

= The Monster (novella) =

The Monster is an 1898 novella by American author Stephen Crane (1871 ? 1900) . The story takes place in the small , fictional town of Whilomville , New York . An African @-@ American coachman named Henry Johnson , who is employed by the town 's physician , Dr. Trescott , becomes horribly disfigured after he saves Trescott 's son from a fire . When Henry is branded a " monster " by the town 's residents , Trescott vows to shelter and care for him , resulting in his family 's exclusion from the community .

The fictional town of Whilomville , which is used in 14 other Crane stories , was based on Port Jervis , New York , where Crane lived with his family for a few years during his youth . It is thought that he took inspiration from several local men who were similarly disfigured , although modern critics have made numerous connections between the story and the 1892 lynching in Port Jervis of an African @-@ American man named Robert Lewis . A study of prejudice , fear and isolation in a small town , the novella was first published in Harper 's Magazine in August 1898 . A year later it was included in *The Monster and Other Stories* ? the last collection of Crane 's work to be published during his lifetime .

Written in a more exact and less dramatic style than two of his previous major works (*Maggie : A Girl of the Streets* and *The Red Badge of Courage*) , *The Monster* differs from the other Whilomville stories in its scope and length . Its themes include the paradoxical study of monstrosity and deformity , as well as race and tolerance . Both the novella and collection received mixed reviews from critics , although *The Monster* is now considered one of Crane 's best works .

= = Background and writing = =

Crane began writing *The Monster* in June 1897 while living in Oxted , England with his longtime partner Cora Taylor . Despite his previous success ? *The Red Badge of Courage* had gone through 14 printings in the United States and six in England ? Crane was running out of money . To survive financially , he worked at a feverish pitch , writing prolifically for both the English and the American markets . He later remarked that he wrote *The Monster* " under the spur of great need " , as he desperately required funds . In August of that year , Crane and Cora were injured in a carriage accident while visiting friend Harold Frederic and his mistress Kate Lyon in Homefield , Kenley ; after a week of recuperation , they followed the couple on vacation to Ireland , where Crane finished the story .

The Monster was Crane 's first story to feature the fictional town of Whilomville ; it would eventually serve as the setting of 14 stories , 13 of which would appear in the 1900 anthology *Whilomville Stories* . The town was based on Port Jervis , New York , where the author lived from the age of six to eleven . Although Crane and his mother relocated to Asbury Park , New Jersey , in 1880 , until 1896 he frequently stayed with his older brother and Port Jervis resident William Howe Crane . Crane admitted to his publishers that while he readily used Port Jervis as inspiration while writing *The Monster* , he was anxious to ensure that the residents of his previous hometown did not recognize themselves in the fictional Whilomville . While Crane biographer Thomas Beer claimed to trace the prototype of Henry Johnson to a Port Jervis teamster named Levi Hume , Crane 's niece , Edna Crane Sidbury , believed the character and his disfigurement were influenced by a local waste collector whose face was damaged by cancer . In *Black Frankenstein : The Making of an American Metaphor* , author Elizabeth Young theorized that Crane may also have been inspired by popular freak show attractions such as Zip the Pinhead , whose real name was William Henry Johnson , and Joseph Merrick , the Elephant Man . It is also possible that Crane found thematic inspiration in Henrik Ibsen 's *An Enemy of the People* ; although first published in 1882 , the play ? about a physician who finds himself ostracized by his community ? first became popular in the United States in the mid @-@ 1890s .

Modern critics have connected the novella 's themes of racial division to a violent episode in Port Jervis ' history . On June 2 , 1892 , an African @-@ American man named Robert Lewis was lynched for allegedly assaulting a local white woman . On his way to the Port Jervis jail , Lewis was

set upon by a mob of several hundred men who dragged him through the town , beat him and hanged him from a tree . William Howe Crane lived within sight of where the lynching took place and was one of the few men , together with the chief of police , who attempted to intervene . Although Stephen Crane was not present , there were detailed accounts published in both the Port Jervis Gazette and the New York Tribune , and Crane contributed to the Tribune at the time . The Gazette marked the day of Lewis ' lynching as " one of the most disgraceful scenes that was ever enacted in Port Jervis " , and activist Ida B. Wells launched a campaign to investigate the murder as well as the widespread theory that Lewis was set up . Of the 1 @,@ 134 reported lynchings throughout the United States between 1882 and 1899 , Lewis was the only black man to be lynched in New York .

Crane initially sent his a manuscript of more than 21 @,@ 000 words to McClure 's , along with several other works including " The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky " , but it remained unpublished for nearly a year . After McClure 's eventual rejection , The Monster appeared in the August 1898 issue of Harper 's Magazine with illustrations by Peter Newell . A year later , it was published in the United States by Harper & Brothers Publishers in a collection titled The Monster and Other Stories , which included two other works by Crane , " The Blue Hotel " and " His New Mittens " . The first British edition , which added an additional four stories , was published in 1901 .

= = Plot summary = =

After being admonished by his father , Dr. Ned Trescott , for damaging a peony while playing in his family 's yard , young Jimmie Trescott visits his family 's coachman , Henry Johnson . Henry , who is described as " a very handsome negro " , " known to be a light , a weight , and an eminence in the suburb of the town " , is friendly toward Jimmie . Later that evening Henry dresses smartly and saunters through town ? inciting catcalls from friends and ridicule from the local white men ? on his way to call on the young Bella Farragut , who is extremely taken with him .

That same evening , a large crowd gathers in the park to hear a band play . Suddenly , the nearby factory whistle blows to alert the townspeople of a fire in the second district of the town ; men gather hose @-@ carts and head toward the blaze that is quickly spreading throughout Dr. Trescott 's house . Mrs. Trescott is saved by a neighbor , but cannot locate Jimmie , who is trapped inside . Henry appears from the crowd and rushes into the house in search of the boy , finding him unharmed in his bedroom . Unable to retreat the way he came , Henry carries Jimmie , wrapped in a blanket , to the doctor 's laboratory and the hidden stairway that leads outside . He discovers the fire has blocked this way out as well and collapses beside Dr. Trescott 's desk . A row of nearby jars shatters from the heat , spilling molten chemicals upon Henry 's upturned face .

Dr. Trescott returns home to find his house ablaze ; after he is told by his hysterical wife that Jimmie is still inside , he rushes into the house by way of the laboratory 's hidden passageway . He finds Jimmie still wrapped in the blanket and carries him outside . Hearing that Henry is inside the house , Dr. Trescott attempts to re @-@ enter , but is held back . Another man goes into the house and returns with the badly burned " thing " that used to be Henry Johnson . The injured men and boy are taken to Judge Denning Hagenthorpe 's house across the street to be treated , but while it is thought that Dr. Trescott and Jimmie will survive their injuries , Henry is pronounced as good as dead ; he is mourned as a hero by the town .

Henry Johnson survives , however , under the watchful eye of Dr. Trescott , who treats the injured man out of gratitude for saving his son 's life . Hagenthorpe , a leading figure in town , urges Trescott to let Henry die , stating that he " will hereafter be a monster , a perfect monster , and probably with an affected brain . No man can observe you as I have observed you and not know that it was a matter of conscience with you , but I am afraid , my friend , that it is one of the blunders of virtue . " Ultimately Trescott decides to move Henry , who has sustained disfiguring injuries to his face and psyche , to a local negro household , but Henry 's presence proves troubling for the family 's well @-@ being , and he is moved to another . One night Henry absconds , visiting various people around town and leaving terrified neighbors in his wake , including Bella Farragut , who he attempts to court as if no time has passed since they last met . Not welcome anywhere else , Henry is eventually moved to the carriage @-@ house in the newly built Trescott home . Despite Dr. Trescott

's protection , Henry is branded a monster by the townspeople , who avoid the Trescotts as a result . Although previously Henry 's friend , Jimmie now mocks him , daring his friends to approach the disfigured man . Once the leading doctor in Whilomville , Trescott 's reputation suffers greatly , as does that of his wife , who no longer receives visitors .

= = Style = =

The story is told from the point of view of a selectively omniscient narrator who seemingly chooses whether or not to divulge plot points as they occur , causing " a pattern of expectation " on the part of the reader . Although the novella is separated into 24 chapters , some critics ? among them Charles B. Ives , Thomas Gullason and Marston LeFrance ? believe these chapters are further divided into two parts : chapters 1 ? 9 lead up to Henry 's injury , whereas chapters 10 ? 24 map the town 's response . Critic David Halliburton wrote in his 1989 book *The Color of the Sky : A Study of Stephen Crane* that *The Monster* displayed a more " chastened " and exact style than Crane 's earlier works , which were often a mixture of clever bawdiness and epic dramatics ? both of which are seen respectively in *Maggie : A Girl of the Streets* and *The Red Badge of Courage* .

Edwin H. Cady believed *The Monster* is the best indication of the writer Crane may have become had he lived longer , showcasing a style that is " technically proficient , controlled , and broadly insightful . " *The Monster* relies heavily on Crane 's signature use of imagery and symbolism . Frequent images and metaphors dealing with sight appear several times in the story , especially in regard to the townspeople 's lack of vision , both literally and morally . The townspeople are similarly depicted using imagery of either animals or machines , characterizing them as both bestial and mindless . Color imagery is also prevalent . For example , fire ? both literal and symbolic ? features prominently throughout the story . While critics as early as Edward Garnett in 1921 pointed to Crane 's heavy use of irony in *The Monster* , other critics such as Michael D. Warner question whether Crane intended the story to be read as ironic , or if this is the result of the author 's " oddly contradictory attitude toward his characters . "

In his introduction to 1921 's *Men , Women and Boats* , one of the first Crane anthologies , Vincent Starrett noted the difference in tone between *The Monster* and the 14 other tales that Crane set in the fictional Whilomville . He wrote , " The realism is painful ; one blushes for mankind . But while this story really belongs in the volume called *Whilomville Stories* , it is properly left out of that series . The *Whilomville* stories are pure comedy , and *The Monster* is a hideous tragedy . " Critic William M. Morgan noted the stories ' similar fascination with " pure animal spirits " and " meanings of boyhood " , but differentiated *The Monster* 's focus on " a larger , more mature , and modernizing community . " Paul Sorrentino also pointed to the style differences , noting the story 's focus on the adult characters rather than the children , as well as the overall length of the story ; at more than 21 @,@ 000 words , it dwarfs the other *Whilomville* tales . However , there is disagreement among critics as to whether *The Monster* should be considered a short story or a novella . Crane called it a " novelette " , and the Library of America edition refers to it as a novella .

= = Themes = =

The question of morality plays a large role in *The Monster* , especially in terms of compassion and tolerance . Several critics have pointed to the novella 's non @-@ absolute stance on these themes , mainly in regard to Dr. Trescott 's ethical dilemma in his devotion to Henry , a black man and his son 's savior . As author Patrick Dooley points out , " What is at stake in *The Monster* is that if Trescott is a moral man , Crane has rejected common @-@ sense morality . If Trescott 's actions are supererogative and saintly , however , he is to be applauded and admired , but the ordinary moral behavior of average people and the competence of everyday heroes will not have been expunged . " Crane scholar Stanley Wertheim also noted the duplicitous morality depicted by the town of Whilomville , which exhibits " prejudice , fear and isolation in an environment traditionally associated with neighborliness and goodwill . "

Various critics have written about the story 's paradoxical themes of deformity and monstrosity . Not

only does Henry Johnson suffer a literal and physical defacement that brands him a monster , but the Trescotts ' suffer metaphorical loss of face when they are cast out by society . The trope of monstrosity takes on a second meaning when it becomes clear that the townspeople 's actions make them more monstrous than the man they shun for his deformity ; as professor and critic Lee Clark Mitchell asked in his essay , " Face , Race , and Disfiguration in Stephen Crane 's ' The Monster ' " , " Is ' the monster ' the disfigured black man or is it the town that comes to dis @-@ figure him ? " Similarly , Harold Bloom called The Monster an example of the " invasion myth " , made worse by the fact that the " monster " is born from within the townspeople 's collective mind . Henry @-@ the @-@ monster is therefore " generated by its fears of social instability , its prejudices about appearance (including racism) , and its all @-@ consuming passion for gossip and drama . " Trescott , the only man in town not to see Henry as an invader , also becomes ostracized by the frenzied small @-@ town mentality .

Race is a polarizing theme throughout the story . As William M. Morgan wrote , while the white characters are largely depicted as cold and humorless , and the black characters as warm and amusing , the town 's racial hierarchy is omnipresent . Slavery is referred to several times throughout the story , as critic Nan Goodman noted ; as a post @-@ Civil War work , The Monster revisits slavery 's legacy , as well as its effects on modern African Americans like Henry Johnson . At the beginning of the story , it is made clear that the white townspeople tolerate Henry because he " behaves himself " and " knows his place " as a black man . Later , when Henry struggles through the burning house to save Jimmie , it is said that " he was submitting , submitting because of his fathers , bending his mind in a most perfect slavery to this conflagration . " However , while his suffering is tantamount to the story , Henry Johnson is never really fleshed out as a character ; before the fire , he " strikes in quick succession the minstrel 's poses of an old @-@ time , happy @-@ go @-@ lucky Negro " , who charms children and women alike . Despite his heroism , Morgan stated , Henry does not stray far from a racial stereotype . Critics such as Lillian Gilkes and John R. Cooley have noted Crane 's lack of racial sensitivity while writing The Monster , although they note that the author was simply exhibiting " unconscious racism " in order to fulfill literary conventions of the late 19th century . In his 2002 essay , " Blunders of Virtue : The Problem of Race in Stephen Crane 's ' The Monster ' " , John Clemen sums up the critics ' tendency to either " ignore the evidence of Crane 's racism , to dismiss it as a cultural influence irrelevant to his larger purposes , or to reconfigure it within his irony in such a way as to enable the story and its author to achieve an unintended racial insight . "

= = Reception and legacy = =

The Monster received mixed to positive reviews from critics . Before its publication , Crane 's friend Joseph Conrad wrote while responding to a partial draft : " the damned story has been haunting me I think it must be fine . " William Dean Howells , an early champion of Crane , proclaimed the novella to be " the greatest short story ever written by an American " . The Spectator concluded that The Monster alone would have cemented Crane 's literary reputation ; its reviewer wrote , " If Mr. Crane had never written anything else , he would have earned the right of remembrance by this story alone . "

The reviewer for The Critic dismissed it as " an unpleasant story There is humor in the telling , but it is humor of a rather grim character . " Julian Hawthorne , son of author Nathaniel Hawthorne , also ultimately disliked the novella , calling it " an outrage on art and humanity " . He did , however , point to the similarities between Crane 's " monster " and Victor Frankenstein 's creation in Mary Shelley 's most famous work , stating that Crane , like Shelley before him , successfully depicted an innocent outsider being tormented by townspeople who are themselves made monstrous by their irrational fears . Other critics have since echoed the comparison between Shelley 's character and Henry Johnson ; Elizabeth Young explained the parallels in that , similar to Frankenstein 's narrative ? in which " a male body is hideously transformed in a scientist 's laboratory and brought back by the scientist from the dead ? Johnson 's disfigurement takes place in a doctor 's laboratory , and it is Trescott that ultimately saves him .

The Monster and Other Stories was the last collection of Crane 's work to be published during his lifetime . In the mid @-@ 20th century , the novella received a resurgence of critical attention , especially in regard to studies of race relations in late 19th @-@ century New York . Critic Chester L. Wofford wrote that the story " reveals truths not socially accepted for almost another hundred years . The story is , indeed , an excoriation of social conditions for the blacks , but more important ... it is an excoriation of all communities , all societies , in all places and all times . " African @-@ American author Ralph Ellison called The Monster , alongside Mark Twain 's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn , " one of the parents of the modern American novel " . In a 1999 article , critic James Nagel stated that " no other work of short fiction in the decade was more important thematically , and nothing until William Faulkner 's " The Bear " so enriched the genre of the United States . Screenwriter and director Albert Band adapted Crane 's novella for the 1959 film Face of Fire , starring Cameron Mitchell as Dr. Trescott and James Whitmore as Johnson . Unlike in the original story , Johnson was depicted as white , and his first name was changed from Henry to Monk .