marine mammals; these passages are set apart, like a whale's fluke against the horizon, and mark the bea(s)ts of this series of visitations on mammals and monsters, violence and hunger, and — above all — the pains, pleasures, and intimacies of touch.

}— *Although I've lived at or very near the Pacific Ocean for over twenty years, this is the first time I've been whale watching. I'm in Depoe Bay, Oregon in 2009. I'm 23. It's a queasy day, for the sea and myself, but the gray whales that swim near our boat distract from the nausea. I try to take pictures, but the boat is too active and everything comes out blurry, mere watercolor-like dabs of fins and flukes. Near the end of our trip, one whale spouts close to the boat, its otherworldly, unimaginably briny breath enveloping those of us on the deck. To quote Joe Roman, it is "as if the ocean itself had come up for air."*⁹ — {

JASCONIUS

In the eighth century, a scribe wrote down the story of an Irish monk named Brendan (c. 486–575).¹⁰ Traveling in a coracle — a light boat made of wood and covered with animal hide — Brendan and fourteen of his fellow monks visit a series of extraordinary islands and encounter myriad miracles and marvels,¹¹ including enormous,

9 Joe Roman, *Whale* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 1.

10 D.H. Farmer, "Introduction," in J.F. Webb, trans., *The Age of Bede*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 11; and J.F. Webb, trans., *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*, in *The Age of Bede*, 235.

11 Working with a 1215 treatise by Gervase of Tilbury, Bartlett, 2008, draws an important distinction between these two terms: "on the one hand, miracles, which are beyond nature and caused by God directly, on the other hand marvels, which are natural even if inexplicable and unusual" (19). Aquinas, too, draws this distinction, "consigning monsters to nature, where they shared a home with marvels" (19). While these authors are writing much later than the *Voyage* scribe, this distinction is evident in the Brendan story, which relies heavily on the miraculous. However, it does not seem to me that this distinction materially changes the possibility for affective intimacies between human and animal bodies, so I do not dwell on it here.

undomesticated sheep; birds that sing hymns; Judas Iscariot, imprisoned in eternal torture; and a mysterious crystal which may or may not represent an iceberg, all in search of the “Land of Promise of the Saints.”¹² One of these islands in particular has become emblematic of the voyage. This island is:

rocky and bare, there was hardly a grain of sand on the beach and only an occasional tree here and there. The monks landed and passed the whole night in prayer in the open, but Brendan stayed on board. He knew perfectly well what kind of an island it was but refrained from telling the others, lest they should take fright.¹³

With the exception of Saint Brendan, who knows something his fellows don't, the monks disembark onto the strangely bare beach to pray and rest. The peace and homely comfort of Brendan's sailors is short-lived, however, as *The Voyage* soon describes:

When they had built the fire up with sticks and the pot began to boil, the island started to heave like a wave. The monks ran towards the boat, imploring their abbot to protect them. He dragged them in one by one and they set off, leaving behind all the things they had taken ashore. The island moved away across the sea, and when it had gone two miles and more the monks could still see their fire burning brightly.¹⁴

Just when the monks think the ground is safe beneath them, the still unidentified, mysterious “island” upsets their footing, their expectations, and the seemingly unbridgeable difference between the fluid ocean and the solid ground. It even takes their fire. Brendan explains:

‘Brethren, does the island’s behaviour surprise you?’

‘Indeed it does! We are almost petrified with fright.’

12 Webb, *Age of Bede*, 258.

13 Webb, *Age of Bede*, 241.

14 Webb, *Age of Bede*, 241.

'Have no fear, my sons. Last night God revealed to me the meaning of this wonder in a vision. It was no island that we landed on, but that animal which is the greatest of all creatures that swim in the sea. It is called Jasconius.'¹⁵

In his poetic retelling of the story, "The Disappearing Island," Seamus Heaney embellishes on the monk's desperation and their relief at finding themselves on (temporarily) firm, dry ground. In Heaney's version, the monks have "found [themselves] for good" and "made a hearth"; indeed, they are beginning to make a *home* "between [the island's] blue hills and those sandless shores" when the ground swims away from underneath them.¹⁶ In an interview about his poem, Heaney describes this incident as being "both matter-of-fact and dreamlike, unexpected and foreknown, like poetry itself."¹⁷ The early description of the island's landscape emphasizes this dreamlike quality while also uncannily evoking a real whale. The island, which has a sandless "beach," is described as "rocky" in a moment of resonance with the whale barnacles that cling in huge, calcified clusters to the bodies of baleen whales. In spite of this resonance, though — which may or may not have been on the mind of the anonymous author of the *Voyage* — the whale's body, with its strange, "occasional" trees and "sandless shores," must seem an inhospitable and alien landscape even before it begins to move.

This story commonly reappears in bestiaries and natural histories and on maps throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Coenen's *Walvisboeck* contains a version in which the danger posed by the mistaken identification of whale as island is actualized. It "often happens," Coenen writes, referencing Olaus Magnus, that sailors moor on these whales (what he calls "*Aspidochelon physiologus*") without realizing what they are. Invariably, the sailors make a fire, and when the whale feels it "he swims away, the people are drowned, and he pulls the boat underwater."¹⁸ In this version, Brendan's anomalous and miraculous encounter becomes a commonplace, something that "often happens."

15 Webb, *Age of Bede*, 241.

16 Seamus Heaney, "The Disappearing Island," *The American Poetry Review* 16, no. 4 (1987): 6.

17 Seamus Heaney, interview with George Morgan, *Cycnos* 15, no. 2 (2008).

18 Coenen, *Whale Book*, 16.

In contrast to the whale Coenen describes, Jasconius miraculously protects the monks. With his injunction to “have no fear,” Brendan assures the monks of God’s providence in taming “the fury of a monstrous beast,” and the periodic resurgence of this theme will echo the cyclical return of the monks to Jasconius’ back every Easter. But how soothed are the monks, really, especially if Brendan has to keep reminding them not to be afraid? In spite of Brendan’s unshakeable confidence in the whale as a wonder of God, assimilated docilely into a religious narrative, something of the monks’ fear and uncertainty lingers in this and other stories of encounters with marine mammals.¹⁹ In his essay, “Hospitality,” Jacques Derrida begins to get at why this might be. He argues that the conceptual importance of maintaining the sovereignty of the host ultimately both limits and defines hospitality: if there is no host, there can be no hospitality, but as long as there is a host, the guest is at his mercy. Consequently, “hospitality is a self-contradictory concept and experience which can only self-destruct”; the words “hostile” and “hospitable” are hopelessly entangled.²⁰ These questions grow even more complicated when species lines are crossed, and Derrida asks “what can be said of; indeed can one speak of, hospitality toward the non-human, the divine, for example, or the animal or vegetable; does one own hospitality, and is that the right word when it is a question of welcoming — or being made welcome by — the other or the stranger [*l’étranger*] as god, animal, or plant, to use those conventional categories?”²¹ Echoing the slippage in Derrida’s phrase “welcoming — or being made welcome by,” narratives describing the whale-as-island ask the

19 Coenen, *Whale Book*, 5.

20 Jacques Derrida, “Hospitality,” *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 5, no. 3 (2000): 5. Derrida further explains the slippage between hostility and hospitality by noting “a paradoxical trait, namely, that the host, he who offers hospitality, must be the master in his house, he (male in the first instance) must be assured of his sovereignty over the space and goods he offers or opens to the other as stranger. . . . It does not seem to me that I am able to open up or offer hospitality, however generous, even in order to be generous, without reaffirming: this is mine, I am at home, you are welcome in my home, without any implication of ‘make yourself at home’ but on condition that you observe the rules of hospitality by respecting the being-at-home of my home, the being-itself of what I am. As a reaffirmation of mastery and being oneself in one’s own home, from the outset hospitality limits itself at its very beginning. . . .” (14).

21 Derrida, “Hospitality,” 4.

same question over and over again, but in reverse: can the animal show hospitality to us? Do we even want it to?

}— *Growing up in southern California in a house near the ocean, I saw dolphins frequently. My first memory of an encounter with a larger marine mammal, however, takes place at SeaWorld. I'm six or seven, and at the whale show. One element of the show then, and probably now, involves choosing a child out of the audience to interact with and eventually sit on the orca. The orca's stage name is Shamu, just like every performing orca in SeaWorld shows since the first one, a female, was captured from the ocean and survived. To my intense jealousy, my charismatic little sister is chosen. She poses and smiles, and immediately develops a deep and lasting affinity for marine animals. Twenty years later, I cringe while watching the trailer for Blackfish, a film by Gabriela Cowperthwaite that uses as its point of departure the 2010 death of Dawn Bracheau. An orca trainer, Bracheau was killed by Tilikum, an orca she had been working closely with.²² Bracheau was the third person killed by Tilikum, and the documentary tries "to demonstrate a cause-and effect relationship between captivity and violence, contending that orcas snap and kill people out of chronic frustration and boredom."²³ Watching the trailer, I think of my many childhood visits to Sea World, and I wonder how to weigh the intimacies of captivity — intimacies my sister felt, that trainers and keepers feel with the animals in their care — against the violence that inheres in spaces of forced encounter. —{*

MONSTERS AND MARVELS

For the people of the medieval North Atlantic, "whales could be monstrous at sea and mundane as meals . . . they were good to eat, but bad to encounter, both fascinating and frightening even when dead on shore."²⁴ As Vicki Ellen Szabo here suggests, whales occupied various and sometimes contradictory places in the

22 Mark Mooney, "SeaWorld Trainer Killed By Whale Had Fractured Jaw and Dislocated Joints," *ABC News*, 31 March 2010, accessed 10 December 2013.

23 Mike D'Angelo, "Blackfish" (review), *A.V. Club*, 18 July 2013, accessed 8 December 2013.

24 Vicki Ellen Szabo, *Monstrous Fishes and the Mead-Dark Sea: Whaling in the Medieval North Atlantic* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 23.

medieval imagination. On the one hand, they had actual, physical bodies that could be encountered on the shore and that were important sources of a variety of goods including oil, meat, and bone. But they were also monsters with the purported ability to capsize ships. A 1572 map by Olaus Magnus gets at this dual role that whales played. Clustered closely together on the map between the Faroe Islands and Norway are three whales. One whale lies beached and presumably dead on the shore of the Faroe Islands and is being flensed — stripped of skin and blubber — by three men. Another whale, anchored by a hook to a ship, hosts two men who are building a fire on its back. The third creature is a serpent with a long tail, coiled around a ship and threatening to drag it into the deep.²⁵

These three tropes of the whale — as commodity, as island, and as threatening sea monster — are evident in *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*. After being instructed by a number of human and nonhuman characters to repeat their voyage for seven years, hitting the same major four islands on the same four holidays, Brendan and the monks spend every Easter on the back of Jasconius. Every year “they found Jasconius in the usual place [on Easter eve], climbed out onto his back, and sang to the Lord the whole night, and said their masses the next morning.”²⁶ While away from these four islands, they experience both miracles and marvels as well as a host of tribulations, from hunger to thirst and bad weather. Most of all, they experience fear of the waves, winds, and monsters of the deep:

Looking round one day they espied a creature of gigantic proportions writhing along in their wake. It was still far off but was charging towards them at top speed, ploughing up the surface of the water and shooting out spray from its nostrils. It looked as though it would devour them. ‘Good Lord, deliver us!’ they yelled. ‘Do not let the beast consume us!’²⁷

Shooting plumes of water into the air and rippling the water like the invisible waves it moves through, the whale charges. Cool as ever, Saint Brendan prays, and in his prayer we find a host of other monsters: “Lord, deliver your servants now, as of old

25 Chet Van Duzer, 2013. *Sea Monsters on Medieval and Renaissance Maps* (London: British Library, 2013), 82–84.

26 Webb, *Age of Bede*, 266.

27 Webb, *Age of Bede*, 252.

you delivered David out of the hand of the giant, Goliath. Deliver us, O Lord, as you rescued Jonah from the belly of a great whale.”²⁸ Brendan finishes his prayer, and another sea monster, “spewing out fire,” appears to attack the first: “The wretched animal that had assailed the servants of God was chopped into three parts before their very eyes; the victorious monster swam back the way it had come” as Brendan gives praise unto God for his mastery over the creatures.²⁹ It is easy to read this moment in light of what Szabo sees as a binary in medieval thought between the “fantastic whale” (also the “good whale”) and the “bad whale,” or, in even simpler terms, as an emblematic clash between good and evil.³⁰ And yet this moralistic reading fails to fully account for the violent quality of this scene, from the “wretched animal” that is ripped apart before the monks’ eyes, to the lingeringly contingent quality of the service performed by the victorious sea monster. The enemy of my enemy may be my friend, but he is also, in this case, a scary, unknowable other, a fantastic version of the slippage in Derrida’s nominal term, “hostipitality.”

What happens when a whale changes from a monster to a miracle? What intimacies are lost? The next day, the brethren find “the rear quarters of the dead monster. . . Lying on the beach. ‘Ha!’ cried Brendan. ‘That creature was going to eat you; now you are going to eat it.’”³¹ At Brendan’s insistence, the monks strip enough meat from the carcass to last them three months for, as Brendan warns, otherwise “animals will come in the night and pick it clean.”³² This seemingly small reminder is expanded upon by the text when, three months later, the monks decide to see if Brendan was right. “When they reached the spot where the carcass had been, they found nothing but bones.”³³ The next morning, as Brendan prophesies, another whale washes up on the shore. The effect is of endless, God-given bounty, but also endless need. In the harsh North Atlantic, nothing as valuable as a whale carcass can be wasted by either man or beast.

28 Webb, *Age of Bede*, 253.

29 Webb, *Age of Bede*, 253.

30 Szabo, *Monstrous Fishes*, 31.

31 Webb, *Age of Bede*, 253.

32 Webb, *Age of Bede*, 253.

33 Webb, *Age of Bede*, 254.

DRIFTAGE

Elsewhere in the *Walvisboeck*, Coenen describes another encounter with a beached whale. On the second day of July, 1577, a “living fish” became stranded in the shallow water of the river Schelde where it was “finished off with picks, hooks, and other instruments.”³⁴ What in 1547 was a celebratory and festive encounter (albeit with a dead animal) is here depicted as a scene of violence and pain; Coenen describes how the whale “roared in a terrible fashion and made an enormous hullabaloo before it died, so that the water was tremendously stirred up, churned up and troubled from bottom to top. Afterwards it was dragged with ropes and small boats to Haefden,” presumably to be eaten and turned into fuel.³⁵

Szabo emphasizes the importance of the ocean as a source of food, especially in times of scarcity: “Whales, along with fish, sea birds, and other marine mammals, supplemented cultivated resources and allowed people to survive simple short-falls or long-enduring famines.”³⁶ This is the situation described in *Grettir’s Saga*, a thirteenth-century narrative taking place in tenth-century Iceland. A famine has descended on Iceland, the narrator asserts, “so devastating that its like has never again been experienced.”³⁷ But Iceland’s hardship is exacerbated by the fact that even the ocean has stopped providing: “few fish were caught and no whales or other driftage washed ashore.”³⁸ A famine without whales and other driftage is a famine indeed. “This situation continued for several years,” the narrative tells us, until one “spring . . . a man named Thorstein” finds “a whale where it had washed ashore on the farthest tip of the headland, at a place called Rifsker [“Rib-bone Rocks”]. It was a big finback whale.”³⁹ The next few paragraphs of the *Saga* chart the ripple effect created by Thorstein’s discovery. Thorstein sends his men to tell Flosi and his other neighbors, who tell others, until the story spreads throughout much of eastern Iceland. In the meantime, Flosi’s men “began to cut up the whale. The pieces that were sliced off were dragged up onto the land. There were nearly twenty people at the beginning,

34 Coenen, *Whale Book*, 10.

35 Coenen, *Whale Book*, 10.

36 Szabo, *Monstrous Fishes*, 14.

37 Jesse Byock, trans. *Grettir’s Saga* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 27.

38 Byock, *Grettir’s Saga*, 27.

39 Byock, *Grettir’s Saga*, 27.

but their number quickly increased.”⁴⁰ As more men arrive, two factions form and a battle breaks out:

Thorgeir Flask-Back led the assault, and went for Flosi’s men atop the whale. Thorfinn . . . was cutting the whale. He had placed himself forward at the whale’s head, and stood with his feet in foot-holes which he had cut out for himself.

Thorgeir said to Thorfinn: ‘Here is your axe back.’ Then he struck at the man’s neck, slicing off his head. Flosi, who was up on the gravel shore, saw this and urged his men to counter-attack. They fought for a long time . . .⁴¹

The men fight over the whale, and *with* the whale, wielding not only their flensing tools but also the whale’s great bones and huge chunks of its meat. Many die. Standing on the head of the dead whale, Thorfinn carves out foot-holes in which to stand. This detail emphasizes the bloody, intimate, tactile connection of the flensers and the whale, the slipperiness of its great head, and the need for footholds so that Thorfinn will keep his balance and have enough leverage to cut into the tough flesh. The text immediately asks, however, if balance, or mastery, is possible on top of something as precarious and valuable as a whale. Thorfinn carves foot-holes, or perhaps footholds. These holes are not only ledges to give him balance on the whale, but also spaces from which to carve out a better subsistence in the form of provisions against the harsh Icelandic environment. But Thorfinn immediately loses this balance, and he himself loses his head just moments after cutting away at the head of the whale.

Saint Brendan’s cry over the dead sea monster — “that creature was going to eat you; now you are going to eat it” — is perhaps a moment of exultant mastery, in which the human subject crows over the humbled whale, but perhaps we are also glimpsing a moment of relief, a sense of being spared — this time — from the oceanic ecosystem that continually threatens Brendan and his companions. A third possibility is even more likely: neither simply exultant nor humble, Brendan’s cry

40 Byock, *Grettir’s Saga*, 28.

41 Byock, *Grettir’s Saga*, 30.

makes space for moment of equivalence, an acknowledgment that the hunger of humans and of whales drives them to similar actions, and that one hunger is no more monstrous or demonic than the other.⁴²

Thorfinn dies, his blood mingling with the whale that has also recently lost its life on this beach. A sea monster, charging a small coracle in the northern seas, is itself killed by another monster as the monks it originally attacked look on, horrified. An orca, kept in a space infinitely smaller than that which houses its wild conspecifics, is involved in the death of three of its trainers. A whale feels a fire burning on its back and wakes, forcing the humans riding it to flee. A man climbs onto the belly or back of a whale and finds not mastery, but pain, fear, wonder, and a shockingly shared vulnerability. But is violence the only possible form of human/cetacean intimacy?

}— I'm eleven years old, living on the coast of Oregon and spending time with a friend. My family is having a bonfire at the beach, and we have snuck away in the darkness to sit on the rock wall near the jetty. My friend knows this spot well and wants to tell me a secret about it. She says if we sing, the seals will come up onto the rocks a few feet below us and listen. The Siuslaw River is full of seals, including one that my step-siblings and I have named "Sammy" and who we know by the scars on his face — the record, probably, of a run-in with a boat prop. We give him bits of fish when we throw our crab nets off the docks. So I believe my friend. We sing, and twenty years later I carry a steady conviction that the shadowy forms that we saw in the darkness below our feet really were listening seals. —{

SONG OF THE SEA

Brendan, too, shares a song with the sea. As the story relates, the monks celebrate St. Peter's Day at sea, watching "the movement of life beneath the boat" like medieval members of Team Zissou. The water is:

so clear, indeed, that the animals on the ocean bed seemed near enough to touch. If the monks looked down into the deep, they could see many different kinds of creatures lying on the sandy bottom like

42 Thanks to Asa Mittman for suggesting this final reading.

flocks at pasture, so numerous that, lying head to tail, and moving gently with the swell, they looked like a city on the march.⁴³

Predictably, Brendan's monks are frightened by this strange congregation, and with good reason. The sea, so far, has been a place of miracles, but also monsters and death. Furthermore, the metaphors here keep shifting. First the fish and other creatures seem like docile cattle. With breathtaking swiftness, however, they morph from this pastoral image into a martial one, "a city on the march," and possibly against Brendan's band. Insisting yet again on God's ability to "make all creatures docile," Brendan

sang at the top of his voice, causing the brethren to cast an anxious eye in the direction of the fish, but at the sound of singing the fish rose up from the sea bed and swam round and round the coracle. There was nothing to be seen but the crowds of swimming forms. They did not come close but, keeping their distance, swam back and forth till mass was over. Then they scurried away on their own tracks over the paths of the ocean, out of sight of the servants of God.⁴⁴

How do we read this scene? While it certainly serves as another example of the recuperation of the frightening sea into the aegis of God's plan, we should also read this as a moment of coming together, of shared aesthetic pleasure in a confidently voiced song. Importantly, the sea creatures do not linger, or even touch the boat. They are not available for food nor — in spite of the monk's fears — does it seem that they are seeking to eat the brethren. They are just listening. As I have climbed from back to back across these essays, I have considered what our curiosity about whales and other sea creatures might teach us about our shared vulnerability to a precarious world. But these stories also quietly insist that we be attentive to the ways that those creatures might also be curious about us. Acknowledging our shared capacity for and vulnerability to violence, these stories of human and cetacean contact gesture towards the possibility for shared pleasure alongside the pain.

43 Webb, *Age of Bede*, 257.

44 Webb, *Age of Bede*, 258.

GREAT FISHES AND MONSTROUS MEN (UNDERTOW)

INTERLUDE II · MEGAN E. PALMER

Back, now, to Ipswich in 1568 — and to a disorientingly dual narrative in which the darker side of shared creaturely vulnerability is hidden, though ever-present, beneath a story of human victory over the monstrous. As we have seen, the strong surface current running through Timothy Granger’s broadside account of the capture of twenty-seven orca concentrates its definition of monstrosity on the size of the captured creatures. Unlike other monster broadsides of its day, it is without an explicit moral: the monsters are used neither to warn against behaviors that cross culturally constructed moral boundaries nor to plead with readers to reform their lives. It is a story of human ascendancy. But pulling strongly in the other direction — back to sea, back to the enormity of non-human otherness and to the disturbing darkness of unspeakable human cruelty — the broadside also illustrates the extreme brutality of the men of Ipswich upon encountering their “monsters.” The orca, once finally captured, were hauled in to Ipswich wharf; the largest was tied to a tree. “Som of them,” we learn, “laye upon the wharfe .ii. dayes and a nyght before they weare dead, and yet [the men] strooke them wyth Axes & other weapons to kyll them,” even to the point of their axes breaking on the whales’ “bones hard as stones.” While Granger never remarks upon the merciless brutality he describes at length, it saturates the text. It is likely that these actions were legible as cruelty to many contemporaries, especially those who focused on the creatures as fish first and monsters second.

As recent critics have shown, the continuities between humans and animals were strongly perceived by early modern Europeans. Laurie Shannon has demonstrated that a strong philosophical and literary current (based in the account of animal creation in Genesis) saw animals as “the subjects of the law who then become the abjects of tyrannical man,” noting that, in this tradition, “‘murder’ applies outside of kind, and acts of human tyranny take place across species.” In this view, the actions of the men of Ipswich are both murderous and tyrannical: the bodily autonomy of the creatures is violated first in their capture, second in their torture at the ropes and axes of the men, and finally in their drawn-out deaths. And, as Karen Raber

argues, early moderns recognized that, “where the body is concerned,” differences between humans and animals “are and have always been simply impossible to maintain.”¹ Our shared anatomical features make the continuities between species impossible to ignore. While some strains of proto-scientific thought went to great length to explain away such continuities (as in Descartes’ famous equation of animal suffering with the automatic motions of clockwork), they were crucial to early modern anatomy and medicine.² Raber shows that, in the period, “animals remain the ground on which epistemological and ontological understandings of the human body are constructed”; the muscles, bones, and appendages which constitute animal bodies are basically identical to our own. By detailing such identities, Renaissance animal anatomies end up conferring “interiority, even subjectivity” on their animal objects.³

In a similar vein, our broadside’s near-obsessive anatomization of the captured orca insists upon creaturely similarity, though as usual the speaker himself seems curiously unaware of the implications of such similarity. Granger reports that one “fishe was a mans heyght in thickestnes”; even more impressively, the largest male “had a yerde, that when it was out, was more then .iii. quarters of a yearde long, and as byg toward his bodye as a mans areme sleeve & all, by the elboe.” The creatures are “monstrous” because of their size in comparison to men; their captors seem to be fascinated and frightened precisely because such comparisons are easy to make (and are emphasized by the references to a man’s body for scale).⁴

A more disturbing similarity between these creatures and their human tormenters is blood — a copious and surging flow of it: “The ryver wherin they weare taken was coloured red, with the blood that issued from theyr woundes, whyle they weare a takyng, the water beinge so deepe that a hoy [small craft] might well ryde thearin.” Blood is particularly significant in contemporary anatomical discourse. As Gail Kern

1 Karen Raber, *Animal Bodies, Renaissance Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 30.

2 See René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method for Conducting One’s Reason Well and for Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1988), 33.

3 Raber, *Animal Bodies*, 33, 74.

4 Here, the broadside’s visual and verbal elements are in harmony, for one of the woodcut impression’s most striking features is the orca’s prominent penis.

Paster demonstrates, its vessels “become in effect the body’s internal distribution systems of . . . subjectivity”; furthermore, because these vessels allow for the transmission of rational and spiritual energies through the body, “blood, spirit, and sensation become nearly indistinguishable in action and properties.”⁵ An early modern reader aware of medical theory might well see the subjectivity and the suffering of these “monstrous fishes” as literally permeating the landscape of Ipswich. And rivers of blood would also surely call to mind the First Plague visited by God onto the Egyptians. The moment, first reported in Exodus, is recounted in Psalm 78: “he turned their waters in to bloude, so that they might not drynke of the ryuers.” The waters of Ipswich overflow with, and are tainted by, the vital spirits of these tortured orca just like the waters of Egypt were once rendered undrinkable through God’s wrath. But, like the human-animal similarities the broadside reports as if unknowingly, this biblical allusion seems to exist only in the undertow, moving beneath and opposite to the surface of the text.

Another allusion, even more surprising in its lack of reflectiveness, dwells in the same strange undercurrent: in an uncharacteristically fragmentary sentence, Granger declares “Theyr backes as blacke as ynke, so smoth & bryght that one myght have seene his face on it, as in a dim Glasse.”⁶ The second half of this sentence echoes 1 Corinthians 13:12–13: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”⁷ Paul

5 Gail Kern Paster, “Nervous Tension: Networks of Blood and Spirit in the Early Modern Body,” in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), 112, 113. Paster is here discussing specifically human subjectivity, but she has also written on the blood-related sympathies between humans and animals; see *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), especially chapter 3.

6 I am indebted to Asa Simon Mittman for calling my attention to the crucial importance of this passage and its highlighting of the townsfolk’s failure to, in his words, “see their own humanity reflected in the actually reflective surface of the whales” (personal communication, 3 February 2015).

7 The Tyndale translation (used for the Coverdale Bible of 1535 and the Great Bible of 1539) is somewhat awkward here: “Now we se in a glasse even in a darke speakeynge:

evokes the imperfection of mortal understanding — we cannot see ourselves clearly, cannot know ourselves or others — which, he says, will be resolved in a fully intersubjective communion. Charity, or love, is the subject of the chapter as a whole: Paul says that nothing can be truly accomplished unless it is attended by love. There are poignant ironies, then, in Granger's echo of the passage. A man, he says, "*myght* have seen his face"—his interior, subjective self, the part of him which longs to be known by another — in the whale, but fails to, even as a blur in the "dim Glasse." Given the chance to look at the surface of the whale and see himself, Granger demurs: he does not find the charity to see, let alone stop, the suffering of the creatures with their skin "so smoth & bryght." He manifestly does not know the whale even as also he is known (to himself, to the suffering whale, to the reader attentive to the many correspondences his narration has drawn between humans and these "fisshes"). The moral lesson so strangely absent from the surface narration cries out for expression here, but is forced down beneath the waves, into the undertow pulling away towards the vast seas of the unknown, monstrous Other.

but then shall we se face to face." It is possible that Granger knew the Vulgate, "*videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate tunc autem facie ad faciem*"; in any case, the passage and its link to mirrors were well-known in the sixteenth century.

QUICKENING SANDS

ERIN VANDER WALL

The Lord of Ravenswood (tragic hero of Sir Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor*) rides to avenge the death of his love. He rashly cuts away from the firmly packed ground where the sand meets the cliffs. He veers across the open expanse of the beach, and vanishes. Quicksand. Lord Ravenswood's disappearance is abrupt and entire.

The beach: a meeting of substances, a mixing, a wearing away. Sand shifts, rubs, drifts. Water flows, spreading itself out over the sand, smoothing, erasing, pulling silty granules with it as it ebbs. The beach is a place of exchange where two substances come together, mix, and separate, each marked by contact with the other. Quicksand is a mixture of these substances — it is both water and sand — and yet it is neither water nor sand. It is a third substance. Undisturbed, sand and water maintain a balance, both present but not distinct, reliant upon the persistence of the other. Agitation alters this relationship separating water from sand; the land moves, ripples, opening a gap into which the walker sinks. Quicksand is both elements and both substances, it is the promise of solid ground and the subsequent rupture of water and sand that, in the case of Lord Ravenswood, swallows a man (and his horse) whole, in an instant. Quicksand is deceptive, unassuming, a perception of solid land that comes to life when stimulated. The separation of sand and water quickens the substance. The ground produces signs of life as the body is absorbed into living ground, becoming part of the landscape.¹ Consumed. A monstrous incorporation.

The consideration of quicksand requires one to occupy two occasionally contradictory positions: a scientific view of quicksand as a physical substance that exists in the world and is acknowledged primarily when it acts upon those who encounter it; and a literary, and ultimately, cinematic perspective that shapes our understanding of the physical substance and the properties ascribed to it through a Western cultural lens.

1 Kevin Bosner, "How Quicksand Works," accessed September 15, 2015, <http://science.howstuffworks.com/environmental/earth/geology/quicksand.htm>.

These perspectives invite a continual shift in our approach to and understanding of quicksand.

While quicksand is still alarming, it is rarely more than a few feet deep and of such a spongy, gel-like consistency that one sinks slowly.² The depth to which one sinks is driven primarily by the agitation created by the initial contact. Quicksand is saturated sediment that appears as a solid. It loses strength and its ability to bind when pressure is exerted, opening a space that the object applying pressure then fills.³ An object sinks to a depth where that object's weight equals the weight of the displaced water/sediment mixture. The speed a human or animal sinks after the first agitation is driven by the intensity of their escape attempt.⁴ Quicksand as a threat to life is reinforced by culturally created ideas. Quicksand death is generally ascribed to additional external factors such as exposure or dehydration.⁵ The density of displaced sludge is greater than that of water, which prevents the complete submersion of a person.⁶ In literature and film, however, quicksand consumes swiftly, eagerly, and entirely, absorbing a body in a matter of minutes.

The tide line: the tide line marks the outer limits, it outlines where land ends and the ocean begins. The place where water laps over one's feet is considered beyond the edge and in one sense this is true: you are either in the water or you are not. However, with each incoming wave, the line shifts, marking and remarking that edge and thereby removing any opportunity for a clear delineation between sand and water.

Traditionally. Historically. Culturally. Monsters are a product of fear, anxiety, desperation. Monsters violate the idea of the natural. They violate nature itself. As such, we position monsters at the margins, the outskirts, at the ends of the earth. We assign them to deceptively general locations that we fear so much that we warn against

2 Dirk Kadau, "Living Quicksand," *Granular Matter* 11, no. 1 (Jan 2009): 6.

3 Darrel G. F. Long, "What is Quicksand?" *Scientific American*, 3 July 2006, accessed September 15, 2014.

4 A. Khaldoun, "Rheology: Liquefaction of Quicksand Under Stress." *Nature* 437 (29 Sept 2005): 635.

5 "Killer Quicksand," *Mythbusters Results*, last modified 20 October 2004, accessed 15 September 2015, <http://mythbustersresults.com/episode19>.

6 Khaldoun, "Rheology."

them cartographically by populating them with monstrous bodies. Quicksand, particularly quicksand as it appears in *The Bride of Lammermore*, is located literally at the end of the earth. At a place where earth and water meet. At a tide line. The ever-moving line between earth and water. Sand and water come together in both beach and quicksand but different substances are produced. It is in the separation of these substances, born out of molecular agitation, that this monstrous environment comes alive.

Scott's quicksand, known locally as Kelpie's Flow, is characterized by words that underscore its menace. In his urgency, Ravenswood leaves the safety of solid ground and cuts across the beach. His death follows his unconscious, or uncaring, trespass of the boundaries of Kelpie's Flow, and the "tenacious depths of the quicksand, as is usual in such cases, retained its prey" (348).⁷ Despite his role in his own death, Ravenswood is prey. His description as prey, however, introduces intentionality. Action. Hunting. Ravenswood is held tenaciously in its depths. Kelpie's Flow consumes man and steed in an instant, and once it captures its prey, it will not relinquish that hold. The tenacity of these depths hint at a substance that not only grasps and hunts, but acts in a way that reinforces its own existence. A perpetual ebb and flow that moves with the tide reinforces the persistence of the substance. Existence is preserved through movement. An expansion and contraction of surface area that replicates breath. A continual shifting of "center" signifies a determination to remain.

Lord Ravenswood's disappearance is described from two perspectives: that of his faithful servant, Caleb, watching as his master rides away, and Colonel Ashton, the brother of Lord Ravenswood's lost love and the man he rides toward. Caleb, viewing Ravenswood from the battlements, follows his progress to the beach, at which point Lord Ravenswood disappears from his sight. The perspective then switches to Colonel Ashton, who sees Ravenswood's approach illuminated against the rising sun until, again, Ravenswood's advancing figure vanishes. Within the narrative frame of the novel, these experiences occur simultaneously, a shared experience presented from alternate vantage points that eventually allow the viewing characters to meet in the middle, at which point the completeness of Ravenswood's disappearance is verified. What is left to question is where this event occurred, as indicated by the search

7 Sir Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 348.

for Ravenswood's body: "the inhabitants of Wolf's-Hope, [the nearby village] [...] crowded to the place, some on shore, and some in boats, but their search availed nothing. The tenacious depths of the quicksand, as is usual in such cases, retained its prey."⁸ Scott's language ascribes malicious intent to the quicksand, but his description of the search for Ravenswood's body signals a larger issue — the inability to determine the location of Ravenswood's disappearance. It becomes a place that is *no place* in that neither it nor Ravenswood can be located. The search area can be pinpointed, as everyone knows of Kelpie's Flow prior to this event, but in terms of definition, it is large, requiring the use of boats in addition to those searching on the shore. The ebb and flow of the waves, the push and pull against the sand, expands and diminishes the quicksand incrementally, and the search area on both beach and ocean continually alters in size and direction, while further increasing the necessary depths to search. What results is an inaccessible point of disappearance, an expanse that shifts continually.

Quicksand's shifting location reduces it to a general area but not a location that can be precisely mapped. To pinpoint a location, to map it, requires temporal stability. Time becomes an inadequate tool for assessment because the shifting quicksand puts it in a constant state of flux. Literary depictions of quicksand provide a sense of how *greedy* the ground is and how swiftly it consumes. A sense of duration. But, unsettlingly, it does not provide a concrete sense of *where* that instantaneous consumption may take place. Deadly on the instant,⁹ quicksand consumes in a particular moment that could be any moment and therefore any location.

The kelpie is a creature of Scottish myth, a demonic water spirit that takes the shape of a horse. The kelpie lures riders onto its back, at which point they are held fast, unable to escape as the kelpie plunges into the water, drowning its victims.¹⁰ The danger posed by the kelpie is enacted in Lord Ravenswood's furious ride across the beach, and in the sudden disappearance of man and horse. The danger of the kelpie may be derived from myth, but Lord Ravenswood's disappearance pinpoints a more

8 Scott, *Bride of Lammermoor*, 348.

9 James P. Blaylock, *The Ebb Tide* (Burton, MI: Subterranean Press, 2009), chapter 5.

10 Maggie Scott, "Scots Word of the Season: Kelpie," *The Bottle Imp* 8 (November 2010), accessed September 15, 2014, <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/SWE/TBI/TBIssue8/Kelpie.pdf>.

pressing danger: an earthly, unexpected danger, where the land itself reaches for and consumes man and beast, pulling the swiftly moving, vengeance-seeking pair into a monstrous maw that immediately returns to unassuming, continually shifting ground.

GREAT FISHES AND MONSTROUS MEN (TIDE LINE)

INTERLUDE III · MEGAN E. PALMER

From shifting ground to shifting sea, from the parallax of dual narratives to the inrush and undertow of a single narrative that cannot see through to its own reflection, we come now full circle, back to 1586 and our marvelous sea-monster. To this point, we have been considering Timothy Granger's broadside wholly within its early modern context. Now, however, I propose holding the mirror up to our own contemporary moment, one much more confident in its relegation of monsters to fiction and much more explicit in its concern for animal welfare.

We've heard of the whale's marvelous ink-black back, but he has more wonders in store. "His tayle was 3 yeades long, and 2 yerdes broad verye thicke & blacke, & wonderfull stronge: for 10 tall men stood upon his tayle, & he lifting his tayle up, over thre them all." This very virile "fissh" (which, as we saw in the previous interlude, has a penis "as byg toward his bodye as a mans arme sleeve & all, by the elboe") employs its monstrously great size to overthrow the men that have injured it — but ends up doing tricks. Here, we might be reminded of the feats performed by modern-day orca in captivity: flipping and cavorting to delight crowds with their power, their semen manually obtained behind the scenes to breed more orca. As Haylie Swenson discusses so poetically elsewhere in this volume, the captive SeaWorld orca Tilikum "crushed, dismembered, and partially swallowed" trainer Dawn Brancheau in 2010. Tilikum was also the most prolific sperm donor in SeaWorld's history,¹ and though the modern spectacle is awash in language of concern for animal rights, actual treatment of these marvelous fishes was until recently only slightly less monstrous than early modern treatments.² Orca pods, we know today, are "tightly organized along lines of maternal relatedness," and their "social lives . . . are

1 Kenneth Brower, "Opinion: SeaWorld vs. the Whale That Killed Its Trainer," *National Geographic*, 4 August 2013, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/08/130803-blackfish-orca-killer-whale-keiko-tilikum-sea-world/>.

2 The film *Blackfish* treats the situation in depth, though SeaWorld (and many of the trainers interviewed for the film) say it is a misrepresentation. Since Brancheau's death, SeaWorld trainers have ceased to go into the water with orca.

without doubt as rich and complex as those of the most advanced land mammals.”³ But to capture them, organizations like SeaWorld once separated young individuals from their pods, often violently; in marine parks, they are thrown in with individuals from different pods. As environmental writer Kenneth Brower puts it:

The various tribes of orcas vocalize in very different patterns. The North Atlantic vocalizations of Tilikum . . . were as different from those of [his] Pacific tank-mates as Old Norse of Iceland is different from Haida or Tlingit . . . SeaWorld facilities hold scrambled nations and cultures of whales. The societies in these tanks are less like the intricate societies of wild orca clans than like the accidental assemblies you find in any drunk tank on Saturday night.⁴

These modern accidental assemblies of orca, cut from their kinship groups, are put on display for the pleasure of viewers, in a disturbingly similar manner to that of the early modern orca with his huge “yard.” And both then and now, the dangerousness of these creatures is held up as part of their allure. Orca are the most powerful carnivores on earth. Their grace and majesty are, therefore, necessarily frightening to smaller creatures like ourselves. But orca do not, of their own volition, approach humans: rather, they react with violence against us only when treated violently. Why, then, do we insist upon capturing and exhibiting them? Perhaps it is because these liminal creatures — sea-dwelling mammals living in small family groups and communicating among themselves, traversing easily the boundaries between human cultures and settlements — inspire in us both awe (which rises to the surface of our consciousness and our narratives along with the pleasurable spectacle of the performing animal) and bloodthirsty horror (dwelling always beneath our conscious notice and tugging against our fragile feelings of mastery). The menace and majesty of these border-swimmers, their radical otherness from and eerie sameness to humans, seem to reflect the monsters in all of us.⁵

3 John K. B. Ford, Graeme M. Ellis, Kenneth C. Balcomb, in *Killer Whales: The Natural History and Genealogy of Orcinus Orca in British Columbia and Washington* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), 23.

4 Brower, “Opinion: SeaWorld vs. the Whale.”

5 I thank my fellow Babel panelists Alan Montroso, Haylie Swenson, and Erin Vander Wall for their fascinating and creative work. I am especially grateful to Asa Simon Mittman and Thea Tomaini for their astute and helpful readings of this article in its draft form.

SINK OR PLUNGE?

CONCLUSION · ASA SIMON MITTMAN

We are sinking. We *are* sinking, as individuals, as participants in a field that is sinking along with us, as members of a species, and as components in a massive, global ecological network. But we are not sinking because of the malevolence of natural forces, not because the sand is hungry for us and for our horses, characterized by “malicious intent,” as Erin Vander Wall describes the quicksand in Walter Scott’s *The Bride of Lammermoor*.¹ We are not sinking because whales and monstrous fish want to swallow us whole, not because the strange beings of the sea wish harm on us, nor because the sea itself is vengeful, though “the water comes,”² and who could blame it? We are sinking because of *our* collective hunger and callousness. As dwellers in the anthropocene, we can already see it all around us. Yes, of course, Venice is sinking.³ More than two decades ago, seemingly alarmist headlines asked questions about Amsterdam’s future like, “Is it time to build another ark?”⁴ But these cities have been sinking for centuries.

1 Vander Wall, 40.

2 Montroso, 4.

3 Stefania Munaretto, Pier Vellinga, and Hilde Tobi, “Flood Protection in Venice under Conditions of Sea-Level Rise: An Analysis of Institutional and Technical Measures” *Coastal Management* 40, no. 4 (July 2012): 355–80, 356: “Venice and its lagoon are a well-known example of a complex and vulnerable artificially conserved natural system. Similar to many other coastal regions, SLR [sea level rise] in the Venice lagoon is expected to increase erosion; the frequency, intensity and height of tidal floods (locally called acqua alta, meaning high water); and loss of habitat and biodiversity.” See also Y. Bock, S. Wdowinski, A. Ferretti, F. Novali and A. Fumagalli, “Recent Subsidence of the Venice Lagoon from Continuous GPS and Interferometric Synthetic Aperture Radar,” *Geochemistry, Geophysics, Geosystems* 13, no. 3 (March 2012).

4 “Is it time to build another ark?” *U.S. News & World Report* 107, no. 20 (20 November 1989): 12.



Lors le Roy Alixandre
 leur respondi
 et dist en telle
 maniere etymme
 L'ome qui entent a beneser
 sa honte ou a croistre son loe
 en son pouoir si se doit habill
 donner aux peulz de fortune
 et ne doit mie penser quil
 soit parail a ses Enemis Car
 hardi se mauuaise parole
 ne crist proesse ne valeur
 Et se je me sup habandonne
 en tel peulz Je y ay tant
 maingme q'ien gouidrauy
 plus sairement mon peuple
 touz les iours de ma vie

pou vault. Et ay deu
 des petites poissons qui
 par enuoy desconfisoient
 les grans qui par force
 ny pouoient auerir
Coment le Roy Alixandre
 et son off se combattirent
 contre bestes sauvages
 lesquelles auoient ou
 font une corne trentat
 come une espee 606

Even Las Vegas has been sinking since the 1930s.⁵ Its sands are slow, but nonetheless are sucking the city down toward their “tenacious depths.”⁶ They do so not because they hunger for us but because we thirst for the waters that lurk beneath them. With every cool drink pulled from the hot, dry sands, people pull themselves downward to their city’s grave. But while Las Vegas is something of a reduction sauce of US and global capitalism, we are all in the same state of descent. All of us are making a large and collective fire on the back of our Jasconius-Earth, which, in fleeing from us, dives down and threatens to drown us all.

The tide rises, and the sea, which has beckoned us for millennia with its beauty and its bounty, the sea, which we have gone to for so long, is now coming for us. Alan Montroso — following Stacy Alaimo and Steve Mentz — encourages us to think not only as the creatures of the sea, but as the sea itself, to dive down with it rather than resisting its perhaps inevitable advance. What would it have meant for the monks of *The Legend of St. Brendan*, introduced here by Haylie Swenson, to have held fast, to have dived down with Jasconius — the great fish or whale they mistake for an island — rather than fleeing back to their fragile coracle? Unprepared, it would mean their death by drowning. But what if, like Alexander in *Le livre et le vraye hystoire du bon roy Alixandre*,⁷ they prepared carefully, bringing with them a few pets and some lamps (Figure 6)? Alexander is imperiled in this narrative by his unfaithful wife, cutting the rope connecting him to the surface, rather than by the strange creatures of the abyss, or the water itself.

When Jasconius awakens, the monks on his back are so surprised that, to them, it seems that “the whole earth was moving, And moving away from the ship.” Brendan,

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- 5 J.W. Bell, J.G. Price, and M.D. Mifflin, “Subsidence-induced fissuring along preexisting faults in Las Vegas Valley, Nevada,” *Proceedings, Association of Engineering Geologists*, 35th Annual Meeting, Los Angeles: 66–75.
 - 6 Sir Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 348.
 - 7 London, British Library, Royal MS 20 B. xx, f. 77v, France (Paris), c. 1420. For details and color images, see “Detailed record for Royal 20 B XX,” *British Library Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts*, accessed September 2015, <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=6533&CollID=16&NStart=200220>.

of course, understands what has happened, and from his perspective on the ship can treat the situation with his characteristic calm.

Brendan said to them: 'Brothers, do you know
Why you have been afraid?
It is not land, but an animal
Where we performed our feast,
A sea fish greater than the greatest.'⁸

Jude Mackley argues that “Jasconius is sentient and aware of the monks, but reacts instinctively to the fire on its back.”⁹ That is, while he nearly kills them all, Jasconius bears the monks no ill will, and a year later — and every year thereafter — he returns to serve as a platform for the Easter celebration, even returning to them a lost cooking pot:

Their cauldron which they lost
The year before, now they saw;
Jasconius has kept it,
Now they have found it on him;
They are more secure on him
And they celebrate a most beautiful festival there.¹⁰

The monks achieve a rapport with the great sea monster in this fictional narrative. In the historical episode chronicled by Timothy Granger in 1568 and explored with sensitivity here by Megan Palmer, the humans fail. They lack a figure of empathy, like Brendan — so compassionate that he decides to relieve Judas’s sufferings in hell, if only for a day.¹¹ Instead, when a group of fishermen find a pod of orcas, they haul them back to shore, string them up on trees — missing the christological symbolism as they do so — and hack them to death for two days. These men, though, despite their butchery, see only their own imperilment, from the orcas’ blowholes that “did

8 Jude S. Mackley, *The Legend of St. Brendan: A Comparative Study of the Latin and Anglo-Norman Versions* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 272.

9 Mackley, *The Legend of St. Brendan*, 114.

10 Mackley, *The Legend of St. Brendan*, 283.

11 Mackley, *The Legend of St. Brendan*, 294–302.

spoute a great quantitie of water . . . that they had almoste dround 2 boates men and all, with spoutynge of water . . . & wet all them that were within theyr reache moste cruellie.”¹² That is, while being axe-murdered with their family members, such that “the ryver wherin they weare taken was coloured red, with the blood that issued from theyr woundes,” these orcas were *cruelly* wetting men with their dying breaths. These fishermen of Ipswitch and their reporter, Granger, fail so utterly to think with, or think as the orcas that, even when their faces are reflected back at them in the glossy black surface of their victims, they fail to see the potent non-human identities and agencies of the “fisshes.”¹³

The whale painted for us by Adriaen Coenen was already beached when found by another timorous batch of monks. This time, the whale is on their turf, literally, and so they can afford to be astonished rather than terrified, though their small faces bear tiny frowns that seem to suggest concern. The whale is on its back, dead or dying, but they still cower in their habits, their cowls pulled up and their hands clutching their robes under their chins. As Swenson describes it, “a stranded whale thus seems to be a whale at its most vulnerable, a subdued monster that can be approached, touched, rubbed, and climbed with eagerness, fear, and desire.”¹⁴

There are, though, great dangers to climbing onto the backs of whales. Thorfinn is lured by the promise of famine relief, but loses his head. Brendan’s monks are almost drowned. And surely the fishermen of Ipswitch carved away some element of their own humanity. One cannot hitch a city to the avanc — the miles-long monster-whale of China Miéville’s *The Scar* — without risking total annihilation.¹⁵ All of these interactions result from failing to see *as* the whale, see through its eyes, “perfectly round, many times the size of a man’s head.”¹⁶

12 Palmer, 10.

13 Palmer, 36.

14 Swenson, 22.

15 China Miéville, *The Scar* (New York: Del Rey Books, 2002).

16 Swenson, 19.

I grew up on an island — really, a terminal moraine, the endpoint of a glacial advance, the heap of rocks and sand that were left behind as an ice age ended and the ice receded. An earlier warming of the earth created this apparent island, and now, as ice dies, shrieking in its death,¹⁷ that island, like all islands, is sinking. This 118-mile-long whale-shaped mass will, presumably, not only raise its North and South Fork flukes and slowly dive into the sea, but will then break back down into the detritus of which it was formed.

But, lest this be too bleak, we need to recall that though the fire drives Jasconius to dive down, he *does* return; and Brendan and his men learn how to make their annual feast on his back without causing him harm, and therefore without risking their own destruction. They find a harmony with the cycles of nature, such that their invented holy day coincides — of course, clearly by divine agency in the tale — with the great whale’s annual return.

The challenge posed by the essays in this volume is not the well-worn “sink or swim?” In the face of present and future anthropogenic climate disruption, we cannot debate between staying afloat or sinking — we *are* sinking, alone and together. In his “Swim Poem” titled “Sounding,” Steve Mentz feels how the sea “Grips me as I grip it,” and hears the sound of his own soundings:

The noise flesh makes moving through water.
The hiss and slither of universal infamy, which will make itself heard
If anyone cares to listen.¹⁸

These essays ask us to go flukes-up, to point our noses downward, to *dive*. To dive down to the habitats of the “strange strangers” dredged up for the Sant Ocean Hall of the National Museum of Natural History,¹⁹ to dive into the Orcas’ bodies, “blacke

17 “This iceberg sings,” *News in Science*, 25 November 2005, accessed September 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/science/news/stories/s1516768.htm>.

18 Steve Mentz, “Wet Work: Writing as Encounter,” *How We Write: Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blank Page*, ed. Suzanne Conkin Akbari (Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2015), 128.

19 Montroso, 1, alluding to Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

as ynke,"²⁰ to cram ourselves into a fragile Bathysphere with William Beebe and Otis Barton,²¹ and, descending to the depths, to see the alien beings of the Bathyal Zone, and to think about, and for, and *as* them, and as the great ocean by which they, we, *all of us* are surrounded.

²⁰ Palmer, 36.

²¹ For wonderful images of the Bathysphere, its inventors, and a few of Else Bostelmann's beautiful illustrations of sea creatures glimpsed through its tiny, thick porthole, see "Episode 179: Bathysphere," *99% Invisible*, 1 September 2015, <http://99percentinvisible.org/episode/bathysphere/>.

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IMAGE CREDITS

cover: *North Pacific storm waves as seen from the M/V NOBLE STAR, Winter 1989.* National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/Department of Commerce.

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vi: *Sant Ocean Hall, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.* Alan S. Montroso.

10: “A Moste true and marveilous straunge wonder, the lyke hath seldom ben seene, of .XVII. Monstrous fisshes, taken in Suffolke, at Downam brydge, within a myle of Ipswiche. The .XI. daye of October. In the yeare of our Lorde God. M.D.LX.VIII” (1568). Huntington Library Britwell 18306, EBBA 32270.

13: “The true fourme and shape of a monsterous Chyld, which was Born in Stony Stratforde, in North Hampton Shire” (1565). Huntington Library, Britwell 18293, EBBA 32225.

15: “The discription of a rare or rather most monstrous fishe taken on the East cost of Holland the .xvii. of November, Anno 1566. The workes of God how great and straunge they be / A picture plaine behold heare may you see” (1566). Huntington Library 13187, EBBA 32405.

20–21: Same as page i, above.

46: *Alexander Lowered into the Sea*. London, British Library, MS Royal 20 B.xx, f. 77v, *Historia de proelis in a French translation (Le Livre et le vraye hystoire du bon roy Alixandre)*, c. 1420, ©The British Library Board, All Rights Reserved.

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BEACHES GIVE AND TAKE, bringing unexpected surprises to society, and pulling essentials away from it. The ocean offers monsters—whales and whirlpools—but when a massive creature is pushed into human proximity by the ocean’s wide shoulders, the waves deposit and erode human assumptions about itself and its environment: words, sounds, breath, water, wind, flesh, blood, and bones wash in and out. Chance encounters reveal us to ourselves anew; we recognize an Otherness and thereby gain an ethical understanding of difference. Learning to read the monster’s environmental signs helps humans determine the scope of the monster’s place in the eco/cosmic timeline and defeat it—until the epic cycle inevitably repeats. We confront our tiny time between catastrophes; monsters live and live and live. Even so, when humans identify and face monsters, we do so at the risk of exposing our own monstrosity. When we look into the inky backs of whales, or deep into vortices, what do we see?

This volume of essays emerges from MEARCSTAPA’s panel, “The Nature of the Beast/Beasts of Nature: Monstrous Environments,” at the 3rd Biennial Meeting of the BABEL Working Group, held at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where the Pacific Ocean lays her face against the sand and waits.





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