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HSS-1

*Tentacle* by Rita Indiana Compared to *Monstro* by Junot Diaz

Both Indiana and Diaz tell the stories of societies in which disease-ridden groups of people are stripped of their humanness. This idea of dehumanization is spread throughout *Monstro*, but is eventually shown in its most radical form when towards the end of the short story, superior powers, in order to rid the world of the disease, specifically a disease which only affected 'poor Haitians,' detonated the entire city of Port-au-Prince which '...deaded all electronics within a six-hundred-square-mile radius.' The question then arises of whether the poor Haitians in *Monstro* were dehumanized simply due to the disease, or were stripped of their humanity prior to this.

Since it initially only affected the Haitians, the disease was put aside and deemed unimportant. Only when it grew to the point where it could no longer be contained, the entire hospital was somehow infected with the same symptom; "...patients with the Casimir complaint appeared onscreen a deep, flickering blue... Every single person, doctor, assistant, aid worker, janitor who walked in and out of that hospital radiated blue," did they take action. In addition to it being delayed, the research itself was very inhumane; "Same doctor performed a second experiment: ...after four days of battering themselves relentlessly against the doors of their holding cells the men loosed a last high-pitched shriek and died *within minutes of each other*." Similarly, in *Tentacle*, there is little to no effort in curing or understanding the disease; rather, it is dealt with by the

extermination of the victim. Indiana describes the use of noxious gasses to terminate the ill whereas Diaz demonstrates the massacre of all who are confined within the quarantined area by a mass explosion.

Health equity, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is ‘the state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health.’ In all of the societies and timelines described in both *Tentacle* and *Monstro*, there is no health equity. Indiana writes, “Recognizing the virus in the black man, the security mechanism in the tower releases a lethal gas and simultaneously informs the neighbors, who will now avoid the building’s entrance until the automatic collectors patrolling the streets and avenues pick up the body and disintegrate it.” *Tentacle* opens with Acilde, a maid, who witnesses an ill Haitian man exterminated on his employer’s doorstep. Acilde, utterly unfazed by this, immediately returns to work. This sets the stage for the very dystopian society that Acilde lives in.

Early into the story, Diaz writes, “...when the experts determined that it wasn’t communicable in the standard ways, and that normal immune systems appeared to be at no kind of risk, the renminbi and the attention and the savvy went elsewhere. And since it was just poor Haitian types getting fucked up—no real margin in that. Once the initial bulla died down, only a couple of underfunded teams stayed on.” As the disease only affected poor Haitians, most of the researchers began studying other things and left the ‘viktims’ quarantined.

Although the texts share the theme of the importance of health equity, this is not the only thing they have in common. Both *Tentacle* and *Monstro* use crude and indecent language. For example, Acilde, one of the main characters from *Tentacle*, uses a lot of

slurs and specifically obscene terms. This is primarily a means for Indiana to give the reader a better understanding of Acilde's personality and the unmannered society he lives in. Additionally, Indiana also includes almost unnecessarily crass textual illustrations while narrating specific portions of the novel. Similarly, the main character, AKA the unnamed narrator, of *Monstro*, uses almost equally vulgar language.

Dissimilarly, however, Diaz's main character often mixes Spanish, Spanglish, and slang from both languages and dialects. Diaz specifically uses these dialects to place the characters in Latin America. The way the characters speak cleverly provides a setting for the reader to understand; both a geographical location as well as an economic background.

Both *Monstro* and *Tentacle* take place in post-apocalyptic as well as post economic and environmental disasters worlds. While comparing the two, one similarity between the world created by Diaz in *Monstro* and Indiana in *Tentacle* is the lack of marine life. "Coral reefs might have been adios on the ocean floor, but they were alive and well on the arms and backs and heads of the infected." Although it's mentioned only once in *Monstro*, the situation remains the same. Acilde's time-traveling adventure begins with the discovery and eventual attempted theft of a rare sea anemone, whereas *Monstro*'s main character' observes anemone-like nodes on the ill Haitians. Although these are almost negligible parallels, it is interesting to see that both authors independently chose to include this particular detail in their stories, whether it be significant or inconsequential to the main plot.

All in all, both *Tentacle* and *Monstro* show the dystopian effect the lack of health equity has on society as a whole; Indiana and Diaz both use it as a theme to critique our modern civilization.