

FEARFUL SYMMETRY:  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEVIATHAN AND YAHWEH AS SEEN  
THROUGH THE LENS OF MONSTER STUDIES

by © Elliot Mason A Thesis submitted  
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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between the biblical sea monster Leviathan, and the god of the Old Testament, Yahweh, through the use of primary sources taken from the Hebrew Bible. It combines research conducted in the fields of biblical studies and monster studies to investigate parallels between the two figures, drawing particular attention to similarities between the biblical conflict between Leviathan and Yahweh with the Near Eastern combat myth (*chaoskampf*). It touches on the work of biblical scholars such as Hermann Gunkel and John Day, as well as researchers in cultural and monster studies such as Timothy Beal, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, and David Gilmore. Cohen and Gilmore's definitions of monsters and monstrosity are applied to the biblical narrative, with additional insight borrowed from Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*.

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Introduction

*Little lamb, who made thee?  
Dost thou know who made thee?*

- William Blake, *The Lamb*

*When the stars threw down their spears  
And water'd heaven with their tears:  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?*

- William Blake, *The Tyger*

*William Blake's The Tyger*, whence this study takes its name, is a meditation on the nature of creation, and more specifically creation's relationship with its creator. It has become such an oft-referenced and quoted poem that, as Umberto Eco once said of the symbolism of the rose,<sup>1</sup> it has come to hold very little meaning at all. The ubiquity of the work, along with the line chosen for the title of my own study, speaks to an underlying, and perhaps innate, concern with the dualism inherent in human life. Innocence, represented in Blake's *The Lamb*, is not to be contrasted with sin or evil, but instead with experience, as addressed in *The Lamb's* companion piece, *The Tyger*. What, Blake asks, is the ultimate nature of a god capable of creating both the lamb (the good, the holy), and the tyger (the monstrous)? The fearful symmetry of the tyger's stripes is, in fact, the reflection of God's being, which the human mind perceives as both good and evil.<sup>2</sup> Thus,

<sup>1</sup> Umberto Eco's thoughts on the rose as a narrative symbol were voiced in response to questions about his choice of title for his novel *The Name of the Rose*, as well as the Latin hexameter that concludes the work. K. S. Park, "Name of the Rose, Title and Last Line," <http://www.umbertoeco.com/en/name-of-the-rose-title-and-last-line.html>.

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of consistency, throughout the rest of the thesis I will be using the name "Yahweh" for the biblical character, and not either "Elohim" or "God."

the true nature of the creator is as dualistic as his creation, and humankind's experience of evil is merely the natural evil of experience. This is not to say that Blake considers experience to be wholly evil, but rather, that our experience of life is necessarily as multifaceted as the creator it reflects, encompassing both the negative and the positive. The poems contrast the state of life before experience with that of life after innocence has fled. Knowledge, in a sense, is "evil" here. In the context of the biblical narrative, Job experiences just such a change in himself, as he progresses from innocence to experience and knowledge through suffering. Yahweh's manifold nature with regard to innocence and experience, or good and evil, may be intimated in many different ways. The character of Yahweh is capable of great good and great evil from the perspective of the Bible's human characters. He is, after all, the self-same god who both protects Noah and his family from harm, while destroying the rest of his human creations. In the Old Testament in particular, Yahweh is a figure of complex and dubious morality. While he may stop Abraham from sacrificing his son, Isaac, in the Akedah (Gen. 22.1-14), he is not so lenient on Jephthah, whom he holds to Jephthah's vow of offering the first thing which comes out of his home in exchange for Jephthah's victory in battle (Judg. 11:31). When Jephthah's unnamed daughter comes to greet him, Jephthah is not granted the same reprieve as Abraham, and sacrifices her to Yahweh (Judg. 11:34). The purpose of this study, however, is not to cast a value judgement on Yahweh's viability as divine overseer. Rather, I intend to explore the parallelism that exists between Yahweh and his monsters, and in particular the fearful symmetry between Yahweh and the primordial serpent Leviathan. In examining the mythology surrounding the relationship between the two characters, it becomes easier to

situate the moral ambiguity at the heart of many of Yahweh's interactions with the created world, including humankind.

Many of the biblical passages I will be examining centre around a particular mythology known as the combat myth, or *chaoskampf*. In its simplest form the combat myth is a story based in a cosmic battle between the forces of order and chaos. This conflict usually centres around the process, or continued existence of, creation. In Near Eastern mythology, the forces of chaos are often depicted in serpentine or dragon-like form, and it is not uncommon for the “hero” representing order to share common characteristics across cultures. In the Bible, this myth appears in the form of the conflict between Yahweh (order) and Leviathan/Rahab (chaos). As one might expect, Leviathan demonstrates both serpentine, and dragon-like qualities.

Drawing on the field of monster studies to analyze both Leviathan and Yahweh, I seek to contextualize and examine the chaotic underpinnings of both characters. As such, my analysis will be one that combines literary analysis with the socio-cultural methodology used by most scholars of monster theory. Though much research has already been conducted on Leviathan in the field of biblical studies, the majority of these analyses have relied on historical and linguistic data. It is my intention to broaden the scope of Leviathan studies to include relevant material from related fields, while simultaneously making use of traditional scholarship on the subject. Likewise, though monster studies itself provides helpful frameworks and overarching data that can be applied to a reading of any monstrous figure, there has been no in-depth study of Leviathan the biblical serpent within the field. As a central figure and image of monstrosity in the Bible,

Leviathan's influence on monster lore stretches across cultures and chronology, making an analysis of the character within monster studies important to our wider understanding of concepts of the monstrous.

Rather than presenting a straightforward narrative of good and evil, I will argue, the Bible paints its divine players in shades of grey. While Leviathan is most assuredly a monster, its monstrousness lies not in its immorality, but in its physical and symbolic trappings. The fearsomeness of the monster manifests on an existential level, representing the terror of the unknown world beyond Yahweh's ordered creation. Yahweh too may be such a creature, for though he is responsible for creation and its continued existence, in Job he reveals the striking and terrifying similarities between himself and Leviathan. Through his behaviour in the Akedah, Judges, and Job, Yahweh displays his own dubious moral status. Though Yahweh appears arbitrary in his pronouncements, however, Yahweh is like Leviathan: irreducible to a "good" or "evil" character, and reflective of the narrative complexity of the majority of the Bible's characters.



## Chapter 1: Literature Review

### Introduction:

The mythology surrounding Leviathan primarily relates to a larger mythological motif known as the combat myth, and it is with this myth that much of the available literature on the topic is concerned. Insofar as this motif centres on the nature of the dragon and its opponent, it will also be the well from which most of my own research is drawn.

The most basic form of the combat myth is the story of a hero and their battle with a monster. Examples of this story, both modern and ancient, are not difficult to summon to mind,<sup>3</sup> and, indeed, it is the very prevalence of the motif and its association with cosmogony and first-things that makes it of interest to the scholar of religion.

The combat myth usually involves the slaying of a particular monster that threatens either creation, a people, or a physical location such as a city.<sup>4</sup> In stories of the second and third type (those concerned with a more local threat), the danger to a physical location or ethnic and cultural group is a metaphor for the larger, superhuman conflict between the forces of order and those of chaos.<sup>5</sup> In stories of this type there is the ultimate threat of de-stabilization, the metaphorical and physical destruction of those structures that bind and house society and its mores. In a modern context, we see this most readily

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<sup>3</sup> From *Beowulf* to the story of St. George and the dragon, to modern heroic narratives like those of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or Ripley versus the alien in the *Alien* film franchise, humankind has long been fascinated with the story of the hero vanquishing the monster.

<sup>4</sup> In the Assyrian and Babylonian versions of the Labbu myth, human cities are threatened by a “serpent-dragon” that must be defeated. Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987), 44-5.

<sup>5</sup> This applies both ways, since cosmogonic conflict can represent the more local and historical.

in our summer blockbusters, in which a hero and his super-powered friends must defeat a cosmic threat to the universe, Earth, or sometimes just the city of New York.<sup>6</sup>

In the combat myth, both figures, the monster and its opponent, are either gods or godlike figures. In the Babylonian myth of Gilgamesh and Huwawa, for instance, the hero Gilgamesh is a demi-God, while Huwawa is a fire-breathing monster set to guard a divine grove of trees by the god Enlil.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, in Canaanite myth, the god Baal defeats the sea-god Yamm to avoid slavery, and, in the process, becomes lord of all Yamm's previous holdings.<sup>8</sup> In a biblical context, the combat myth is reflected most prominently in the conflict between Yahweh and the forces of chaos as represented by Leviathan the sea monster and Behemoth the land beast. In the majority of these stories there is a cosmogonical background to the narrative. The forces of chaos (or evil) must be subdued by a supreme force for order before creation can occur and the universe be made. As we shall see, this cosmogonical narrative often involves a recurring tension between order and chaos, as chaos must be continually suppressed and tamed.

There are two primary schools of thought as to the origin of the combat myth as it appears in the Old Testament. The first of these, which posits a Babylonian source for the conflict between Yahweh and Leviathan, was largely championed by nineteenth-century

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<sup>6</sup> Take for example the first *Avengers* movie, in which the titular heroes must defeat the god Loki in order to protect New York (and Earth) from destruction.

<sup>7</sup> Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 21-3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 47-8. There are many more examples, ranging from the slaughter of the death-god Mot by Baal's divine sister, Anat (Canaanite), to Marduk's defeat of the female dragon Tiamat (Babylonian), to Egyptian narratives that depict the sun god Ra facing off against the chaos serpent Apophis in order to drive back the forces of disorder. Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 60, 48. Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses, and Traditions of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 106-8.

scholar Hermann Gunkel. The second suggests a Canaanite origin, and bases its conclusions on similarities between the Old Testament and Ugaritic texts discovered in 1929, after Gunkel's time. I have divided my literature review into three sections to reflect the distinct academic approaches to the combat myth as it relates to Leviathan. The first two sections focus on the Babylonian and Canaanite origins respectively, while the third explores non-historical approaches to Leviathan's relationship with Yahweh. In particular, the first section will describe Gunkel's contribution to the field, the second will touch on later work completed by Mary K. Wakeman, K. William Whitney, and John Day; while the third section will be based on the philosophical and literary approaches taken by Richard Kearney and Timothy K. Beal. This will be followed by a brief overview of my own contributions to the discourse, as well as the particular biblical passages that will be covered in subsequent chapters.

### The Babylonian Origin:

In many ways, the study of the history and symbolism behind the biblical monster Leviathan begins in 1895 with Hermann Gunkel, whose seminal work, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton* (henceforth, *Creation*), drew important connections between Leviathan, the combat myth, and the early mythologies of neighbouring cultures. Depending heavily on the *Enuma Elish* for his comparisons, Gunkel argued for a reading of the creation narrative that tied it to both concepts of chaos and the end times. Gunkel posited a Babylonian original that had served as the basis for much of Hebrew eschatology and related narratives. Though his hypotheses could not be

proved to the full extent that he may have wanted during his lifetime, the subsequent discovery of Ugaritic materials relevant to these mythological traditions have lent further credence to his idea that the mythology of the Old Testament had been influenced by, and was perhaps a development out of, other Near Eastern mythological traditions.<sup>9</sup> As K. William Whitney makes clear in his introduction to his English translation of the work, *Creation* was important to the field of biblical scholarship as much for its methodological contributions as its critical conclusions. When the book was written in the late nineteenth century, most academic work on the Bible took the form of source criticism that viewed the text in isolation, rather than considering it as a living text that had developed out of a long-lasting oral tradition that owed much to the myth cycles of neighbouring religious communities and cultures.<sup>10</sup> Likely inspired by the growing interest in oral tradition as popularized by the Brothers Grimm,<sup>11</sup> Gunkel emphasized biblical narratives as parts of a wider folk tradition.

In *Creation*, Gunkel proposes an understanding of the creation story in Genesis 1 based on the mythological motif of the *chaoskampf*, or “chaos struggle.”<sup>12</sup> Such stories, which are thought to stem from an Indo-European source, involve a conflict between the forces of chaos (usually in the form of a serpent or dragon) and a great hero or creator deity. In most versions of the conflict, the hero is ultimately victorious, though on

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<sup>9</sup> Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism*. Harvard Semiotic Monographs, ed. Peter Machinist (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 11, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*, trans. K. William Whitney Jr. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), xxii.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* xxv.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* xxvii.

occasion their victory is only temporary, with the suggestion that the conflict will repeat itself either at the end of time, or continuously.<sup>13</sup> Though traces of a non-Jewish mythological source in Genesis 1 are scarce, Gunkel is able to find evidence of a more complex *chaoskampf* mythology within the text. Central to Gunkel's position are observations concerning the order during which individual cosmological, geological, and biological features are created or acknowledged. He notes in particular the curious detail that darkness in Genesis 1 appears to have existed prior to the creation or, at least, if it was at some point created, such a creation event occurred prior to the events of the text. The earth, in Genesis 1.2 is "formless and void," while "darkness covered the face of the deep." Thus, rather than representing a creation of Yahweh's to mirror his creation of the light in Genesis 1.3-4, the darkness represents the blank canvas upon which Yahweh paints his creations, including the light. Gunkel notes that the idea that darkness preceded light, and that the world was originally composed of darkness and water, can also be found in Babylonian, Assyrian, and other polytheistic cosmogonies that predate Genesis 1.<sup>14</sup> Says Gunkel of this passage, "it is apparent to us from Jewish literature...that the idea of chaos is not consistent with the idea of God as an independently working creator."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> One of the most recognizable traditions in which this sequence of events is more complex is the Norse story of Thor's battle with the Midgard Serpent. At the end of the world, Thor and his fellow gods battle with the forces of chaos, leading to the destruction and subsequent rebirth of the world and mankind. In this version of the *chaoskampf*, Thor defeats the serpent, but at the cost of his own life, since he is said to stagger a few steps before succumbing to its venom. In this version both chaos and hero are victorious. The symbolism of this narrative, taking place as it does at the very end and beginning of creation, emphasizes the cyclical natures both of time, and the struggle against chaos. I shall return to this theme later as it applies to the *chaoskampf* narrative of the Old Testament. John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 288.

<sup>14</sup> Gunkel, *Creation*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Gunkel, *Ibid.*

More evidence, according to Gunkel, can be found in Gen 1.14-19, which introduce Yahweh's creation of the great luminaries (sun and moon) and the stars. Gen 1.16 in particular, he claims, is a reflection of earlier star worship, which we see reflected in the association of stars with angels and human kings, both being symbols of divine or earthly authority.<sup>16</sup> Gunkel designates these concepts “mythologically resonant.”<sup>17</sup> By this he means that Genesis demonstrates characteristics that derive from pre-existing traditions and concepts, and that it is not an independent starting point free of outside influence. From here, Gunkel establishes a connection between the pre-existence of water before creation and Israelite and Babylonian celebrations of the New Year/end of the year. While in Israel the start of the New Year was marked by the beginning of the rain (typically in the fall), Babylon considered this to be the end of the last year. The New Year was thus marked in Babylon by the termination of the rain in the spring. Thus, a Babylonian creation would begin with the end of a rainy season, while a purely Hebrew one would emphasize the beginning of such conditions. On this basis, Gunkel posits that Genesis 2 is based on a Hebrew understanding of the year, with water as Yahweh's first creation, while Genesis 1 favours the Babylonian understanding that the world began with Yahweh's termination of the rain/water.<sup>18</sup> Throughout his analysis, Gunkel relies on similar comparisons between Babylonian and Israelite traditions and texts to support his argument. As I will show later, *Creation* draws attention to passages from Psalms, Job, Amos, and Isaiah to elaborate on the role of the *chaoskampf* motif in the Old Testament.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 12.

Although Gunkel's concern is with this theme generally, rather than Leviathan specifically, the role of Leviathan as a representation of chaos is integral to his understanding of the myth as a whole.

Gunkel explains that Leviathan is at times described as “twisting” or “curving.” This is due in part to the Babylonian and Hebrew conception of the ocean, which viewed the sea as a “ring around the lands.”<sup>19</sup> According to Gunkel, the chaos serpent exists in a variety of different roles, as antagonist in Genesis and Psalms,<sup>20</sup> as pet and plaything in Job and Ps.104.26,<sup>21</sup> and as a symbolic stand-in for enemy Egypt in Ps. 87.4, where he appears under the name Rahab.<sup>22</sup> That Leviathan the chaos monster appears in the Old Testament under a variety of names and guises is remarked upon early in Gunkel's analysis, and he convincingly draws connections between the multitude of monsters described as *rĕhābîm* (Ps. 40.5) and *tannînim* (Ps. 74.13).<sup>23</sup> Thus Gunkel establishes an early connection between several terms found throughout the Old Testament, and which do much to broaden the potential field of study, as well as scholarly understanding of the *chaoskampf*. Additionally, Gunkel takes care to establish a solid connection between Leviathan the chaos serpent and the elements of darkness and water. These connections are crucial to both Gunkel's own interpretations of Genesis 1, and those of the present study. Commenting on Job 41.23-26, Gunkel draws a clear connection between all three concepts:

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 26.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 28.

Here the places of Leviathan are named: deep, sea, foundation of the current—which alternate with names of the underworld, as though underworld and sea normally coincide. And, moreover, the word now appears which links the two conceptions and leaves its mark upon our view of Leviathan. That word is  $\text{D}\bar{\text{i}}\bar{\text{h}}\bar{\text{h}}\bar{\text{h}}$  [*těhôm*].<sup>24</sup>

This linkage of terms that sees Leviathan made lord over *těhôm*, connects more explicitly to the creation myth as depicted in Genesis 1, where we find no mention of the name Leviathan (nor any of his epithets), but where *těhôm* is used to describe the primeval waters that existed prior to creation, and which needed separating in order to facilitate the rest of the creation event. Here, *tehôm* assumes the role of chaotic antagonist in the *chaoskampf* narrative. This is echoed in Ps. 74.12-19, which describe Yahweh's victory over both Leviathan and the sea, which he has “divided mightily (Ps. 74.13).

For my thesis it is important to establish the existence of a credible and prevailing narrative of Leviathan as biblical chaos serpent, since I will be arguing that the fearful symmetry between the two figures of Leviathan and Yahweh comes from both their associations with chaos. Gunkel's contributions in this area do not end with these simple connections, nor even his methodological approach to the *chaoskampf* narrative, but for our purposes, these advances in the study of Leviathan form a backbone on which to support further research and interpretation. While Old Testament criticism forms a large part of *Creation*, over half the work is concerned with the New Testament and, in particular, the book of Revelation. Gunkel's thesis here is much the same as in the earlier part of the study, and seeks to reinterpret Revelation through a comparative study between

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 35.



the Bible and Babylonian mythology, as the title of Chapter Five rather ambitiously states, “The Tradition of Revelation 12 is of Babylonian Origin.”<sup>25</sup>

### The Canaanite Origin:

While there are points of disagreement from scholars as to particular readings rendered by Gunkel in *Creation*,<sup>26</sup> his central thesis that the biblical *chaoskampf* originates in a Babylonian myth is the most controversial. It is now widely believed that the biblical version of the myth comes from Canaanite sources and traditions. While nonetheless building on the methodological approach established in the nineteenth century by Hermann Gunkel, subsequent scholarship has parted ways with the connections forged in his interpretation and focuses instead on similarities to be found between Yahweh's conflict with Leviathan and other Near Eastern traditions.

Mary K. Wakeman's detailed study of the terminology associated with Leviathan in the Old Testament, seeks to draw connections between the term “leviathan” and any and all references to serpents, snakes, the primordial deep, etc. Though comprehensive and of much relevance to my own research, many of Wakeman's points appear tenuous.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 239.

<sup>26</sup> For instance, John Day rejects the notion proposed by Gunkel that *rēhābīm* (Ps 40.5) is a plural derived from Rahab, arguing instead for a simpler reading that assumes the definition of “proud men.” John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 198), 6, note 11.

<sup>27</sup> In particular, Whitney comments on a lack of scholastic acceptance of Wakeman's theories concerning Behemoth and its relationship with the god Mot (Whitney, 29). The same elaborate linguistic approach that Wakeman takes in her analysis of Behemoth and Mot is used to connect various occurrences of serpents, staves, and fire with Leviathan the biblical chaos serpent. See: Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: E.J.Brill,1973), 84-5. John Day, too, finds her conclusions flawed, finding fault not only with her association of Mot with Leviathan and Behemoth unsupportable, but he also questions her interpretation of Is.30.7 as reading “to act like Rahab.” Day's own translation for the passage is: “the silenced Rahab.” Day, *God's Conflict*, 84-6.

Though many of Wakeman's points do require more evidence, her overall contribution to the study of Leviathan and serpent symbolism in the Old Testament cannot be overstated. The links Wakeman's research forges between instances of the term *tehôm*, “the deep,” and Leviathan provide an excellent resource for anyone interested in primordial serpent mythology.<sup>28</sup> Beyond her linguistic and historical analyses, Wakeman makes several critical observations that prove useful for my own study of Leviathan, and how the conflict between Yahweh and the primordial chaos monster is rooted in their shared associations with liminality. As Wakeman traces the origins of the combat myth, she draws especial attention to myths of cosmic conflict that result in castration, male pregnancy, and same-sex intercourse.<sup>29</sup> Wakeman points out that it is “the possibility that the liberating god becomes a repressive monster is expressed.”<sup>30</sup> She further goes on to detail what ingredients appear to go into the construction of “the monster” of the combat myth, declaring it both devourer and separator. The devourer does not allow for differentiation, while the separator must be contained and bound for it opposes change and natural progression through intercourse. According to Wakeman:

What makes “the separator” such a villain is that he opposes change. He is as much a reactionary as ‘the devourer’ is a radical, denying all distinctions to affirm fundamental, underived being. The one is just as much a tyrant as the other . . . . The basic meaning of “god killed the dragon” is that time proceeds, bringing fulfillment as it brings death; water flows rather than

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<sup>28</sup> Wakeman, 86-92.

<sup>29</sup> Thus, in the Hittite epic of the storm god versus Kumarbi, Kumarbi (a man) is impregnated when he ingests the genitals of the god Anu. Kumarbi gives birth to the storm god, and Anu and the newly-begotten storm god supplant his father as king of the heavens. In Greek mythology, Kronos castrates his father Ouranos in order to seize control of creation, and in the Egyptian story of the conflict between Set(h) and Horus, Set(h) (antagonist) is likewise castrated and impregnated by the god Horus. *Ibid.* 25-6; 33-5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

floods, the sun rises as surely as it sets, sons become fathers as they engender sons. What makes Indra, Marduk, Zeus, Horus, Baal, etc. heroes is their ability to provide an order in which this free yet regulated movement is assured.<sup>31</sup>

This concept underlies Wakeman's division of the combat myth into two types of stories: the space model, and the time model. The space model, as one might expect, refers to versions of the story that have to do with the withholding of space, either through the maintenance of boundaries between primeval waters of creation and whatever lies outside, or the refusal to differentiate such waters. Often in such traditions, the monster itself is split apart to create the world, as in the case of the goddess/chaos dragon Tiamat.<sup>32</sup> The time model, as Wakeman expresses it, is concerned with the progression of generations. There is an appropriate time, says Wakeman, for the son to supplant the father, as there is for the father to be supplanted. Danger, therefore, lies not only in the refusal of the parent to allow the child to assume their rightful place, but also in the possibility for the child to prematurely attempt to oust the parent from their position of authority. In this paradigm, the antagonist monster is dangerous because it prevents the natural progression of time, as represented by the system of succession.<sup>33</sup>

Beyond her discussion of these patterns, Wakeman's efforts centre on a dissolution of the boundaries between the various figures associated with the combat myth.

Behemoth and Leviathan (land and sea monsters) are, for Wakeman, different ways of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 39-40.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 7; 24.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 42.

approaching the same figure.<sup>34</sup> Though her association of Behemoth with Mot has been contested, she makes the astute observation that if Mot (death, the swallower) can be swallowed by Yahweh, then Mot is nothing but another facet of Yahweh himself.<sup>35</sup> If we accept both of Wakeman's points, then Leviathan himself would be none other than an aspect of Yahweh himself, or, failing that, a second creator. Nevertheless, Wakeman goes on to distinguish between Yahweh and his monsters, claiming that:

The monster is by definition irregular, irrational, erratic, lacking positive intention. God differs from the monster in one respect that is never excepted, and that is that he (who is the law) *regulates* the exercise of his powers. The reality that is God is by definition intended, and legal.<sup>36</sup>

This view would suggest that Yahweh is immovable where the monster is fluid, and life-giving as opposed to destructive. The problem with this interpretation, of course, is that the biblical corpus itself would suggest the opposite. As Chapter 4 will show, Yahweh's actions are often characterized by a certain ambiguity, proving at once protective, destructive, and erratic in their application. If, however, Yahweh is himself a partner of Leviathan, these inconsistencies in the biblical narrative can be accounted for. Following John Day's interpretation that Yahweh's defeat of Leviathan represents Yahweh's ascent as king and creator,<sup>37</sup> one could say that the very material that Leviathan either guards or is composed of is the stuff of which Yahweh's world order is constructed. The implication, as I have discussed above, is that at one point Leviathan may have represented a force co-

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 116.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 108.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 138.

<sup>37</sup> John Day, *God's Conflict*, 19.

equal with Yahweh's divine authority. While such authority may have been lost during the battle before creation, the continuous re-emergence of the chaos monster in the form of Israel's diverse enemies would suggest a cyclical reawakening of Leviathan's power.

Such a view is in keeping with the work of David Penchansky, whose study, *Twilight of the Gods: Polytheism in the Hebrew Bible*, re-evaluates a number of biblical stories in an attempt to render more accessible the scholarly position that polytheism existed alongside proto-Judaic monotheism.<sup>38</sup> In support of the theories proposed by both Gunkel and Day, Penchansky promotes a view that long-standing Near Eastern traditions and mythologies had an impact on the Bible, and on Hebrew monotheism as a living religion. Though Penchansky does not specifically address the significance of Leviathan in his study, his commentary provides a suitable starting point for a discussion of Leviathan's relationship with Yahweh, and the possibility that Leviathan once represented a god of chaos<sup>39</sup> or was yet another part of Yahweh as godhead. Leviathan's function as narrative villain and biblical antagonist is, I will argue, a remnant of a story that saw Yahweh and Leviathan as figures of at least equal power, the one the shadow of the other. More radically, perhaps, I will propose that Yahweh and Leviathan share a hereditary connection that casts Yahweh's subjugation of Leviathan in an Oedipal light.

Mary K. Wakeman's contributions to the study of Leviathan are largely based on a methodological approach that emphasizes a close linguistic reading of the text. While her

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<sup>38</sup> Penchansky re-evaluates the wrath of Chemosh in Kings, as well as the significance of the *Bene Elohim* (related to the notion of a divine council) throughout the biblical narrative. Later chapters are focused on the possible existence of God's wife, Asherah. David Penchansky, *Twilight of the Gods: Polytheism in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> One imagines a deity similar to the Egyptian Apophis, the serpent said to swallow the sun each evening, only to be defeated every night by the god Ra in the form of a cat. Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology*, 107.

work is extensive, it has found criticism in John Day's analysis of the biblical *chaoskampf*.

John Day offers the most extensive elaboration of the proposed Canaanite origin of the *chaoskampf* motif in the Bible (and refutation of the Babylonian connection championed by Gunkel) in his study, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*. While Day is in agreement with Gunkel that an older *chaoskampf* tradition underlies the biblical creation story, he contests Gunkel's assertion that the conflict between Yahweh and Leviathan is based on the Babylonian myth of Marduk's fight against the female chaos dragon Tiamat.<sup>40</sup> Day argues:

All those passages in the Old Testament which speak about God's control of the sea at the time of creation naturally presuppose the archaic world view shared by the ancient Israelites along with other peoples of the ancient near east that both above the domed firmament of the heaven and below the earth there is a cosmic sea. Rain was regarded as having its origin in the cosmic sea above the firmament and coming down through the windows of the heavens, while the world's seas and lakes were thought of as being connected with the subterranean part of the cosmic sea (cf. Gen. 7:11).<sup>41</sup>

Day points to the Ugaritic texts discovered in 1929 as evidence to link the Canaanite monster Yam with Leviathan, and the Canaanite sky god Baal with Yahweh<sup>42</sup> According to Day, in the Ugaritic stories known as the Baal Cycle, Yam and Leviathan are related, though they are not analogous. Rather, Baal and his fellow gods are responsible for the subjugation of multiple chaos beasts, since both Yam and Leviathan

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<sup>40</sup> Day, *God's Conflict*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

are mentioned separately and not in parallel.<sup>43</sup> Day's arguments are compelling, relying on strong textual similarities between biblical verses and those of the Ugaritic texts. Not only is Leviathan itself mentioned in the Ugaritic texts as having been defeated by Baal, but the monster is described using similar terms to its description in Ps. 74.14 and Job 26.13, that is, as “twisting” ( 𐎎𐎗𐎕𐎗𐎕 ) and possessing multiple heads.<sup>44</sup> Day's argument that Leviathan the chaos monster has “helpers” in both the Ugaritic and biblical stories, indicates that Yam should be taken to refer to a different monster, and that Leviathan is simply one such helper. Similarly, in Ps. 74.13, Day identifies the plural *tannīnīm* with multiple dragons that may have been defeated at the same time as Leviathan. Leviathan, the named monster, appears to have been of chief importance, and so these other dragons can perhaps be read as helpers. Day points out that this is the case in the legend of Tiamat from the *Enûma Elish*. A similar term is found in Job 9.13, which refers to “the helpers of Rahab” according to Day's translation.<sup>45</sup>

Apart from his critiques of Gunkel, and his support of a Canaanite influence on the biblical *chaoskampf*, Day makes further contributions and interpretations concerning the nature of Leviathan and the symbolism associated with its related mythology. Like Gunkel before him, Day sees an obvious connection between the *chaoskampf* motif in the Bible and the concept of death, rebirth and the natural cycle of the calendar year. In

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 13-4.

<sup>44</sup> In the Ugaritic story, the dragon is said to have seven heads, though in the biblical version only multiple heads are mentioned, with no specification as to the exact number. Ibid. 13-4.

<sup>45</sup> Day is in accordance with Gunkel's identification of Leviathan with Rahab, though he contests Gunkel's suggestion that Rahab was a female Leviathan, and the named Leviathan the male of the species. Ibid. 6-7; 24.

particular, Day identifies a possible *sitz im Leben* (situation in life) in the form of the Hebrew Feast of Tabernacles that marked (and still marks) the agricultural year end. Using the work of S. Mowinckel and P. Voltz as a starting point, Day posits that Pss. 74, 93, and 29 suggest a connection between the *chaoskampf* tradition, The Feast of Tabernacles, and the enthronement of Yahweh. Yahweh's enthronement would here be associated with the triumph over the chaos monster, as well as the end of one year and the beginning of another.<sup>46</sup> This association would fit well within the larger mythical picture that identifies chaos dragons and serpents with the notion of cyclical time. Like Thor's defeat of the Midgard Serpent, and the subsequent end and re-beginning of the universe,<sup>47</sup> the defeat of Leviathan heralds the end and beginning both. Like the serpentine symbol of *ouroboros* devouring its own tail, Leviathan's twisting body becomes an image of time looping about itself. Furthermore, Day's linkage of Yahweh's enthronement with Leviathan's defeat has curious consequences insofar as Yahweh's sole mastery of creation is concerned. We have already seen with Gunkel that the biblical account in Genesis 1 suggests the *pre-existence*, rather than creation, of the chaos waters. This would be in line with a reading of Leviathan and its "helpers" as creatures it was necessary for Yahweh to destroy in order to attain lordship over the materials of creation. Much emphasis is therefore placed on the power and importance of Leviathan as a force of primal, creative energy. While interpreting Leviathan's relationship with Yahweh as a co-equal creator might be taking this idea too far, it does not seem a stretch to suggest that Leviathan in its

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>47</sup> Lindow, 288.



undefeated state represents a source of creative energy of equal importance and power to Yahweh, though perhaps of a different type. If Yahweh's defeat of Leviathan resulted in his enthronement, then the chaotic waters Leviathan represented, and which were used in the construction of the world, could surely be said to be the materials of which Yahweh's kingdom was ultimately composed. Day takes a somewhat more literal view than this, returning to the Ugaritic story of Baal's defeat of Yam to draw comparisons from Baal's resulting enthronement following Yam's defeat, and that of Yahweh after the conquest of Leviathan.<sup>48</sup> For Day, the roaring seas of Ps. 93 suggest a blatantly violent conflict between two sides: the waters of chaos, and Yahweh.<sup>49</sup> Although Day rejects a direct correlation between Yam and Leviathan, many of his points depend on just such a connection. While it is clear that he is correct in indicating that Leviathan appears in his own right in the Ugaritic texts, that should not preclude Leviathan from assuming some of Yam's features. Indeed, could it not be possible that the biblical Leviathan is a hybrid monster, fashioned from the bodies of Yam and Canaanite-Leviathan both? For Day, Yahweh has no trouble assimilating characteristics of both El and Baal.<sup>50</sup> Like Baal, Yahweh in Ps. 104.3 is said to "make the cloud [his] chariot." Day also makes the claim that Yahweh takes on the characteristics of El as lord of creation, pointing out that both Yahweh and El are said to consult with divine forces during the process of creation, and, as well, the Bible takes the battle with the dragon from Baal's related mythology.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Day, *God's Conflict*, 35-7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 18, 30, 56, 107.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 56.

Day, like Gunkel, argues that Leviathan is not intended to be analogous to a crocodile, nor was Behemoth intended to represent a hippopotamus: such interpretations stem from readings of the monsters' lengthy descriptions in Job. Scholars have struggled for decades to use these descriptions to link Leviathan and Behemoth with real animals that would have lived in the Mediterranean or Near East at the time the text was composed.<sup>52</sup> For Day, such attempts to link what are clearly mythological beasts with existing animals seem misguided, and a connection impossible to prove with any certainty. Day's rejection of these ideas is a welcome change.

Zoological readings of Job focus on a few particular passages from the book. Much of the basis for equating the monster with a crocodile is based on the description of Leviathan's scaled back in Job 41.7-9, but, as Day makes clear, there are a number of passages from Job that make the association unlikely. For one, Leviathan is described as impossible to capture or kill in multiple verses. Job 40.25 asks, "Can you draw out Leviathan with a fish-hook or press down his tongue with a cord?" while similarly, Job 40.31 asks whether you "can fill his skin with harpoons, or his head with fish-hooks?" In Job 41.18 it is attested that "if one reaches him with a sword, it will not avail, nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin." For all intents and purposes, Leviathan cannot be caught save by Yahweh himself. Yet, as Day points out, it was known at the time that the Egyptians hunted crocodiles.<sup>53</sup> Similar to the more common opinion that Leviathan can be

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<sup>52</sup> Day, *God's Battle*, 62, 65-75.

<sup>53</sup> While in general I am in agreement with Day's stance that Leviathan and Behemoth are both mythological creatures that were not intended to be equivalent to any specific monster, it is tempting to suggest that they nonetheless might have retained their grandiosity whilst still owing some creative detail to a variety of natural animals. As Day himself points out, it seems likely the author of Job thought of Leviathan and Behemoth as real creatures. While this appears to make it less likely that

identified as a crocodile, are the suggestions by G. R. Driver that Leviathan was either a whale or a dolphin.<sup>54</sup> As in the case of the crocodile, Day easily refutes such claims since in this case, too, both the whale and dolphin were known animals in the Near East, and there a number of dissimilarities between the descriptions of Leviathan in Job and the appearance of these natural animals. Additionally, one of Driver's points concerning the dolphin rests on a passage from Pliny in which it is said dolphins had been known to enter into agreements with fisherman, receiving wages in exchange for herding fish toward the fishermen's nets. Where this falters is that Job, rather than claiming one *can* enter into an agreement with Leviathan, states just the opposite: "will it enter into an agreement with you?" (Job 40.28).<sup>55</sup> If Job refers in any way to the whale or dolphin, it seems more likely that such references serve as comparisons of difference that further demonstrate Leviathan's monstrousness. Indeed, the purpose of Yahweh's speech to Job is to demonstrate his own might, since he is the only one to have defeated the monster. How can Job, the text poses, hope to challenge Yahweh when Yahweh can best a beast of such size and magnificence? Whales, crocodiles, and fish are the prey and playthings of humankind, while Yahweh hunts and plays with monsters.<sup>56</sup>

One of the most common associations of Rahab and Leviathan is with the nation

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either beast could be analogous to crocodile, whale, or ox, it may explain why the author would have borrowed elements from natural animals for his descriptions. See: Day, *God's Conflict*, 65, 83. In fact, it is a common feature of monster mythology that monsters combine elements of natural animals in order to form hybrid organisms. David D. Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 188-9.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 66-7.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 67.

<sup>56</sup> Leviathan is not the only monster with which Yahweh fights and plays, and one of Day's greatest contributions to the study of the *chaoskampf* motif is his identification of the chaos monster Behemoth

of Egypt. In Job 9.13 “God will not turn back his anger: beneath him bowed the helpers of Rahab.” It has become generally accepted here that Rahab refers to Leviathan alone. Day is in agreement with this reading, which centralizes the *chaoskampf* motif as a point of focus in the verse.<sup>57</sup> Later in his analysis, Day devotes an entire chapter to the historicization of Yahweh's struggle with Leviathan. Thus we read in Ps. 87.4 a list of historical nations, including the name Rahab: “I reckon Rahab and Babylon as those that know me; behold Philistia and Tyre with Ethiopia.” As Day asserts, it seems ridiculous to consider in this instance that Rahab does not refer to a country, since it is paired with Babylon in a list of prominent countries and city-states. That Rahab is a name granted Egypt elsewhere in the Bible, along with the fact that one would expect its name to appear on such a list, suggest that that is indeed the author's intention.<sup>58</sup> Important for our purposes is the significance of naming an enemy nation after a chaos monster that has been established as the divine enemy. As Day says, “That this could be done is indicative of the fact that the powers of chaos, though subdued at the creation, were still liable to manifest themselves in the present on the historical plane.”<sup>59</sup>

That Egypt in particular was identified with Rahab is not unusual, given the

with the Ugaritic creature Arš. Rejecting the idea that Behemoth can be equated one-for-one with the hippopotamus or ox (as he does with Leviathan and the crocodile) Day suggests a reading that takes note of Behemoth's bovine description, but which places the creature within the mythological monstrous tradition. Like Leviathan, Day claims, Behemoth has a Canaanite origin, and corresponds to El's calf, Arš (also called Atik). In the Ugaritic texts, Atik/Arš is mentioned alongside Leviathan, with both creatures fought and defeated by the god Anat. Indeed, Day is able to find multiple examples of Atik's partnering with Leviathan in Mesopotamian and Ugaritic mythology, including one incidence of the pair appearing together as beasts who inhabit the sea. Ibid. 79-81, 83.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>58</sup> Especially, says Day, considering the relative importance to biblical history of Egypt, versus that of Ethiopia. Indeed, the pairing of Babylon and Egypt makes sense given the enormity of both nations' influence within and without the text. Ibid. 90.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 88.

persistent role of antagonist that it assumes throughout the Old Testament. Furthermore, according to Day, that the salvation from the Egyptians in Exodus took place at sea further intensifies the connection.<sup>60</sup> Most often, “Rahab” represents both Egypt and the divine conflict with chaos. Indeed, even in those locations wherein it is clear that a reference to Egypt was intended, the association with the *chaoskampf* merely intensifies the chaotic and oppressive image of Egypt. Egypt (or Babylon), in Is. 51.9 seems to be equated with Leviathan insofar as there is the hope during the exile that Yahweh will defeat Babylon as he once did Rahab. Here, just as Yahweh became king by defeating the monster, so too might Israel regain independence through the defeat of Babylon/Egypt. This reaffirms some of Day's earlier points concerning the Feast of Tabernacles, and the association of the autumn festival with the renewal of Yahweh's status as king and creator.<sup>61</sup> The importance of the *chaoskampf* motif was not limited, in this case, to its mythological past, but was a predictor of things to come, as well as a means of understanding contemporary struggles within the context of Yahweh's power. As a result the Bible supports the understanding that divine order itself might undergo cycles. Had the monster Leviathan ever truly been defeated, for instance, would it rise again in the metaphorical form of enemy nations? The notion of an ultimate battle between the forces of order and chaos (Yahweh and Leviathan) is an eschatological one, but as we have already seen, the mythological end times do not necessarily represent a final and complete end, but rather, the continuation of a series of ebbs and flows of divine power

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<sup>60</sup> Babylon and the Seleucid dynasty are also referred to by the epithet “Rahab” in Jer. 51.34, Is. 27.1, and Dan. 7). Ibid. 89-90.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 92.

and conflict.

Equally significant is the idea of associating a real-world enemy with a monstrous one. While the nations of Egypt and Babylon were understood as oppressors and conquerors, there is nonetheless a dehumanization of both cultures that takes place in associating them with one's symbol of ultimate otherness. Leviathan and its "helpers," according to Day's interpretation, had to be defeated in order for Yahweh to attain kingship and harness the primordial forces of creation. There is an element of violence and desecration to the act if one considers the body of the waters in Genesis as the body of Leviathan itself, bodies that are separated to create night and day (Gen. 1.4), separated again from one another to create the sky (Gen. 6-8), and re-shaped to create the earth (Gen. 1.9).<sup>62</sup> Was Egypt such a body to be divided and reshaped? For an oppressed people, certainly the idea of Yahweh felling the enemy with the full force of his vengeance would have been a powerful one. The Old Testament, of course, is no stranger to the "othering" of enemy nations or peoples.<sup>63</sup> In Judges, for instance, particular

<sup>62</sup> This is remarkably similar to the cosmogonies of a number of different cultures, including Egyptian, Norse, and Greco-Roman mythologies that see one deity slain in order to fashion the vault of the heavens, or to form the oceans and earth. In the Greco-Roman model, the god Kronos is responsible for the separation of the heavens through the murder of his father, Ouranos. See Joseph Campbell, *The Mythic Image* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974), 76-7. Similarly, in the Norse tradition, the giant Ymir is the progenitor not only of his fellow frost giants, but his body and blood are also used to create the heavens, earth and seas. In some accounts, the god Bor is responsible for killing the evil giant Ymir and fashioning of the cosmos. In some versions of the story, Ymir is the sole being in existence before Bor and Bor's relatives, and so it is suggested that Ymir procreates hermaphroditically. Ymir is also potentially linked with Bor along the maternal line, and thus creation requires the slaying of maternal kin, as noted by Lindow in his examination of the extant materials. Lindow, 323-5. Egypt myth and its portrayal of chaos is slightly more complex, as we shall see later in this study. Though Egyptian myth does contain violence done unto the bodies of chaos monsters (particularly the serpent Apophis), the bodies that compose the heavens and earth are complicit in their own use as barriers against such forces. Thus we have the goddess Neith, stretching upward from the chaos waters below to protect the solar child from Apophis, as well as Nut the bovine sky goddess, and Shu supporting the heavens. Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 52-3, 57.

<sup>63</sup> "To other" in its verbal sense is to place someone or something in the position of "the other," distancing

emphasis is placed on the foreignness of the dangerous women Samson encounters. J. Cheryl Exum, in her feminist analysis of several Old Testament texts, discusses how the text of Samson's narrative leads us to believe that all three of the dangerous women Samson encounters are foreigners (and in particular Philistines) without ever explicitly stating the fact, save for in the case of his wife from Timnah.<sup>64</sup> Not only is the foreignness of these dangerous women used to “other” the individual female characters of the story, but their betrayals and deeds as women are used to smear the reputation of their respective homelands. Exum notes how the Philistines continue to be separated narratively by their distinctly foreign customs, such as their lack of circumcision. Likewise, Samson is narratively punished for his choice to marry a Philistine woman.<sup>65</sup> There is a clear association in Samson's story between foreigners and amorality, and similar association drives the connection between Rahab (primordial chaos) and Egypt.<sup>66</sup>

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them from oneself and the larger culture or society by emphasizing their differences, or imposing differences upon them.

<sup>64</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 69.

<sup>65</sup> Exum, 71-2.

<sup>66</sup> In Day's estimation, the sense of distrust felt toward Egypt by the authors of the Old Testament may have been due in part to the mistaken belief that the Egyptians worshiped chaos. Day, *God's Conflict*, 94. Narratives of chaos and order permeate Egyptian mythology, cosmogony, and culture, and so it is not surprising how the connection might be formed. According to Egyptologist Geraldine Pinch:

Chaos was not presented as totally evil. Beings such as Nun, god of the primeval ocean, were honoured as 'fathers' of the creator. It is implied that some elements of chaos were necessary for survival and had to be harnessed rather than eliminated . . . People were thought to have the capacity to choose between living in *maat* [order] or *isfet* [the evil aspect of chaos]. (Pinch, *Very Short*, 74).

That said, it is perhaps telling that *isfet* is described as “evil.” As Pinch goes on to say, in the Egyptian *Book of Two Ways* there is an underlying theme of retribution against those who would oppose *maat* as it was represented by the king. Order was highly prized in Ancient Egypt, and so saturated Egyptian life and culture that it informed a standardized style of royal architecture and sculpture. Ian Shaw, *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 162. The king, too, was seen as an earthly vessel of *maat*, able to impose order upon *isfet* through proper religious observation. This included, but was not limited to, the building of temples and religious monuments, and appropriate sacrifices to the

John Day's main contributions appear in the form of his detailed collation of evidence to support connections between Rahab, Leviathan, and their various epithets throughout the Old Testament and related literature. His particular focus on rejecting Gunkel's Babylonian *chaoskampf* theories in favour of a Canaanite origin for the motif likewise represents what was a distinct advance in Leviathan studies. His linkage of the concept of kingship and coronation with the overcoming of the forces of chaos, as well as the Feast of Tabernacles, bring to the fore the significance of Yahweh's defeat of Leviathan in real-world terms that offer new insight into the symbolism of their relationship.

It should be noted that although scholars have criticized Gunkel's argument concerning the relationship between chaos and creation,<sup>67</sup> scholarship largely agrees with Gunkel's main points. K. William Whitney, in his in-depth linguistic and historical analysis of the *chaoskampf* motif, spends some time defending Gunkel's premise from its opponents. And although H.W.F. Saggs argues that Job 26 is unconcerned with creation, Whitney rebuffs the claim, indicating the inadequacies in Saggs's understanding of the definition of creation. Whitney rightfully points out that one's analysis, “must be nuanced,

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gods. The distinction between order and chaos was thus very important to the Egyptians, though chaos was respected as a force in its own right, as were its divine representatives. Ironically, it was likely Egyptian culture's preoccupation with the maintenance of civil and divine order that led to a Hebrew belief in Egypt's worship of chaos. Apart from this, Leviathan and the *chaoskampf* motif had long been associated with serpents and other reptilian animals. Many of Egypt's gods are depicted in the form of serpents, crocodiles, or anthropomorphisms of reptilian animals. The *uraeus*, an Egyptian symbol of royalty, took the form of a rearing cobra atop the crowns of Egypt's kings and queens. Pinch, *Very Short*, 73-4, 90. Egypt was thus, perhaps, an easy target to identify with forces of chaos that took the form of an ancient sea serpent and its “helpers.” Whether literal or metaphorical, the powers of chaos in the Old Testament are often a code for anything perceived as evil, and which only Yahweh is capable of defeating.

<sup>67</sup> See in particular the work of H.W.F. Saggs and W.G. Lambert as introduced by K. William Whitney: Whitney, 12.



first, by a broader understanding of creation than that of 'absolute origin,' and second, by the recognition that the various motifs associated with creation (i.e., kingship, temple building, etc.) may be configured in distinctive ways in different mythic accounts.”<sup>68</sup> In the context of Job, therefore, we can understand “creation” as potential, with Yahweh the ever potent reservoir of creative energies. That Leviathan itself might also represent such energies, the raw material with which creation was made, might be another avenue of exploration. Neil Forsyth presents an opposing view, arguing that not all iterations of the combat myth are concerned with the cosmogonical. With reference to the Labbu<sup>69</sup> myth, Forsyth demonstrates how the combat myth motif can recur without a connection to a creation narrative on a cosmic scale. Here, says Forsyth, it is a city we find in need of defense. According to Forsyth the story cannot have cosmogonic significance, since a city could not exist prior to creation. It is my contention that Whitney would disagree, as I also disagree. As Forsyth himself says, “it has to do with the preservation rather than the creation of orderly life.”<sup>70</sup> The preservation of order in the face of chaos is, I would argue, an element of the combat myth that cannot exist but as a metaphor for cosmogony. It is merely a reflection of the primary combat narrative, a microcosmic re-enactment of the *chaoskampf* as it is hinted at in Genesis.

Though my own analysis will focus on the biblical canon with only occasional reference to non-canonical literature, it is worth noting that K. William Whitney's study sets itself apart from the work of Wakemen, Day, and Gunkel through its extensive use of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>69</sup> Labbu being the name of a dragon. Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 45.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

non-canonical literature to extend academic understanding of recurring motifs in the *chaoskampf* tradition. In particular, Whitney makes use of passages from 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 Apocalypse of Baruch to analyze the temporal fluidity that characterizes the conflict between Yahweh and Leviathan. Both primordial and eschatological narratives that include Leviathan and Behemoth exist in mythic time, according to Whitney, allowing the defeat of the chaos monsters to be “melded with the focal event of their destruction by God and their use as food for God's righteous.”<sup>71</sup> In 4 Ezra 6.49, Whitney indicates the explicit naming of Leviathan by God. This, he says, is unusual, as nowhere else either in the biblical canon or pseudepigraphia does Yahweh name any creatures. Instead, this task is reserved for Adam, whose wisdom, according to Rabbinic sources, can be intuited from his participation in the naming.<sup>72</sup> In Whitney's interpretation, both Leviathan and Behemoth are emphasized in 4 Ezra as created things formed from the watery elements of creation.<sup>73</sup> Whitney identifies the combination of initial combat and eschatological feast with a motif he calls the “combat-banquet” tradition, which he differentiates from the *axis-mundi* tradition that establishes Leviathan as the world axis, or spine.<sup>74</sup> Though the majority of his work is a reiteration of ideas established and discussed by earlier scholarship (particularly that of Gunkel and Day), it is in the area of pseudepigraphic studies that Whitney makes the greatest contribution of new analytical material.

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<sup>71</sup> Here, Whitney refers to the Jewish folkloric tradition that Behemoth and Leviathan will be served as a dinner for the righteous during the end-times. Whitney, 50-1.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 36, 40.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 30, 59.

Literary and Philosophical Approaches to the Monstrous:

Much of my own research is rooted in the work of previous scholarship that re-examines Yahweh's role as creator, and protector god in light of new analyses of the biblical monster Leviathan. In particular, Timothy K. Beal's *Religion and its Monsters* has been instrumental in drawing attention to the narrative parallels that exist between Yahweh and the creatures who serve as his biblical antagonists. Using the *Enuma Elish*, along with the rich history of Near Eastern mythology as his own foundation, Beal argues that a comparative and close analysis of the Old Testament and related texts reveals a paradoxical relationship between Yahweh and the chaos monster, Leviathan.<sup>75</sup> Beal argues that the relationship is:

both interdependent and mutually exclusive. In these stories, cosmic horror is profoundly theological. The precariousness of the world as a livable abode for humankind is believed to be rooted in a divinity in which creation and chaos are in perpetual and ultimately unresolvable tension with one another.<sup>76</sup>

This is suggestive of the same cyclical *chaoskampf* motif that was mentioned earlier in relation to Norse mythology and the broader tradition of Near Eastern eschatology. Here, Gunkel and Day's image of a Yahweh who has a perpetual and recurring need to reassert his kingship over creation by defeating Leviathan recurs in Beal's concept of divine balance.

Furthermore, in Beal estimation, it is unclear whether or not Yahweh himself is not

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<sup>75</sup> Timothy Beal, *Religion and its Monsters* (London: Routledge, 2002), 29-30.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

at least partly responsible for this aforementioned chaos, or the tension it has created. Are Leviathan and Yahweh partners in creation, asks Beal, rather than forces in staunch opposition to one another?<sup>77</sup> The answer, as one might expect, is complex. According to Beal, Leviathan is just one example of the otherworldly within the worldly, a feature shared by other biblical and mythological monsters associated with chaos.<sup>78</sup> This has enormous implications for creation. If the demonic or antagonistic elements are aligned with a symbol of primeval chaos then that symbol acquires a sanctity of its own, and should Yahweh be considered complicit in the continued existence and creation of chaos, then he too becomes demonic and antagonistic.<sup>79</sup> For Beal, Yahweh and Leviathan are cosmic horrors in true, Lovecraftian fashion—parallel entities that herald creation and chaos not separately, but together (whether intertwined, or, in fact, as one and the same being).<sup>80</sup> The fearful symmetry of the figures, then, informs both of their characters and purposes within the text. When chaos and Leviathan are in turn further identified with Israel's enemies, something unusual and perhaps disturbing occurs. As Beal says:

To make another nation into a monster does more than simply mark it as a clear enemy. Insofar as chaos monsters are the otherworldly within the worldly, such conjuring also endows the enemy with a kind of supernatural, primordial, mysterious otherness, an agency that resists being reduced to an easy target, and that never stays down for long. To name an enemy after a chaos monster . . . is to risk imbuing it with a kind of sacred chaos—a sacred chaos with

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 28-9.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>79</sup> Again, one is reminded of the Egyptian concept chaos as a divine entity worthy of respect. Pinch, *Very Short*, 74.

<sup>80</sup> Beal, 33.

which God may even be allied, much to Israel's and Judah's horror.<sup>81</sup>

The otherness that seems inherent in our understanding of chaos monsters is apparent here, a horrific otherness expressible, perhaps, in no other way than through our biblical and literary monsters. Leviathan, I will argue, represents in Genesis 1, Job, Psalms, and Isaiah, an ultimate otherness that lies outside order as represented by Yahweh. It is both through the similarities it shares with Yahweh, as well as its differences, that Leviathan demonstrates the fearful symmetry of Blake's Tyger.

Building in part on Beal's efforts in *Religion and its Monsters*, Richard Kearney addresses the association of otherness and the monstrous in *Strangers and Monsters*. Kearney expresses a notion of divinity that includes in its definition the cosmic horror of Leviathan and Yahweh's relationship. He does this by comparing Herman Melville's description of the white whale in *Moby Dick*. For Kearney, "Melville's chilling evocation of the quasi-divine, quasi-demonic whiteness of the whale [recalls] at once the horror of Leviathan and the transcendence of Yahweh."<sup>82</sup> Although Kearney is more concerned with contemporary and popular depictions of the monstrous, his observations can easily apply to a biblical context.<sup>83</sup> Kearney notes, for instance, the ways in which the divine monstrous can function as a symbol of scapegoating and othering. This paves the way for an interpretation of biblical representations of chaos and Leviathan, as well as Leviathan's symbolic importance in Psalms and Job. Following Kearney, Leviathan and Yahweh

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Richard Kearney, *Strangers and Monsters* (New York, Routledge, 2003), 6.

<sup>83</sup> Kearney's analyses include reflections on the *Alien* film franchise, *Apocalypse Now Redux*, as well as such diverse works of literature as *Hamlet*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*. Ibid. 49, 53, 141, 146.

become representations of Rudolph Otto and Sigmund Freud's *Unheimlich* and *Ungeheure*.<sup>84</sup> This encounter with otherness, or what Kearney calls "alterity," is what we should understand in Job when faced with his simultaneous "fear and fascination."<sup>85</sup> What is most horrifying, I would suggest, is the likeness of Job's god to God's monster, Leviathan. If Job himself is an entity created in Yahweh's image, fashioned from the material of primeval chaos, it is Job's own reflection and realization of his alterity that is the true terror.

As Kearney is chiefly concerned with an examination of alterity as it relates to monsters, his focus is much broader than my own. Nonetheless, Kearney's identification of the cosmic nature of otherness in relation to Leviathan is an important one, as is the association he suggests between such ideas and notions of religious purity:

The interrogation of sacrificial monsters reveals the paradox that the monster is not only a portent of impurity . . . but also an apparition of something utterly other and numinous. In this double sense the monstrous can fill us with both awe and awfulness.<sup>86</sup>

While other scholars have addressed the fact that demons were, and often are, used to further the political and nationalist agendas of their authors, little textual analysis has been done on how this affects characterization within the context of the narrative itself.<sup>87</sup> My own research hopes to raise a slightly different issue: in demonizing

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<sup>84</sup> "The uncanny" and "the monstrous." Ibid. 35.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 35.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>87</sup> For more political and historical approaches see: Elaine Pagels. *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Random House, 1995). Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (London: Pimlico, 1993). Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003).

characters who are often portrayed as rebels, underdogs, or outsiders, a more intricate character emerges—one neither wholly evil, nor universally good. Though my own study is not sociological in nature, nor intended to isolate an individual group for study, the larger goal at work beneath a re-evaluation of the relationship between Leviathan (chaos/disorder/marginality) and Yahweh (law/order/normalization) is to examine the potency of disorder as a generative force within the biblical narrative. This, in turn, I associate with those elements of human nature that are associated with the marginal, the liminal, and the disordered. Yahweh and His creation, I would argue, are not possible without the partnership of *tehôm*, the deep, or Leviathan and Rahab as representations of liminal force. We see in creation, then, the reflection of *tehôm* and with it the stripes of Blake's tyger. My question, therefore, is what the text can tell us about the character and nature of Yahweh through its depiction of his ultimate enemy. Unlike Whitney, who emphasizes Leviathan's identity as a created thing,<sup>88</sup> my own emphasis will be on the dual origin of Yahweh and Leviathan from the waters of creation, as well as the fact that creation seems to have been composed of the material of chaos itself. In such a reading, order and structure may have been imposed on the created world, but in the visible cracks of creation what lies beneath is the same chaos that was always there, and out of which Yahweh himself is fashioned. This is in keeping with Kearney's historical understanding of the stranger and its relationship to evil. In medieval art and architecture, for instance, Kearney remarks on the trend of juxtaposing images of demons with images of god. Similarities and parallels are often emphasized, with what Kearney understands to be the

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<sup>88</sup> Whitney, 40.

horror of the mirror image. What is most frightening in these contexts is the likeness of order to chaos, of hero to villain, of Yahweh to Leviathan.<sup>89</sup> Where Kearney's position diverges both from Beal's and my own is in his personal understanding of the relationship between the divine and the chaotic. Deifying chaos and evil is a step too far for Kearney, as is the idea that Yahweh is himself a creature of chaos, or of the monster as a sacred envoy of the divine. This he deems "an invasion of what we might call sacred chaos and disorientation within self, society and world."<sup>90</sup> The problem, says Kearney, lies in our understanding of evil and chaos as we see them in a historical context. According to Kearney, by taking up Beal's view we entertain a problematic narrative that understands historical horrors like the Holocaust as transcendent, and that beneath our own ordered exteriors "we are all rapists, murderers, child molesters, SS torturers, etc."<sup>91</sup> This Kearney discusses in relation to our real-world application of the ideas presented by Otto, Freud, and Beal. We must be careful, says Kearney, not to take the symmetry too far by confusing perpetrators of violence with their victims.<sup>92</sup> It does not seem necessary to me, however, that we do so. There is a difference, however slight it may seem, between "others" and "strangers," and those victimizers we find in Kearney. One can examine how the monstrous is used as a means of creating and transcending boundaries without simultaneously holding a belief in violent or evil acts as the sacred transcendent.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Relevant to my particular interest in Leviathan is Kearney's example of the juxtaposed Rahab alongside the Lion of Judah in a Florentine church. Kearney, 31.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 123.

<sup>93</sup> Kearney similarly notes the relevance of the boundary and border to our concept of the monstrous. "But monsters terrify and intrigue for another reason too: they defy borders. Monsters are liminal creatures



As Kearney himself explains, we use the monstrous to demonize our societal outsiders, the others who are so like ourselves, yet ultimately different. While “xenophobia comes from the desire to expunge that which is strange within ourselves by projecting it onto the so-called 'other',”<sup>94</sup> we must still face the difficulty “of distinguishing between the hostile and benign 'other.’”<sup>95</sup> The hostility of certain “others” is Kearney’s main concern with redeeming the monstrous, especially in a religious context. In a biblical context, however, is Leviathan depicted as truly evil in the way Kearney describes, or is he merely a monster because he is Yahweh’s opponent, and a representation of chaos? As we have seen in the work of John Day, Leviathan’s conflict with Yahweh is anything but clear-cut, but what it does lack is an association with the type of evil described by Kearney. Leviathan may be monstrous in the way of the alien in a modern horror film, but it is a creature that shares little in common with Kearney’s cadre of real-world villains. Nonetheless, Kearney’s concerns bring up the question whether it is possible to explore the divine aspects of the monstrous without corrupting one’s image of the sacred and divine. My own answer would be that in a biblical context at least, the sacred and divine are sacred and divine *because* they are polluted, or because pollution exists beneath the surface. The one cannot exist without the other. Order, as a concept, is dependent on an opposite for its very existence.

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who can go where we can't go. They can travel with undiplomatic immunity to those undiscovered countries from whose bourne no human travellers—only monsters—return.” Ibid. 117. This is similar to Mary Douglas’s understanding of borders, limits, and the concepts of purity and impurity. As Kearney himself notes, Mary Douglas argues that monsters are fully capable of possessing both divine and horrific features, just as defilement and the transgression of boundaries “are a prerequisite for order.” Ibid. 38.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 68.

In one of the most important demonological studies of the twentieth century, Neil Forsyth is particularly interested in how the characterization of Yahweh is dependent on the development and presentation of his demonic and monstrous counterparts. Forsyth's focus, as is the case in much of his work, is on Satan in particular, and especially on Satan's Miltonian incarnation. Forsyth does, however, spare some time for Leviathan, discussing its role in the combat myth,<sup>96</sup> as well as the history of chaos serpents and their relationship to creator gods.<sup>97</sup> Satan, according to Forsyth, only exists in comparison with his opponent. He is an entity entirely defined by his state of perpetual opposition, without character or substance except that which his contrariness grants him. The question raised by this observation is, of course, whether the same criticism could not be leveled at all characters who participate in some form of competition (or even simply relationship) with one another? If Satan becomes a fully-fledged character only through his role as eternal antagonist, could Yahweh be defined solely by his opposition to his monsters? This concept is longstanding, as Forsyth points out by his reference to John Wesley's famous quote, "No devil, No God."<sup>98</sup> Might we extend this to say "No Leviathan, no Yahweh,"? At first glance these statements seem almost the same as Wesley's, yet hidden beneath the surface is perhaps a darker suggestion, based on Leviathan's relationship with creation. While Satan, as a character, is occasionally and peripherally associated with creation, he is still largely depicted as a created thing, rather than an active agent in the creation of anything new or good. Leviathan, on the other hand, represents the primordial chaos from

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<sup>96</sup> Forsyth, 60-63; 160-211.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 44-8.

<sup>98</sup> Forsyth, 7-8.

which creation comes into being. Perhaps “no Leviathan, no God” might be better put as “no Leviathan, no humanity,” for within the vast chaos of *tehôm* lies all potential for creation, and an infinite possibility for patterns.

As Douglas asserts in *Purity and Danger*, “[s]o many ideas about power are based on an idea of society as a series of forms contrasted with nonform. There is power in the forms and other power in the inarticulate area, margins, confused lines, and beyond the external boundaries.”<sup>99</sup> By this, Douglas means to say that we recognize power in disorder and the potentiality disorder, or chaos, has to create indefinite new patterns.<sup>100</sup> In this way, the “inarticulate areas” that are at once dangerous and impure, are also potent. As a biblical symbol of chaos and disorder, Leviathan's potency is, perhaps, a result of its very ability to traverse the margins and confused lines that claim to separate the ordered world of creation, and primordial chaos. As a narrative character, and a creative force on par with Yahweh, Leviathan takes on the role of the marginal, liminal aspect, with all the social implications of that role.<sup>101</sup>

*Purity and Danger*, with its emphasis on myths and rituals of exclusion, is especially relevant to the discussion of anything demonic. By their very nature as creatures of rebellion and chaos, demons and monsters are beings described outside a pre-conceived norm, or social system. Demons and monsters occupy a space at once impure, and dangerous. This concept, applied to Leviathan, sees the monster as a character

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<sup>99</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1979), 98.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 94.

<sup>101</sup> Douglas chooses as her example the unborn fetus. As a marginal person, the unborn child is “somehow left out of the patterning of society . . . placeless.” One might equally ascribe these qualities to other marginalized bodies and peoples. Ibid. 95.

naturally and eternally detached from the social hierarchy. Leviathan, in this case, was always impure, was always dangerous. As Wakeman and Beal argue, if Leviathan can be considered at least co-creator with Yahweh, if not a part of Yahweh himself, then creation, too, is forever impure and dangerous.

Conclusion:

Through an examination of the relationship and power dynamic between Yahweh and his monsters (*maat* and *isfet*, or order and chaos), we might therefore learn something about the ways in which we conceive of otherness, the “alterity” described by Richard Kearney, and which informs the biblical portrayal of Leviathan and the *chaoskampf*. I have demonstrated in the previous section how monstrousness is a concept that has long been bound to ideas of “otherness,” alterity, and the stranger. The combat myth and its associated narratives are stories concerned with the same ultimate problem of how to deal with alterity. In a biblical context, the ultimate monster, the ultimate other, is surely the beast with which Yahweh does battle. Evidence of Leviathan's use for this purpose is evident in Is. 51.9, and Ps. 87.4, wherein Leviathan becomes Israel's enemy, Egypt or Babylon.

If Yahweh is order then Leviathan is chaos, and yet the relationship is far from simple. Yahweh plays with Leviathan in Ps. 104.26, and in Genesis 1.6 creation itself may well have been fashioned from the same material that made up Leviathan's monstrous body. Through an examination of these key passages, as well as those in Job, I intend to question the nature of the relationship between Leviathan and Yahweh, asking whether

they are creative partners, enemies, or one and the same. In so doing I aim to illuminate the chaotic alterity of both figures and their roles within the Old Testament narrative.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

### Introduction:

Much effort has been expended in previous scholarship to reduce a scaled, serpentine, crocodilian Leviathan to a recognizable and zoological creature. So deadly are its coils, so frightful are its jaws, that even in an academic reading of the Bible the beast must be tamed. Leviathan, as it is described in Psalms and Job, is simply too chaotic for our ordered world of classifications. In such a world we may remain safely behind the boundary of the TV or computer screen to watch our monsters explained and naturalized. In such a world, river monsters become anacondas and pythons,<sup>102</sup> huge and terrifying, yet captured or killed easily enough with the aid of modern technology. Whether the technique used to catch the wily serpent is net, spear, or camera, the act of watching and understanding the mortality of these beasts has an exorcismic quality that renders the once dangerous safe. Confined within the boundaries of taxonomy, what might once have been communicated as monstrous through the vehicle of storytelling and myth-making is rendered part of the ordered world to which we belong. Yet monsters still exist, brought to life in film and omnipresent in religious and classical literature. While modern media have the potential to deconstruct and explain our monsters, they are just as capable of building new, more sophisticated ones. Indeed, the more we learn of the science behind our natural world, the more we seem to thirst for the shock and terror of the unknown.

The monster is still with us as it has always been. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen says in his

<sup>102</sup> Initial, Western accounts of anacondas were often exaggerated descriptions of the animal, leading to a more monstrous image of the snake within the public imagination. Richard Boyle, "The Anaconda of Ceylon': Derivations and Myths," *SundayTimes.lk*, July 27, 2008, [http://www.sundaytimes.lk/080727/Plus/sundaytimesplus\\_07.html](http://www.sundaytimes.lk/080727/Plus/sundaytimesplus_07.html)

introduction to *Monster Theory*, “we live in a time of monsters.”<sup>103</sup> To claim Leviathan and similarly mythical monsters represent only the ignorance of an unscientific and innocent humankind misunderstands the purpose of monsters and the monstrous. For surely if the anaconda and python can be captured and displayed on-screen and inside enclosures, we would have no need for Ripley's parasitic *Alien*, the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park*, or the myriad monsters hunted the world over by cryptozoologists.<sup>104</sup>

As its own category, the monstrous requires deeper consideration than it has often been given. There is a desire to dismiss or debunk our mythical monsters. Paradoxically, this need speaks to the fact that some monsters must remain bunked in order for there to be any understanding of them whatsoever. Part of the purpose of monsters is to remain obscure, unclassified, uncertain, and outside normalized categories of safety and danger. Recognizing this aspect of the monstrous has been instrumental in furthering research within the field and, indeed, in creating a field of monster studies, the scope of which has broadened since the 1970s to include monsters modern, ancient, literary, celluloid, and allegorical.<sup>105</sup> In his foreword to the 2012 edition of *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, John Block Friedman addresses the expansion of monstrous studies, which began for him some thirty-seven years before. What was then a nascent

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<sup>103</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), vii.

<sup>104</sup> Consider the thriving legends of Big Foot, the Loch Ness Monster, Mothman, and similar beasts. Apart from their presence in film and on television, these monsters are surrounded by their own religious and folkloric traditions, and have prompted numerous investigations into their presumed natural habits. Cryptozoology refers to the field of study in which these monsters are studied and hunted using an ostensibly scientific methodology and intent. Joe Laycock, “Mothman: Monster, Disaster, and Community,” *Field Work in Religion* 3, no. 1 (2008):70-86.

<sup>105</sup> Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), xxv-xxviii; xxxvii-xxxviii.

sub-category within the more established academic worlds of literary, religious, and historical studies, has now prompted numerous volumes on the subject of theories and interpretations of monstrosity.<sup>106</sup> Friedman's own interest in the subject began with a narrow analysis of "otherness" in Western art and literature, with particular focus on the so-called monstrous races of men thought to occupy the far corners of the world, as well as human and animal births deemed unnatural or prophetic.<sup>107</sup> That Friedman was concerned with "otherness" as a related concept was no accident, as the twin categories of "otherness" and monstrosity are often intertwined. Friedman defines "otherness" as "the way writers and artists treating such beings encapsulated inchoate fears of losing human status."<sup>108</sup> This is in line with observations made by both Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and David Gilmore in their definitions of the monstrous, though it is my contention that a broader understanding of the term is most useful to an analysis of how Leviathan and Yahweh function on a cosmic scale.<sup>109</sup> "Otherness," I contend, is more than a symbolic loss of humanness, but should be extended to include states of being that lie outside a predefined set of characteristics that mark one as innately human, or within the accepted structure of human behaviour and morality. States of being opposed to ostensibly "natural" phenomena of social hierarchy and structure are likewise "other" in so far as

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<sup>106</sup> Consider not only the *Ashgate Companion* itself, but the plethora of scholarly titles dedicated to researching the topic: Cohen, *Monster Theory*. Beal, *Religion and its Monsters*. Douglas Cohen *Sacred Terror*. David D. Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

<sup>107</sup> An example of which are the *cynocephali*, or "dog heads." Inspired by Pliny the Elder's account of them in his *Historia naturalis*, the authors of medieval bestiaries believed the *cynocephali* to be one of a number of monstrous races that occupied the most distant reaches of the earth. These were thought to be human in body, but with the heads of dogs. Mittman, *Ashgate Companion*, 17; 258.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* xxv.

<sup>109</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 12. Gilmore, 14-5.



they represent whatever lies outside and beyond the parameters we conceive of as human, good, and ordered.

In Gilmore's estimation, inquiry into the monstrous has dwelt too long on what he considers the obvious linkage between monsters and our "id forces" of "aggression and repression."<sup>110</sup> Gilmore's monsters are more complex symbols that reflect the emotional variance at work in the human mind, including feelings of guilt, sadism, and victimization. For Gilmore, monsters cannot be reduced to simple expressions of basic anger and repugnance, but have a dualistic quality that allows them to represent both victim and victimizer. This observation prompts Gilmore to ask both what other forces monsters represent and, given that they do, why?<sup>111</sup> Certainly monsters are most associated with fear, whether it is a fear felt out of anger, self-preservation, or even guilt and self-loathing. Our fear of monsters, whatever mechanism fuels their fearsomeness, is what makes them important. Rather than requiring exorcism, the monstrous needs expression and visibility to function as it should. As Gilmore explains, the monstrous encapsulates and contains that which frightens us.<sup>112</sup> Like the child seeking cover beneath their blanket, we limit the visibility of the monstrous by experiencing it through the medium of storytelling. Our monsters, like a child's, are safely restricted to the boundaries created by our blanket. Monsters may dominate the darkness, the closet, and the land under the bed, but by granting them space we also limit their ability to affect us in day-to-day life, securing ourselves behind the shield provided by our covers. As Gilmore says,

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<sup>110</sup> Gilmore, 4.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 1.

“The mind needs monsters. Monsters embody all that is dangerous and horrible in the human imagination.”<sup>113</sup>

Comparative approaches to the monstrous often seek to draw connections between the origin myths of various cultures, suggesting that one group of people has borrowed from another, or that both myths derive from a common source. Contrary to this position, monstrous studies, and in particular the work of Gilmore, uses a comparative approach to investigate commonalities at the very heart of human culture and human experience that might better explain recurring motifs associated with monsters. Rather than such stories hearkening back to a shared origin myth, similarities between monsters across cultures imply greater commonalities between the cultures that produced them, as well as a continuity of the human mind. Wherever we are, there are certain aspects of the monstrous that stay with us. From this standpoint, it is possible to construct a schema of the monstrous, and indeed, many scholars have done so. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and David D. Gilmore both present possible definitions and systems of monstrosity that help us situate and examine the features and meaning of specific monsters. Using these schemas to help reevaluate Leviathan it is possible to introduce a new methodological approach to our understanding of the relationship between Leviathan and Yahweh, as well as our understanding of ourselves as participants in Leviathan-centred narratives.

Though the larger methodological approaches change from scholar to scholar (Gilmore emphasizes the importance of a combined cryptozoological and psychological approach, while Cohen relies heavily on a broader, philosophical and theoretical

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

approach),<sup>114</sup> each is able to draw similar conclusions as to how monsters manifest across time and culture. Many of these similarities relate to our understanding of how monsters interact with boundaries, as well as our cultural “others.” It is in this respect that Gilmore's methodology relates to Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*, using her identification of “interstitial” categories of being to relate to what emotional and mental spaces are occupied by our monsters.<sup>115</sup> While Gilmore does not elaborate on Douglas's work to the degree that one might wish for a study that purports to base itself on the work of Douglas, Victor Turner, Freud, and Jung, Gilmore's introduction establishes an analytical framework based on these writers, which is to serve as the backbone of his later analyses.

While the scholarship addressed in my previous chapter makes it clear the biblical serpent Leviathan has been discussed in some depth within the field of biblical studies, the work of Timothy Beal remains the only extensive analysis of Leviathan from the perspective of what might be deemed monstrous studies. Linguistic and historical approaches dominate Leviathan studies (and those of its cousin Behemoth) and while Leviathan is cursorily mentioned in many prominent texts within monstrous studies, it has yet to be examined within the context of the monstrous schemas created by the likes of Cohen and Gilmore. Arguably, Leviathan is one of the most influential of monsters due to its presence in a mythologically and religiously foundational text, and yet a rigorous examination of how it relates to the theories propounded by Gilmore, Cohen, or the

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 12. Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 3.

<sup>115</sup> Gilmore, 18-20.

authors in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* is lacking. By taking into account both the historical and linguistic work undertaken by biblical scholars, as well as applying techniques and theories employed by researchers in the field of monstrous studies, my own analysis will represent an interdisciplinary approach to the monster Leviathan. This approach will allow a more complete understanding of Leviathan's relevance to the biblical narrative, as well as the relationship between the monstrous and the divine in the Bible.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's Seven Theses:

One of the greatest contributions of monstrous studies to the broader fields that encompass it, is its development of monstrous schemas that help us categorize and define what monstrousness and monsters actually are. In *Monster Theory*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen presents the most structured and comprehensive versions of such a schema, presenting seven theses that seek to identify commonalities between the monsters that inhabit our myth, minds, and movies. As Cohen's theses present many key components of the monstrous in an easily digestible format, the current section will begin with an explanation of each of his points. This will be followed by a brief look at other definitions of the monstrous, and will conclude with a discussion of the relevance of the work of Mary Douglas to monstrous studies, and in particular to both my own research, and that of David Gilmore.

“Seven Theses,” is Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's contribution in *Monstrous Theories*, and opens the collection of essays by firmly establishing the breadth and influence of the

monstrous. Cohen's purpose in providing such an introduction to the monstrous is both to create an entry point for the reader, and to provide a guide to understanding a variety of cultures by virtue of the monsters they create.<sup>116</sup>

The seven theses in question consist of the following, each of which I will elaborate on further:

- 1) The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body
- 2) The Monster Always Escapes
- 3) The Monster is a Harbinger of Category Crisis
- 4) The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference
- 5) The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible
- 6) Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire
- 7) The Monster Stands at the Threshold . . . of Becoming<sup>117</sup>

What Cohen appears to mean by “cultural body” is that the monster itself is entirely formed by the specific cultural moment in which it is born, and then again within the specific cultural moment when it is read. A monster, according to Cohen, is never just itself, but is a signifier for something else, akin to a letter on a page waiting to be read. Like the letter waiting, monsters occupy a cultural space that exists between their birth and the moment when they are engaged with again by a new audience. This is why, as Cohen attests in his second thesis, the monster always escapes to reappear once more, and

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<sup>116</sup> Cohen, *Monstrous Theory*, 4.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* 4-21.

why it must flee before it can be fully examined and dissected, taking its secrets with it. The meaning behind the monster's escape is both literal and metaphorical. The monster's escape and reappearance is inevitable, as Cohen points out with reference to the *Alien* film franchise. In the *Alien* movies, though the hero wins out in the end, the titular monsters must seemingly be vanquished again and again with each new iteration in the series.<sup>118</sup> Less literally, the monster escapes and reappears in new forms—here as the biblical Leviathan, there as Apophis, and here again as the cryptozoic and pre-historic remnant creeping beneath the serenity of a Scottish loch. Escape, therefore, is no mere literal escape, but the escape reflected in change. Our monsters have the ability to shift and alter to suit the cultural context in which they appear, so that they are always being rewritten to occupy new cultural moments. Cohen himself uses the ubiquity of the vampire as his example of a monster that has escaped definition and understanding by virtue of its shifting face (it is as much *Twilight's* glittering Edward as it is Dracula, Lestat, or Count Chocula). We might do likewise with the cosmogonic serpent represented in the biblical narrative by Leviathan.

Beyond the meanings Cohen's first two theses have for individual monsters and legends, they lead to additional input on the mechanics of monster theory itself:

"Monster theory" must therefore concern itself with strings of cultural moments, connected by a logic that always threatens to shift; invigorated by change and escape, by the impossibility of achieving what Susan Stewart calls the desired "fall or death, the stopping" of its gigantic subject, monstrous interpretation is as much process as epiphany, a work that must content itself with fragments (footprints, bones, talismans, teeth, shadows, obscured glimpses—signifiers of monstrous passing that stand in for the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 4.

monstrous body itself).<sup>119</sup>

The difficulty Cohen speaks of is the nature of the beast. Since monsters shapeshift according to the cultural contexts in which they recur, the object of study is one that is naturally inconsistent. Accepting the mutability of monsters is important to any attempt to understand them, since a part of what makes them worth studying in the first place is that very tendency to mutate, and to inhabit environments both interstitial and liminal.

Monsters are harbingers of categorical crisis as in Cohen's third thesis. It is through their interstitiality and mutability that they defy easy categorization. Even in their appearance, monsters are never simply one thing. Hybridization defines the monstrous appearance, whether the monster in question is a giant serpent with crocodilian scales, or a man with the head of a dog. According to Cohen, monsters are frightening partly because they resist any attempt to classify them within established biological paradigms. Their bodies are “incoherent” and “dangerous,” forms “suspended between forms that [threaten] to smash distinctions.”<sup>120</sup> Because monsters are ontologically liminal, as Cohen puts it, they intrude on binary thinking, creating crises as they represent a third categorization. Even in classical and medieval taxonomies, therefore, monsters prove impossible to classify in any ordered fashion.

Whilst terrifying, however, this exclusivity of monstrousness opens up new avenues of inquiry:

The horizon where the monsters dwell might well be imagined

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

as the visible edge of the hermeneutic circle itself: the monstrous offers an escape from its hermetic path, an invitation to explore new spirals, new and interconnected methods of perceiving the world. In the face of the monster, scientific inquiry and its ordered rationality crumble. The monstrous is a genus too large to be encapsulated in any conceptual system.<sup>121</sup>

That monsters always dwell *beyond* is important, and speaks to Cohen's fourth thesis, that monsters dwell at the gates of difference. We have briefly addressed how monsters and the monstrous have been used historically to oppress specific cultural, racial, or other minority groups. The alterity encapsulated in the monstrous can take nearly any form, but Cohen places particular emphasis on differences of sex, sexuality, race, economic and political position, and culture. Such differences, when painted atop the monstrous body, are exaggerated to the point of horror. Building on the work of René Girard, Cohen describes how characteristics robbed from multiple minority outsiders are often combined in monsters to make them all the more startling and unusual. The marginalized community or individual is transformed in the minds of the majority, free to be exploited or scapegoated as the monstrous author of the misfortunes of the larger community. Worse even than the deeds ascribed to them, however, is the fact that monsters are cobbled together from bits and pieces taken from inside our system of categories, yet remain outside all classification. Through their difference, argue Cohen and Girard, monsters reveal the fragility of the classifications and structures they supposedly lay outside:

By revealing that difference is arbitrary and potentially free-floating, mutable rather than essential, the monster threatens to destroy not just

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 7.



individual members of a society, but the very cultural apparatus through which individuality is constituted and allowed.<sup>122</sup>

While some monsters, through their representation of difference and otherness, act as a rallying call to action against a scapegoated group, yet other monsters are instructional in entirely different ways. Monsters are also capable of restricting behaviour through cautionary tales that reinforce normative values and practices. Cohen refers to this as “policing the boundaries of possibility,” for in prohibiting certain behaviours or choices, the monstrous acts as a means of restricting what people are capable of doing or pursuing. Cohen uses the example of Leviathan and like monsters drawn on medieval maps to warn against exploring the furthest stretches of the ocean. Similarly,<sup>123</sup> the immorality of monsters is emphasized in other stories to reinforce standardized sets of behaviour. In the Greco-Roman myth of Lycaon the werewolf, for instance, Lycaon is a human man transformed into a monster when he breaks guest-rite by serving his visitors human meat. Unbeknownst to the duplicitous host, the guest is none other than the god Jupiter himself, and so Lycaon is punished with the full supernatural might of the divine. His subsequent and grisly transformation into a liminal creature, half-man half-wolf, stands as a warning to other humans of what is risked when guest-rite is not observed. As Cohen explains, what is most monstrous about the position of Lycaon, or of the sailor straying too far toward Leviathan, is that both have crossed the borders delimited by the myths themselves, passing into unknown cultural territory and categorical uncertainty. By

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. 14.

breaking the established laws of travel and guest-rite, the two characters have put themselves outside the ordered world of certainty, and moved into the chaotic realm of the monstrous unknown.<sup>124</sup> This feature of the monstrous is responsible not only for policing what we might consider the innocuous (travel and treating one's guests fairly), but also for reinforcing social norms that maintain patriarchal forms of control. Such norms emphasize the otherness of anyone outside dominant social groups, and prohibit behaviours that promote or involve interracial mixing and perceived sexual deviance.<sup>125</sup> All that is taboo is exemplified in the monstrous, so that “the monster is transgressive, too sexual, perversely erotic, a lawbreaker; and so the monster and all that it embodies must be exiled or destroyed.”<sup>126</sup> The danger, of course, is that humans, like Lycaon, are made monsters, with the result that they too are often exiled or destroyed.

That monsters attract even as they repel, however, is near as universal a truth. The scintillation of the horror or ghost story is part of the reason they continue to be popular. Monsters are able to exist in this way, Cohen explains in his sixth thesis, as long as they remain safely contained within the medium of the story. Through the vehicle of the monster movie, or written or oral ghost story, we can safely express our own desires to subvert normative social behaviours, without actively participating in the behaviours ourselves. The allure of forbidden aggressions or sexual practices fuels our sense of escapism, and “escapist delight gives way to horror only when the monster threatens to overstep these boundaries, to destroy or deconstruct the thin walls of category and

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 15-6.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 16.

culture.”<sup>127</sup> The space occupied by the monstrous is a space defined by its interstitiality, its liminality, and its formlessness. While the monster is an embodiment of desire, the sensation evoked by the spectacle of the monstrous is equally one of anxiety and fear, and so the monster lurks inside the space between horror and beguilement.<sup>128</sup> Likewise, as in the case of Leviathan sitting in warning on medieval maps, or monstrous races peopling regions of the globe to which the reader cannot possibly travel, the monstrous is safely viewable from a distance, for “distance enables a fascination which, if the monsters were close, would be replaced by terror.”<sup>129</sup>

Cohen's final thesis is brief but significant, and poses the question of why monsters are at all relevant or important. That “monsters stand at the threshold . . . of becoming,”<sup>130</sup> acknowledges them as our creations. As children of our own making, monsters have a lot to tell us about ourselves, posing their own questions through their very existence, inviting us to explain our perception of the world around us, and to question our place in it. Monsters allow us the possibility to explore the shadowed parts of ourselves and our cultures, and to safely question without the threat of questing too far or forcefully. Monsters

bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our place, but they bear selfknowledge, human knowledge—and a discourse all the more sacred as it arises from the Outside. These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race,

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>129</sup> Mittman, 394.

<sup>130</sup> Cohen, *Monstrous Theory*, 21.

gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression. They ask us why we have created them.<sup>131</sup>

The question of why we have created monsters, posed here both by the monsters themselves in a rhetorical sense, as well as by Cohen, lies at the heart of monstrous studies and monstrous theory. Why have monsters arisen as a cross-cultural phenomenon, and why do we find such similarities amongst our monsters, despite physical, temporal, and cultural difference? Cohen's seven theses do not, perhaps, provide a standard taxonomy of the monstrous, but they do indicate common features of the monstrous that can be explored in specific contexts to better understand the cultural, literary, or social role of individual myths.

Commonalities can be found amongst Cohen's theses, which seem to emphasize the interstitial nature of the monstrous. Monsters exist in-between their nascence and the time when they are re-encountered, as well as between feelings of desire and fear. They cannot be defined as one thing or the other, but rather, are hybrid creatures that are frightful and abject because of the strain they place on normalized systems of taxonomic classification. Monsters are disordered, for they go against established order and social custom, turning cultural realities on their heads as cautionary tales, or as means of vicariously experiencing taboo behaviours and emotions. These identifiers of the monstrous are similar to what we find in David Gilmore's own schema of monstrousness. Less formalized, Gilmore's points nonetheless point to a continuity amongst monsters, despite their tendency to defy codification.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

David Gilmore's Monsters:

In *Monsters*, David Gilmore introduces the topic with a succinct review of previous definitions of the monstrous. His own definition borrows from many of these and is further enhanced by the theoretical work of Freud, Jung, Mary Douglas, and Victor Turner. Gilmore's interest lies in the traits shared by monsters across cultures. Shared characteristics have much to tell us, says Gilmore, about the overarching purpose and meaning of monsters, which he believes speak to cross-cultural human truths.<sup>132</sup>

For the purposes of his research, Gilmore excludes human monsters from his definition. This includes metaphorical monsters such as serial killers and historical figures, as well as ghosts and witches of various kinds. Inside the scope of Gilmore's study lie imaginary beings of all stripes, and these he remarks upon for their tendency toward hybridization. Monsters and cryptids, Gilmore remarks, are often shapeshifters, creatures composed of the features of multiple species (human and animal), and display disproportionate limbs or gigantic size.<sup>133</sup> This is perfectly in line with Cohen's third thesis, which states that monsters defy classification by any regulated taxonomic system.<sup>134</sup> Additionally, monsters do not simply confound taxonomically distinct categories such as human/wolf, or snake/crocodile. Monsters, according to the work of David Gilmore and Noël Carroll, are ontological fusions of categories such as inside/outside, or living/dead. The horror of the monster is once again expressed through

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<sup>132</sup> Gilmore, 4-5; 11.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>134</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 6.

its ability to represent the impossible, as well as the breaking down of distinct categories of being.<sup>135</sup>

More specifically than Cohen, Gilmore is in line with the paradigms of Ruth Waterhouse and Joseph Andriano, which acknowledge the importance of malice to the monstrous character. Monsters must demonstrate evil inclination and provoke fear. Even more specifically, monsters must threaten to consume humans, and strike fear in the hearts of humans by virtue of this fact.<sup>136</sup>

At its heart, according to Gilmore, most people understand the monster as

a metaphor for all that must be repudiated by the human spirit. It embodies the existential threat to social life, the chaos, atavism, and negativism that symbolize destructiveness and all other obstacles to order and progress, all that which defeats, destroys, draws back, undermines, subverts the human project-- that is, the id.<sup>137</sup>

According to Gilmore's reading of Marina Warner, therefore, monsters are the spirits "who say no."<sup>138</sup> As we have seen in Cohen's theses, however, and as Gilmore himself puts it, monsters are also the ones who say yes. Unlike us, monsters freely subvert and move across and through boundaries and borders, participating in behaviours and ontologies that are forbidden their human counterparts. It is this very ambivalence, explains Gilmore, that makes monsters so enticing, for they are free to do what we can never do, and are what we can never be. Additionally, monsters occupy worlds we can

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<sup>135</sup> Gilmore, 8-9.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 6-7.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

never traverse ourselves, the borderline spaces where one habitat meets another, or outlying lairs that remain separate from human communities while nonetheless remaining psychologically linked to the human settlement. These Gilmore innumerates as swamps, chthonic caverns, ocean depths, mountain peaks, and other looming or seemingly limitless geographies. Monsters leave these interstitial safe-havens only under cover of darkness, or at times of natural or social upheaval such as during or before earthquakes.<sup>139</sup>

The appearances of the monster are also cyclical, as Cohen similarly expresses in his second thesis.<sup>140</sup> Not only does the monster always escape, but he escapes in order to return once more. The ritualistic pattern of monster behaviour is not limited to appearance, escape, and reappearance, but pivots on a series of additional details. Accounts of monstrous appearances are initially disregarded, as the monster strikes mysteriously from the darkness. This is followed by an escalation of attack or destruction, which provokes acknowledgement of the monster's existence and danger. Realization leads to communal rallying behind a hero, whose job is then to defeat the monster. Despite the hero's success however, the monster's death or defeat is only temporary, as it will inevitably return one day in a repetition of the cycle.<sup>141</sup>

Of most relevance to the study of Leviathan and its relationship with Yahweh is Gilmore's point that, "monsters and heroes arise simultaneously in virtually all the ancient cosmologies as paired twins, indeed as inseparable polarities of a unified system of values

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 12-3.

<sup>140</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 4.

<sup>141</sup> Gilmore, 13.

and ideas underlying order itself.”<sup>142</sup> This should be a familiar point when considered in the context of the cosmogonies discussed in the previous chapter. In opposition to chaos stands order, and order, in turn is defined by the presence of chaos. The existence of the monster, in this instance, helps define the norms that set it apart from human culture and society. As Mary Douglas expresses it in *Purity and Danger*:

Granted that disorder spoils pattern; it also provides the materials of pattern. Order implies restriction; from all possible materials, a limited selection has been made and from all possible relations a limited set has been used. So disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realised in it, but its potential for patterning is infinite.<sup>143</sup>

As creatures of chaos, monsters represent the limitless possibility for patterning. We see this in the very body of the monster itself, with its hybrid components and grandiose size.<sup>144</sup> The ability of chaos to produce these patterns can be related to the monster's ability to reinforce societal norms through its tendency to live outside them, as well as to enforce them through fear of reprisal.<sup>145</sup> The need for the chaos monster in establishing order is a part of the combat myth discussed in the previous chapter. Gilmore likewise

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 27.

<sup>143</sup> Douglas, 94.

<sup>144</sup> Gilmore remarks on the similar characteristics of monsters across cultures, for despite how chaotic and jumbled their construction appears there are recurring motifs of monstrousness that one can almost begin to expect. In particular Gilmore draws attention to the grandiose size and ferocity of monsters—the dripping fangs, anthropomorphic or reptilian bodies. I would argue that this is not proof that monsters are ordered rather than chaotic, but that even within the chaos of monstrous bodies we see a limitlessness of the possibility for patterns. Furthermore, on a socio-cultural level, repeating characteristics of monsters help prove Gilmore's point that cross-cultural similarities express common experiences and human emotions. Consider, for instance, Leviathan's serpentine form, compared with the many snakelike monsters present in film or in world mythology. Rather than suggesting that each of these harkens back to a shared cultural mythology, we might interpret them as evidence that many cultures across the world fear snakes due to their frequent venomousness. Gilmore, 29.

<sup>145</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 14, 17.



draws attention to the cross-cultural parallels one finds in world mythology, with particular emphasis on Egyptian myths such as that of Seth and the chaos serpent Apophis.<sup>146</sup>

The contrast between ordered hero and chaotic monster has deeper implications for Gilmore. He notes the troubling tendency of divine heroes to battle their own genetic parents so as to establish an ordered, civilized world, leaning on Freud for his analysis. Beyond the initial horror of kinslaying, however, lies a darker implication about the nature of our gods and monsters, for as Gilmore says:

We come to a major conundrum of monster lore, because the moral duality and the ambiguous nature of the monster signal a dualistic and troubled relationship to mankind. If the image of God incarnates the idealized father (and mother), then the monster, which parodies god, may be said to embody the demonized father (and equally demonic mother). And so we see an unsettling paradoxical unity of men and monsters, a strange but unbreakable genetic relationship.<sup>147</sup>

Monsters, therefore, share a perplexing similarity with the heroes who defeat or destroy them, often to the point that the boundaries separating the two are blurred. The reason, perhaps, for the hero's ability to face the monster is their ability to reflect the qualities of the monster. No ordinary mortal villager could defeat the beast on its own, but a hero set apart by virtue of divine or monstrous birth might stand a chance. This in particular will be of relevance to my discussion of Leviathan and its relationship with Yahweh and with Job, to be addressed in the following chapter. The hero, in this respect, is as much an

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<sup>146</sup> Gilmore, 29.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* 46.

outsider, perhaps, as the monster to which they are opposed.

The social dimension of the monster and its postmodern association with the phenomena of scapegoating and “othering” are integral to modern interpretations of monsters and the monstrous. Limiting discussion of monsters to a particular theoretical perspective like Marxism is, however, severely problematic, according to Gilmore. Marxist approaches to the monstrous are too single-minded to tell us much about the universal appeal and shared characteristics of monsters.<sup>148</sup> Rather, the monstrous should be studied using what Gilmore describes as “a broadly eclectic”<sup>149</sup> methodology. Gilmore achieves this by combining the theoretical approaches of Freud, Jung, Turner, and Douglas and applying their work to his analysis of specific cases of the monstrous. While the theoretical approach Gilmore proposes is ambitious and eloquently argued, his application of it throughout the remainder of the book is sparse considering the strength of his argument for using them. Nonetheless, the work of Mary Douglas on the transgression of borders, boundaries, and taboos, finds its echo in Gilmore's definition of monstrousness, which emphasizes the ability of monsters to traverse the interstitial geographies that monsters inhabit, as well as the cultural interstices that allow them to transgress moral and social norms. This is equally important to my own understanding and interpretation of Leviathan's role in the Bible, since by his monstrous nature Leviathan is also a creature of interstices who transgresses boundaries of taxonomy through its gigantic and hybrid body, its contradictory appearance as both playmate to

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid. 14-5.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. 16.

God, and enemy of God's ordered world. As such, the following is a brief overview of some of Douglas's most relevant points as they apply to monstrousness, to be concluded with a discussion of how the schemas introduced so far will be applied in later chapters to Leviathan itself.

*Purity and Danger and Monsters:*

While the majority of *Purity and Danger* deals with specific anthropological cases that point to commonalities across religious experience and ritual, Douglas's theoretical contributions to our understanding of power, danger, purity, and boundaries, have much to offer the field of monstrous studies. We have previously discussed how Richard Kearney's use of Douglas has been applied to his research on monsters, strangers, and "others," and he is not alone in drawing comparisons between Douglas's work on rituals, and how cultures and texts present their monsters.<sup>150</sup> Though he does not make as extensive a use of *Purity and Danger* as one might like for a study that purports to use it as a basis for comparison, Gilmore's intention to combine the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Jung with the ritualistic theories of Mary Douglas and Victor Turner is the premise at the heart of his research. According to Gilmore, *Purity and Danger* reveals that "monsters expose the radical permeability and artificiality of all our classificatory boundaries, highlighting the arbitrariness and fragility of culture."<sup>151</sup> This is what, according to Gilmore's understanding, is largely responsible for the fear provoked in us by the monster. At its core, the monster represents not merely a transgression of the boundaries and

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<sup>150</sup> Kearney, 38.

<sup>151</sup> Gilmore, 19.

structures that sustain culture, but reveals through its ability to transgress that the emperor has no clothes, and that in fact it is a man, not a wizard, behind the curtain.<sup>152</sup>

Integral to Gilmore's application of Douglas to monstrous theory is Douglas's exploration of the "interstitial," which Gilmore describes as the state of "existing between and in contrast to normally existing categories."<sup>153</sup> Gilmore suggests that the importance of the monster's interstitial habitat lies in its value as a metaphor for the "limitless power of evil" and "the dissolving of the boundaries that separate us from chaos."<sup>154</sup> Yet the very word "interstitial" implies more than a limitless force of moral chaos, to include the ability of chaos to seep insidiously inside the cracks, niches, and margins of culture and behaviour. Beyond representing the ability of chaotic forces to ignore the patterns they help to create, the interstitial monster reveals the chaos that is already there, hidden in corners, dark caves, and deep oceans. Indeed, like mortar in a brick wall, the chaotic forces that fill the gaps in an ordered creation help to sustain the formal structure of culture and society.

*Purity and Danger*, of course, is concerned primarily with ritual and lived experience.<sup>155</sup> Despite Mary Douglas's primary interest in ritual, however, her observations on the function and importance of marginal figures to their respective cultures are equally useful to socio-cultural and textual studies that seek to understand the

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Though Mary Douglas does spend a chapter dissecting biblical concepts of pure and impure, her analysis focuses mainly on Genesis, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, and has been criticized for its chronological errors in dating the texts discussed. Douglas, 41-57.

broader role of interstitial characters and concepts. It would be difficult to discuss the cultural and narrative relevance of Leviathan and its relationship to Yahweh without also touching on the relationship between the forces of chaos and order that they each represent.

Douglas's inarticulate and interstitial areas are as much about chaos and order as purity and danger. Beyond her focus on observable ritual practice, Douglas's work interacts with the broader topic of the interaction between different types of power and structure. Douglas acknowledges that power can manifest both from ordered sources, and from marginal chaotic ones. As she notes, "so many ideas about power are based on an idea of society as a series of forms contrasted with surrounding non-form. There is power in the forms and other power in the inarticulate area, margins, confused lines, and beyond the external boundaries."<sup>156</sup> Douglas explains that, on a human level, this power is best classified by intent. Whether the power expressed is internal or external, voluntary or involuntary, has little to do with whether the wielder is considered a polluting source or a pure one. Rather, what is important in determining the nature of the source (chaotic vs. ordered) is whether or not the intent of the power expressed is hostile to the environment or not.<sup>157</sup> Here we might consider the duality of Gilmore's hero and monster. Gilmore understands the monster as a being whose intent is always malicious, but who nevertheless shares much in common (even to a genetic, familial degree) with the hero it combats.<sup>158</sup> The two parties are trapped in cyclical opposition, though they both

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid. 98.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>158</sup> Gilmore, 6-7; 46.

demonstrate an ability to transcend the limitations of human ability and might. The difference between monster and hero in this context becomes a difference between how the monster and hero each relate to the ordered structure of society. The monster seeks to destroy or mock the ordered structure of the community, wielding its power as a weapon to terrorize and threaten the security of that community. The monster is representative of the overarching threat of what lies beyond the safety and purity of ordered society, so much so that its very existence becomes an ever-present, looming danger that heralds the eventual disintegration of the structure its existence reinforces. The hero, meanwhile, though also a creature distinguished by its superhuman abilities, size, and strength, exerts its power in order to defend the sanctity of the structured world. Douglas links these ideas to the concept of recognized and vetted authority versus unbridled power. Though Douglas is speaking about human beings such as sorcerers and witches, her ideas could equally be applied to the differences between how heroes and monsters are defined:

Where the social system explicitly recognizes positions of authority, those holding such positions are endowed with explicit spiritual power, controlled, conscious, external and approved—powers to bless or curse. Where the social system requires people to hold dangerously ambiguous roles, these persons are credited with uncontrolled, unconscious, dangerous, disapproved powers—such as witchcraft and the evil eye.<sup>159</sup>

By extension, in the following chapters, I will argue that the same can be applied to Leviathan and Yahweh via the monster/hero dichotomy and the combat myth tradition. Like Gilmore, however, I am also interested in the ways in which Leviathan and Yahweh

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<sup>159</sup> Douglas, 99.

subvert traditional categories of “good” and “evil,” and how the behaviour and characteristics attributed to them demonstrate a conflation of the categories of monster and hero. Who, ultimately, is the monster of the biblical narrative, and who the hero? The fearful symmetry between Yahweh and Leviathan that I have remarked upon in my introduction is well within the realm of the monster theory expressed in Cohen and Gilmore. It can be even better understood when examined through the lens of Douglas's observations of how interstitial and chaotic characters interact with forces of order, structure, and boundaries.

#### Leviathan and Monster Theory:

While the field of biblical studies has built up an impressive body of work on Leviathan, much previous scholarship in that field has ignored the sociocultural and theoretical importance of Leviathan in favour of tracing its historical origins. This has been an important step in creating a foundation for the study of the combat myth in the Bible, but fails to interact with emerging theories of the monstrous as proposed by the likes of Cohen and Gilmore. Similarly, while monstrous studies and monster theory have addressed a generalized tradition of the monstrous, along with a few specific cases of monstrousness in film and literature, little has been written in that field that specifically concerns Leviathan of the Bible. Using the schemas presented by Cohen and Gilmore, as well as Gilmore's insightful invocation of *Purity and Danger* as guideposts in my own analysis, I plan to approach Leviathan's role in the Bible from a perspective that combines

the fields of biblical and monstrous studies.

The subsequent chapters of my study will use an interdisciplinary approach to Leviathan to interpret Leviathan and its relationship to both Yahweh and creation. Using both the socio-cultural approaches of Cohen, Gilmore, and Beal alongside careful textual analysis, I will demonstrate how theories of the monstrous and the relationship between chaos and order reveal a complex and often contradictory dynamic between the characters of Leviathan and Yahweh. Applying the schemas outlined in the work of Cohen and Gilmore, it will be argued that both characters express features of monstrousness that render their relationship to creation problematic. These same monstrous characteristics will be supported by the socio-cultural observations made by Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger*. Previous biblical scholarship on Leviathan will be used as a basis on which to discuss the topic of Leviathan and Yahweh's relationship, lending important linguistic and historical support to my arguments.

Chapter three will consider Leviathan in the context of its monstrousness, applying the paradigms of Cohen and Gilmore to Leviathan's characteristics in the Bible, while my fourth and final chapter will consider in depth the relationship between Leviathan and Yahweh as forces both in opposition and symmetry with one another.



Chapter 3: King Monster: Leviathan's Place in Monster Theory

The monster is unknown, unknowable, and ambiguous. It occupies the space in between category, never entirely one thing or quite another. It is vanquished and it returns, and when it does so it is just as happy to reappear in a new shape or under a new name as it is to clothe itself in the secondhand garb of its previous incarnations. The monster is ubiquitous, seemingly a necessity of human culture, and yet its otherness is deeply personal and deeply felt by the specific temporal and geographical loci of its summoning. The monster is awful yet awe-inspiring, and while it is frightening to behold, it is so often a sheep in wolf's clothing: a moral lesson on the danger of trusting the outsider perhaps, but equally a lesson on the dangers of not doing so. The monster is contradiction, a question between answers and the infinite possibility for pattern outside the borders of the patterns we know. In investigating the monster, we thus investigate the subversive and subliminal meanings of a particular text, and the subversive and subliminal emotions at work beneath the veneer of the ordered culture that gave birth to it. Yet even in confusion, it is possible to use the monster as a bridge across space and time, drawing connections and parallels between cultures that span decades or geographical degrees. Common features of the monster can be found, features that have something to tell us about the purpose of monsters across human cultures, and which tease us with glimpses of insight into human psychology. These commonalities between monsters are what have inspired researchers to compose monstrous schemas that seek to elucidate the meaning that lies behind monsters, and the psychology that renders monsters necessary in the first place. In this third chapter, Leviathan's place within the broader field of monstrous studies will be

considered, the better to understand Leviathan's role in the Bible, and in particular its relationship with Yahweh.

Biblical accounts of Leviathan are full of contradictions. As we saw in our first chapter, even its academic history is fraught with conflicting interpretations as to its meaning, origin, and nature. Though any academic field is bound to include its share of divergent opinions and interpretations, Leviathan in particular seems to defy the attempts of scholars to classify it. Take for example the variety of animals proposed as biological ancestors to the Bible's mythological serpent. Animals as diverse as dolphins, whales, and crocodiles are suggested as possible ancestors of the monster, while divergent scholarship argues for a reading of Leviathan as a purely monstrous, mythological entity divorced from any natural animal.<sup>160</sup> Monsters, unlike biological animals like the whale or crocodile, have the additional benefit that their created, hybridized natures carry deep sociocultural and psychological significance. This is not to say that literary and mythological representations of non-human animals have nothing to tell us about our relationship with our surroundings, but rather that, as terrific inventions of the human mind, monsters occupy a unique place in human psychology. As David Gilmore says, “the monster is both a powerful universal symbol and the product of a compulsive fascination that can be explained only in its own terms.”<sup>161</sup> Understanding Leviathan's place in the biblical narrative therefore requires unpacking before the relationship between the characters of Yahweh and Leviathan can be discussed in detail. It is my intention to

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<sup>160</sup> Day, *God's Battle*, 66-7.

<sup>161</sup> Gilmore, *Monsters*, 194.

examine Leviathan through the lens of the monstrous schemas created by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and David Gilmore in order to contextualize the contradictions present in Leviathan's biblical narrative. In the processes of examining how Leviathan exists within the context of monster theory it is possible to gain not only a greater understanding of the biblical serpent, but also of monster theory itself, and the following chapter will integrate my own contributions to monster theory, and monstrous taxonomy with current scholarly research on the topic. This will be followed in Chapter 4 by a detailed look at how Yahweh and Leviathan exist in parallel in the biblical tradition, examining their roles in the combat myth in light of Leviathan's place within monstrous studies.

Before we apply monster theory to the story of Leviathan, it is necessary to give a brief overview of Leviathan's biblical narrative. I touched on some of this in my first chapter, and the following section will make use of the work presented therein.

#### Leviathan's Biblical Narrative, Such as it is:

In the beginning was the serpent, at least according to several passages throughout the Tanakh, and the research of Hermann Gunkel and John Day. Gunkel and Day's research has established a firm connection between the biblical combat myth and the biblical cosmogony.<sup>162</sup> According to Day, the association of creation with Yahweh's defeat of a chaos monster derives from a Canaanite myth that describes the god Baal's subjugation of the serpents Yamm and Leviathan.<sup>163</sup> As it appears in the Ugaritic texts discovered in 1929, the Baal Cycle makes only cursory mention of the serpents' defeat

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<sup>162</sup> Day, 4.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. 4-14.

being specifically associated with creation, though it seems likely this was the case. As Day says, “it must be emphasized that the fact that the Old Testament so frequently uses the imagery of the divine conflict with the dragon and the sea in association with creation, when this imagery is Canaanite, leads one to expect that the Canaanites likewise connected the two themes.”<sup>164</sup> In the Bible, the story of Leviathan the primordial chaos serpent begins in Genesis, though it is not until Psalms that we find explicit reference to the monster itself. Though Genesis lacks mention of Leviathan or its epithet Rahab, it nonetheless retains traces of the *chaoskampf* motif, and the association of the combat myth with creation and a primordial ocean. Leviathan's story begins in the beginning, as a symbol of what came before Yahweh's remodeling of the primal material that later makes up his universe.

We are told in Genesis 1.1-4 that:

In the beginning Elohim created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit of Elohim was moving upon the surface of the waters. And Elohim said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.<sup>165</sup>

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ  
וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תוֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם  
וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם  
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי אור וַיְהי אור

<sup>164</sup> Other suggestions have been made, crediting the combined influence of Canaanite and Babylonian creation myths with influencing the biblical *chaoskampf* tradition. Yet another possibility is that the conflict between Yam and Baal is entirely separate from an earlier narrative alluded to in the Baal Cycle. This earlier story appears to involve the defeat of Leviathan, Yam, and several other primordial monsters, by the gods Anat and Baal. Ibid. 13, 10, 17.

<sup>165</sup> I have indicated in my translation of this passage instances in which “Elohim” is the given name for God, though as I have stated previously, for the sake of consistency my study will refer to the creator as “Yahweh.”

Rather than emerging spontaneously as a consequence of Yahweh speaking it into being, the created world is fashioned from the base material that existed prior to creation, and perhaps prior to Yahweh. Before creation there was *tehôm*, “the deep”--a watery expanse described as “formless” and “void.” This formless, watery expanse is common to Near Eastern cosmogonies, and is a representation of the chaotic material from which creation is made ordered.<sup>166</sup> While *tehôm* itself is not a monster per se, it is likely a derivative of the name Tiamat, the name given to the primordial chaos dragon in the *Enuma Elish*.<sup>167</sup> It seems that in Genesis the monstrous presence of the serpent has been eclipsed by the primordial ocean that Leviathan and its ilk so often represent. Though the monster is absent here, echoes of its presence remain in the physical description of Yahweh's acts of creation. It is necessary for primordial chaos to be subdued in order for creation to flourish, indeed, for creation to be possible at all. Before the defeat of the serpent, the embodied symbol of primeval disorder, the world is described as existing in an undifferentiated state (if indeed it can be said to have existed at all). The raw material presented in Genesis 1.1-4 must be “divided” (לָרַבֵּץ) in order to differentiate night and day, and on the second day of creation Yahweh “divides” (לָרַבֵּץ) the waters above and beneath the sky in order to create the earth and its oceans. Much like the conquered bodies of fallen chaos monsters in world mythology, *tehôm* must be rent and reformed in order to shape creation. The corpse of the serpent, representative of the primal chaos waters that existed before anything else, is transformed into a living, ordered world of

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<sup>166</sup> Day, 4. Beal, 14-5.

<sup>167</sup> Wakeman, 86-7. Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, 48.

Yahweh's devising.

As we have seen, this is not unlike the creation myths of the Ancient Egyptians, whose mythology describes creation arising out of some type of primordial water or chaotic ocean.<sup>168</sup> Images of the dismemberment of creator gods, or primal and chaotic forces, are likewise common in world mythology, as in the case of the Norse giant, Ymir, whose corpse provides the raw material out of which the world's oceans are formed.<sup>169</sup> Similar narratives appear throughout the Bible, and this is the context in which Leviathan's character should be understood. In the biblical combat myth, Yahweh defeats Leviathan as a necessary step in creation. This is described most explicitly in Job 26.13, in which the prophet Job describes Yahweh's awesome might with reference to how he “pierced the fleeing serpent” (חִלְלָהּ יְדוֹ נִשְׁבָּרָה). Job's version of the creation story differs in many ways from the first and second creation in Genesis. For one thing, Job's version contains more detail, or at least it uses detail to emphasize different aspects of the story. Here, Yahweh doesn't simply speak things into being the way he does in Genesis 1; the actual process is instead described. While in Genesis 1.3 Yahweh says “Let there be light” and there is light, Job 26.10 says that Yahweh, “has inscribed a circle upon the face of the waters” (גָּרַע עַל פְּנֵי הַיָּם). Overall, the narrative is a great deal more florid, while at the same time carrying an additional note of violence. In Genesis the narrator describes Yahweh acting upon *tehôm*, but, in Job, Job describes the force of the actions, i.e., “The

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<sup>168</sup> In Egyptian myth, this ocean was deified in the form of the god Nun, who was not only the ocean out of which creation was fashioned, but the primal matter than formed the creator god as well. Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology*, 4.

<sup>169</sup> Lindow, 322-3.

pillars of the heavens tremble and are astonished at his [Yahweh's] rebuke” (26.11 עַמּוּדֵי יְהוָה מִגְעָרָתוֹ שָׁמַיִם יְרוֹפְפוּ וַיִּתְמָהוּ מִגְעָרָתוֹ). Not only are the pillars anthropomorphized (able as they are to experience astonishment), but Yahweh must vanquish yet another enemy: the dragon in the sea. The serpent Leviathan (called Rahab) must be conquered as a part of the process of creation:

With his power he [Yahweh] quieted the sea; With his understanding he smote Rahab.

בְּכֹחוֹ רָגַע הַיָּם וּבִתְבוּנָתוֹ (כְּתִיב וּבִתְבוּנָתוֹ)  
מִחַץ רָהַב

The story is echoed later in Job 41.10 during Yahweh's speech concerning Leviathan: “None is so fierce to dare arouse him [Leviathan], and who then is able to stand before him?” (לֹא אֶכְזָר כִּי יַעֲרֹנּוּ וְגַם הוּא לִפְנֵי יְתִיָצֵב). The implied answer to Yahweh's question is Yahweh himself, for only a god could hope to defeat such a monster, and in so doing mould creation into being. Leviathan's subjection before Yahweh underscores a thematic point about Job's relative insignificance to the vast expanse of creation. If Yahweh is capable of defeating a monster such as Leviathan, then what hope does a man such as Job have against Yahweh?

Another version of the combat myth is presented in Psalm 74.10-15, in which Yahweh's defeat of Leviathan is mentioned along with a plea for Yahweh's aid:

Until when, oh God, shall the enemy reproach, and shall the enemy blaspheme your name forever? Why do you withhold your hand, even your right hand? Pluck your hand from your bosom. For God is my king from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. You

[God] divided the sea by your strength; you shattered the sea monsters in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the people of the wilderness. You cleaved the springs and torrents; you dried up the mighty rivers.<sup>170</sup>

עד-מְתֵי אֱלֹהִים, יִחַרְף צָר; וַיִּצָּץ אוֹיֵב שִׁמְךָ לְנִצָּח.  
 לָמָּה תִשָּׁיב יָדְךָ, וַיִּמְיֶנְךָ; מִקְרֹב חוֹקֵר (חִיקָךְ) כָּלֵה.  
 וְאֱלֹהִים, מִלְכֵי מִקְדָּם; פָּעַל יִשְׁוּעוֹת, בְּקִרְבַּ הָאָרֶץ.  
 אֶתְּהָ פוֹרְרֵת בְּעֶזְרְךָ יָם; שִׁבְרֵת רָאשֵׁי תַנִּינִים, עַל-הַמַּיִם.  
 אֶתְּהָ רִצְצֵת, רָאשֵׁי לַיְוִתָּן; תִּתְנַנְּנוּ מֵאֲכָל, לָעָם לְצִיִּים  
 אֶתְּהָ בְּקִעְתָּ, מֵעַן וַנְחַל; אֶתְּהָ הוֹבְשֵׁת, נְהָרוֹת אֵיתָן

Here, Leviathan's apparent death is presented as necessary for the furtherance of Yahweh's creation, and the betterment of Israel. The plea expresses a sense of national frustration with Yahweh's inaction in the face of Israel's oppression by foreign enemy powers.<sup>171</sup> If Yahweh was capable of defeating the great Leviathan, the text seems to ask, then why does Yahweh continue to allow Israel to suffer?

As in Genesis, the images used to describe the process of creation involve separation, and division. The springs and torrents described in Ps. 74.15 are not steered or formed, but are “cleaved” (בְּקִעְתָּ). The text in question combines various elements and themes common to the combat myth, centring creation around a series of violent acts committed by Yahweh against both Leviathan and the bodies of water that stand in for the serpent in Genesis. In line 12, for instance, we find a reference to the duration of

<sup>170</sup> Wakeman concludes (as do I) that the *tannînim* (תַּנִּינִים), “sea monsters,” mentioned in Ps. 74.13 are mythological beings, rather than known aquatic animals such as the crocodile, shark, or whale. It should be noted, however, that the term also occurs in Genesis 1.21, in which the sea monsters are said to have been created by Yahweh. Since they are created following Yahweh's division of the waters, it seems likely that even should mythological serpents be meant here, that Leviathan/Rahab was not one of them. Wakeman, 73.

<sup>171</sup> Psalm 74 is considered a psalm of lament, dealing in particular with the destruction of the temple. See: G. Baumann, “Psalm 74: Myth as the Source of Hope in Times of Devastation” in *Verbum et Ecclesia* 27, no. 2 (2006), 418.



Yahweh's rule as "king." This is effective at linking Yahweh's enthronement both with his subjugation of the primordial waters, as well as the concept of nationhood, and the responsibilities inherent in kingship over the nation of Israel. Leviathan, likewise, is associated here with the enemy nations responsible for Israel's misfortune. These themes of kingship, nationhood, and the subjugation of primordial chaos, recur in a number of places throughout the Old Testament.<sup>172</sup> The version of creation presented in Psalms differs slightly from that in Genesis, though echoes of the combat myth can still be found in the later text. Once we understand that Leviathan is a symbol both of primordial chaos and the waters in Genesis 1, the first creation account reveals itself as a less explicit version of the story found in Ps. 74, Is. 27.1, and Job 26. Here, instead of crushing Leviathan's many heads, Yahweh must divide the waters from one another, and in so doing begin a series of actions that create by rending and separating. For this to happen, Leviathan and the waters of chaos must come to heel. As in the myth from the Baal cycle, the hero-god, in this case Yahweh, must subdue the dragon in the sea before creation can be established. The defeat of Leviathan and the forces of chaos is thus also associated with the hero-god's enthronement and dominion. Now that Yahweh has symbolically and literally taken control of the universe, he is king of all he surveys. It is a display of supernatural might as much as it is an act of cosmic procreation, and it is in this context

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<sup>172</sup> It should also be noted here that in line 14 we find a reference to Leviathan's death and the feeding of the people of Israel. This version of the defeat of Leviathan exists in a number of variations, most of them apocryphal or folkloric rather than canonical. In these iterations of the myth, Leviathan (or sometimes its female mate) is killed when it is defeated, and its slain body salted and cured so that it may be feasted upon by the righteous at the end of time. Versions of the myth that feature a female monster usually predict that the male of the species has yet to be defeated, and that this will take place at a future time. There is a distinctly eschatological element to the myth that links Leviathan with concepts of creation, cyclical time, and the end of the world. Beal, 63-6.

that the story becomes relevant to the theodicy of Psalm 74 and the Book of Job.

Leviathan and the combat myth appear again in Isaiah 27.1, and 51.9. In Is. 27.1

Leviathan has yet to be defeated, the passage containing eschatological overtones:

On that day the Lord will punish with his fierce, and great, and strong sword Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea.

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִפְקֹד יְהוָה בְּחַרְבּוֹ הַקָּשָׁה וְהַגְדוֹלָה וְהַחֲזָקָה, עַל  
לַיְיָתָן נָחֵשׁ בָּרֵחַ, וְעַל לַיְיָתָן, נָחֵשׁ עֹקֵלִיתָן; וְהָרַג אֶת-הַתַּנִּין  
אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּם

In contrast, the following passage from Is. 51.9 clearly designates the defeat of Rahab as something that has happened in the past. In this particular instance, Rahab is a stand-in for Egypt during the parting of the Red Sea. Egypt here is being compared with the primordial serpent, whose defeat by Yahweh at the time of creation demonstrated Yahweh's might:

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! As in the ancient days in the generations of old. Was it not you who cut Rahab [and] wounded the dragon?<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> It may be worth noting that the use of the word “generations” (דִּרְוֹת) would seem to suggest that the time the author is referencing is post-creation, since generations of humans would not have existed pre-creation. If we understand the phrase a mere way of expressing “long, long ago” then it is less problematic. It seems likely that it refers to Yahweh’s arm smiting Israel’s enemies generally, and not necessarily to the wounding of Rahab in the following line, but if we take this to be the case, can the passage be said to support the existence of a battle between Rahab and Yahweh at the time of creation? An alternative interpretation, though far more radical, might be to understand the generations in question as referring to the generations to which Yahweh and Leviathan themselves belong. This would suggest a divine lineage, and perhaps even an ancestral connection between Leviathan and Yahweh. This idea is worth considering, and I will return to it in my next chapter, which will discuss the nature of Leviathan and Yahweh’s relationship in more detail, and with reference to the similarities between the two.

עוֹרֵי עוֹרֵי לְבָשִׁי-עֹז, זָרוּעַ יְהוָה--עוֹרֵי כִימֵי קֶדֶם, דְּרוֹת  
עוֹלָמִים; הֲלוֹא אֵת-הִיא הַמְחַצֶּבֶת רַהַב, מְחוֹלְלֵת תַּנְיִן.

The central ideas associated with the biblical serpent Leviathan (or Rahab) in each of these texts include combat, creation, and chaos, though these are not to overshadow the primordial serpent's use as a literary stand in for the foreign enemy nation. Each of these roles brings additional layers of meaning to the biblical narrative. For example, the combat myth is used narratively to support Yahweh's claim to dominion over creation, humankind, and rival forces of divinity. This is not the only way in which Leviathan is used in the Bible to demonstrate Yahweh's might, as we see in the Book of Job, wherein Yahweh himself uses the serpent's terrifying physicality to prove to Job the prophet's relative insignificance compared to Yahweh's. We might interpret Psalm 104.26 according to the same theme. Here, unlike in Genesis 1, Ps. 74, or Job, Leviathan is a created thing which Yahweh has fashioned to play (לְשִׂחֵק) in the oceans amongst the ships. Not only has Yahweh made Leviathan, but also the sea itself (הַיָּם) in Ps.104.25. We should not be at all surprised that Leviathan and the ocean are paralleled here, when the serpent is so often a stand-in for the primordial waters. The Yahweh in these verses is of an undeniably more powerful and independent character, cast as he is in the role of ultimate creator and not merely the shaper of a pre-existent material. As a part of Leviathan's biblical narrative, the passage emphasizes similar cosmogonic themes as those in Genesis, Job, and Isaiah, and yet there are undeniable differences in how Leviathan is presented. The combat myth is an integral element of Leviathan's story and nature, and informs

Leviathan's monstrous character, marking him as one of a number of primordial monsters that have associations with the birth of the world and of mankind. That said, the contradictions presented by Ps. 104.25-6 and Genesis 1.21 cannot be denied, and should not be ignored.

That Leviathan is a monster of supernatural proportion should not be in doubt, and yet as we have seen in my first chapter, a number of scholars and commentators have been anxious to connect Leviathan's named characteristics with real-world animals. The following section will demonstrate how those characteristics emphasize rather than decrease Leviathan's monstrous heritage.

Perhaps one of the most significant observations one can make upon examining Leviathan's biblical narrative is that in many ways Leviathan is not a character in its own right. In the majority of passages we have considered, Leviathan is cast in the role of antagonist, yet unlike many biblical antagonists it lacks any form of speech of its own. This might be attributed to its monstrousness, or to its semi-divine characteristics. Yet Yahweh himself speaks, and possesses his own narrative within the Bible. Unlike Yahweh, or any other biblical character save, perhaps, its bovine twin Behemoth, Leviathan has no voice of its own. In its silence, Leviathan is a perfect symbol for all that lays outside the boundaries of Yahweh's creation, so foreign as to be incapable of communication or freedom of will. Leviathan is the ultimate "other," beyond human comprehension, despite representing the fabric out of which all humans were created. Evil can be projected onto Leviathan with ease, since its narrative lacks any clues as to its own desires or goals, if indeed it has any. Lack of will or desire, however, would also suggest a

lack of a desire for evil. Leviathan's character, if it can be said to have one, cannot be simplified to that of the archetypal villain, and it is in this respect that analyzing Leviathan through the lens of monster theory is illuminating. As a symbol of chaos, Leviathan is beyond absolutist definitions of either good or evil, and in this way is the perfect example of the contradictory nature of the monster. Leviathan is, I will argue, a “king monster.” Yahweh's ascension to dominion over the world and mankind seems predicated on his defeat of Leviathan, who represents one of the “first things,” existent even before the process of creation. As chaos, Leviathan is the danger that lies beyond the known, an antediluvian danger that may rear its head in the myths of minor monsters, but whose heart beats in a place deeper and darker still. It is the ultimate expression of the monstrous, representing all that is undifferentiated, marginal, transitional, and “outside” the ordered world that is necessary for human civilization to flourish. By “king monster” I name Leviathan as one of a number of mythological monsters that occupy the role of chaotic progenitor, and who are claimed to have existed before any other iteration of monstrosity.

Leviathan's narrative in the Bible is no straightforward story about good triumphing over evil, or heroic wit and ingenuity defeating brute force and gigantic size. As Timothy Beal says regarding the Bible's attitude toward its monsters, the Bible “canonizes their ambiguity,” flouting contradictory descriptions of Leviathan that place it both outside and inside creation.<sup>174</sup> Leviathan, according to the Bible, is both an enemy of Yahweh and his plaything, part of Yahweh's creation, as well as a symbol of the primeval

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<sup>174</sup> Beal, 57.

waters that were used to fashion creation in Genesis 1, Psalm 74, and Job 26. While the ambiguity of Leviathan's function and origin in the Bible may surprise many readers, it will not come as a shock to scholars of monstrous studies.

Leviathan's Place in Monster Theory:

David D. Gilmore identifies several common features of monsters and the monstrous that the author develops and analyzes through the various case studies presented in his book. Although he does not present so clear-cut a schema as we find in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's seven theses, it is possible to construct a list of common features of the monstrous that Gilmore identifies, and perhaps more importantly, examine the definitions and characteristics Gilmore uses to exclude certain “monsters” from his study.

David Gilmore's examination of the monstrous identifies several widespread characteristics of the monstrous. From his analyses, I have identified the most significant of these as:

- 1) Monsters are grotesque hybrids.<sup>175</sup>
- 2) Monsters operate from a position of malice toward humankind. This is expressed in their appearance by their gigantic maws, and their desire to feed on human beings.<sup>176</sup>
- 3) Monsters inhabit borderline or extreme environments (e.g. swamps, marshes, mountains, the depths of the ocean, etc).<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Gilmore, 6.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. 6-7, 176.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. 12.

4) Monsters share a paradoxical closeness both with divinity, as well as with the heroes against whom they are opposed. Because of this, monsters are both loathed and venerated by the cultures that have produced them.<sup>178</sup>

5) "The monster is a metaphor for all that must be repudiated by the human spirit."<sup>179</sup>

6) Monsters have no respect for limits or boundaries.<sup>180</sup>

7) Monsters participate in cyclical narratives that see them defeated, only to return.<sup>181</sup>

8) Monsters are universal to human culture.<sup>182</sup>

9) Monsters are inextricably linked with the primal, demonstrating associations both with so-called primal human instinct, desire, and behaviour, as well as primordial beginnings and primeval time.<sup>183</sup>

10) Monsters are projections of human psychological truths, and their stories often contain aspects of the Oedipal, expressing a fundamental human desire for atonement and the expiation of guilt.<sup>184</sup>

In addition to the characteristics listed above, Gilmore makes use of exclusionary characteristics that allow him to focus his research only on certain categories within a broader range of what we might call "the monstrous." Excluded from Gilmore's analyses

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 10, 192.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 186-9.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. 193.

are those monsters with human origins—vampires, zombies, witches, and the like. He likewise makes a distinction between so-called literal monsters, and metaphorical monsters like Stalin, Hitler, or Jeffrey Dahmer.<sup>185</sup> Although he does not formally acknowledge this, the positive attributes associated with monsters (what monsters can be said to *be*, as opposed to what monsters can be said *not* to be), likewise have an exclusionary effect. For instance, in claiming that monsters are universally antagonistic or predatory toward humans, he excludes the sub-category of friendly or neutral monsters.<sup>186</sup> These figures would initially appear most relevant to studies of modern culture that analyze redeemed monsters, or cartoon interpretations and reinterpretations of monsters that render them benevolent to humans. From redemptive interpretations of Satan in

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 6. Problematically, Gilmore's study excludes revived and cannibalistic corpses like zombies, as well as shape-changing European and post-colonial witches, yet includes a discussion of the Native American Wendigo and Wechuge. This pair of monsters haunt and hunt the wooded and mountainous regions of North America, and demonstrate key features of the monstrous such as as incredible size, ferociousness, and a hunger for human flesh. The Windigo and Wechuge also belong to a category of monster who begins its life as a human being. In the story of the Windigo, for instance, Gilmore explains that cannibalism leads to the gradual transformation of a human member of a community into a wild and vicious monster. Gilmore even goes so far as to say that, "to understand the Windigo in the Indian imagination, one must recognize that these horrific creatures are not separable from people." The process of aberrant behaviour, gradual change, and finally isolation and banishment from the community that Gilmore describes is not so dissimilar from how witches and similar creatures are treated in European and non-Native American folklore. To exclude one while keeping the other seems a distinction geography and culture, rather than of monstrous "type." Gilmore, 81-5, 92-5.

<sup>186</sup> Gilmore uses this approach to exclude the cosmic dragons of Chinese mythology from class of "monster" in his discussion of East Asian monsters. Gilmore notes instead that Chinese dragons are symbols of luck and fertility, and therefore exist as entities associated with life. Although, as Gilmore observes, there is an association in Chinese mythology between a chaos monster, the combat myth, creation, and a primordial ocean, the role of chaos monster in that narrative is occupied by a simian, rather than reptilian beast. This monster is known as Kung-kung, and his chaotic nature is reflected in the floods he unleashes upon the world after he seizes control of the cosmos, and before being defeated by the god of the wind, Chuan-hsü. To my mind, however, while it is clear Kung-kung is perhaps closer to the biblical Leviathan in mythological function, the fact that Chinese dragons are benevolent does not prove they are not monsters. More important than their benevolence of malice, perhaps, is whether or not members of the culture in question consider dragons as monsters (or the equivalent in Chinese). Gilmore, 127-9.



*Paradise Lost*<sup>187</sup> and his subsequent rehabilitation and romanticization in contemporary fiction, to the appearance of friendly but terrifying dragons in books and movies like *The Neverending Story*, *The Water Horse*, or *Monsters Inc.*, Gilmore's narrow definition of monsters proves useful but exclusive, automatically eliminating problematic or morally ambiguous monsters from his discussion. One might be tempted to accept such a gap as a necessary narrowing of the monstrous to those traditional, folkloric, and pre-modern religious monsters, but for the existence of certain benevolent or ambiguous pre-modern monsters in a number of traditions. In Russian folklore, for instance, the monstrous witch Baba Yaga is sometimes depicted as a wise helper to the human heroes of individual stories, while in others she is a baby-snatcher and a cannibal. In still more tales, Baba Yaga fulfills both roles, confounding categorical and moral order as a cannibal, while nonetheless aiding the hero in his or her quest.<sup>188</sup> This is an important point to establish in my own discussion of Leviathan, since Leviathan itself is a monster depicted variously as both malevolent, and neutral. Unlike the monsters described by Gilmore in his definition, Leviathan is not much concerned with individual men or townships, and is never explicitly described in the Bible as man-eating or predatory toward humans. While Leviathan is undeniably hostile in Ps.74 and Is.27, and especially in Is.51.9 as Rahab/Egypt, that hostility is on a cosmic or national level rather than a personal one.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> John Milton's intentions when he wrote *Paradise Lost* are still hotly debated in academic, poetic, and religious circles. While some would suggest Milton intended the epic poem as a cautionary tale depicting the tragedy of falling from grace, still others have historically equated Satan's politics with Milton's. Neil Forsyth takes a more complex position, claiming Milton was well aware of the seductive and sympathetic qualities of his Satan, as well as the potential for differing interpretations of the text as a whole. Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 3-5.

<sup>188</sup> W. F. Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania UP, 1999), 79.

<sup>189</sup> Not all would agree with this assessment of Leviathan's narrative. David Williams interprets the biblical

Despite this failure to stalk individual humans in the manner of Grendel in *Beowulf*, or to be depicted as universally and eternally opposed to Yahweh (for Leviathan is a plaything and a playmate in Ps.104), one would be hard-pressed, to argue Leviathan is not a monster, or that he has no place within monstrous theory or its schemas. Indeed, the fact that Gilmore makes mention of Leviathan in his own study, describing the creature as one of few biblical monsters, suggests that Leviathan is to be counted amongst those monsters that fit within the boundaries delineated by Gilmore's definition.<sup>190</sup> It is my contention, however, that monster theory must account for monsters both ancient and modern that occupy neutral, benevolent or redemptive roles in narrative if it is to retain its usefulness as a means of studying monsters. For this reason I propose two new categories of the monstrous:

- 1) Redemptive Monsters, or Monsters with a Message – monsters used either allegorically, or to stand in for a belittled social or cultural group in order to humanize them in the minds of the dominant social group.
- 2) Benevolent Monsters—monsters that are intended to retain a sense of monstrousness, perhaps still provoking fear in their audience or the narrative's

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whale who swallows Jonah as another version of Leviathan, and in so doing, adds a distinctly individual attack against a human to Leviathan's rap sheet. While there is evidence to suggest, as Williams states, a relationship between Leviathan, the sea, sea monsters, and the act of swallowing, evidence to support the idea that Leviathan itself is Jonah's whale is sparse, and requires support of the identification of Leviathan in Job 26 as a whale. As K. William Whitney points out, there are numerous instances in the Bible of the sea, or waters, swallowing individuals or larger entities. One of these appears in Ps.69:16, which includes a plea to Yahweh not to allow “the deep” (הַצִּדְדִּים) to “swallow” (אֲכָלֵנִי) the speaker. David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature*, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), 187. Whitney, 141. John Day provides an account of why an identification of Jonah's fish with Leviathan and the “the dragon” is flawed. Day, *God's Conflict*, 111.

<sup>190</sup> Gilmore, 52.

heroes, while nevertheless demonstrating a benevolent or at least ambiguous interest in human activity and life. This category of monster might appear fearsome in physical appearance, while later revealing itself to be harmless.

These additions to Gilmore's definition of monstrosity put his schema more in line with the concepts outlined by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, particularly insofar as they underline the importance of ambiguity and categorical crisis to the monstrous character. In the same way that monsters are able to confound categories of species, sexuality, race, and physical appearance, they likewise confound the idea of moral absolutism, and in particular the association of that absolutism with specific groups or individuals. The notion that it is possible for a type or category of person to be universally and absolutely morally abhorrent and debased is, and indeed has to be, incompatible with the monstrous. If it were to be compatible, underlying our concept of the monstrous would have to be a deeply and widely held belief that the "others" so often depicted by and as monsters are morally and ethically inferior, but that is not a truth that is borne out in literature or folklore. Rather, monsters are as capable of moral choice as the heroes who fight them. I will return to this point at the end of the chapter, and again in chapter four as it applies to Leviathan's relationship with Yahweh, but now it is time to examine Leviathan's overall significance within the field of monstrous studies, and the definitions and theses presented by Gilmore and Cohen.

#### Leviathan the Monster:

Many of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's theses are echoed in David Gilmore's findings.

The contradictory and amalgamate forms that our monsters take are noted by both parties,<sup>191</sup> as is the cyclical nature of the monster and monster stories.<sup>192</sup> Where Gilmore and Cohen differ is in the far more narrow definitions offered by Gilmore's case studies. While Cohen's work is more broadly theoretical, offering a series of potential frameworks and perspectives from which the monstrous can be considered, Gilmore's analyses consider a sampling of monsters from across the globe to determine common archetypes and traditions.<sup>193</sup> Leviathan supports and demonstrates many of the qualities that Cohen and Gilmore identify as commonly expressed by the monstrous, while simultaneously calling into question some of the most prominent of Gilmore's claims about the universality of monster-lore.

Cohen's first thesis, that “the monster's body is a cultural body” describes an essential element of any mythological figure, expressing the interconnectedness between a monster and its cultural heritage.<sup>194</sup> This is a theme explored on a more tangible level in Gilmore's research, as he examines each culture's monsters in terms of the cultural moment in which they appear.<sup>195</sup> Beyond this assertion, Cohen's first thesis suggests that

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<sup>191</sup> Gilmore, 6. Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 6-7.

<sup>192</sup> Gilmore, 5, 13. Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 4, 16.

<sup>193</sup> Cohen himself readily admits that his intention is not so much to define the monster in concrete and absolute terms, but that, “Some fragments will be collected here and bound temporarily together to form a loosely integrated net—or, better, an unassimilated hybrid, a monstrous body. Rather than argue a 'theory of teratology,' I offer ... a set of breakable postulates in search of specific cultural moments. I offer seven theses toward understanding cultures through the monsters they bear.” Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 3-4.

<sup>194</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 4.

<sup>195</sup> While Gilmore's overarching goal is to identify pan-cultural features of the monstrous, he nonetheless considers each of his subjects within the context of the specific culture in which they appear, comparing a variety of different monsters from the same culture to draw broader pictures of larger monster traditions. Gilmore, 4-5.

the meaning behind the image of the monster is changeable depending on when it is engaged with, and exactly who is engaging with and interpreting it. The monster is acknowledged here to be more than what it first appears, a symbol for something larger than its self.

Leviathan often appears in roles that are vastly more important than the immediate and apparent role of “monster.” The monster is allegorical, its purpose to represent and encapsulate the fears, anxieties, and emotions of the cultural moment. In the case of Leviathan's presence in Job and Psalms, Leviathan often expresses the fears of a post-exilic Israel, while Psalm 104 relishes in and celebrates the terrible magnificence of Yahweh's creation, and Leviathan with it.<sup>196</sup> Depending on context, as we have seen, different elements of Leviathan's narrative and its relationship with Yahweh are emphasized. In nearly all of Leviathan's biblical appearances, whether as Leviathan proper or as Rahab, the serpent's role in the combat myth is expressed.<sup>197</sup> What changes from passage to passage is how the combat myth is used. In Ps. 74. 13-4, for instance, the author's references to Yahweh's defeat of Leviathan and its many heads is used to express social frustration with Yahweh's presumed refusal to use his obvious might in Israel's defense. References to the length of Yahweh's reign as king (יְיָ) in Ps.74.12 make use of Leviathan's connection to pre-creation to emphasize Yahweh's power even further. As

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<sup>196</sup> Additionally, Ps.104:26 may represent part of a gradual de-mythologization of the combat myth and Yahweh's battle with the dragon. Day, *God's Conflict*, 74.

<sup>197</sup> Ps. 104.26 is a notable exception, though it could be argued that Yahweh's dominion over Leviathan in this particular verse is an echo of a more explicitly antagonistic relationship. While Ps. 87.4 and Is. 30.7 both reference Rahab without explicitly detailing Yahweh's combat with the serpent, both use “Rahab” as a name for Egypt, a “conquered” nation in that it has been laid low by Yahweh, and one that is undeniably presented in a combative context throughout the Bible.

Day attests, “the *chaoskampf* motif [is] intimately related to that of Yahweh's kingship.”<sup>198</sup> The question posed by psalms such as 74 is that of a desperate subject to their monarch, a supplication in light of Yahweh's strength as evidenced by his ability to slay the serpent, to subdue the dragon. This is also true of references to Leviathan and Rahab in Is.51.9, wherein Leviathan is yet again used as a means of aggrandizing Yahweh's strength (לֵוִיָּאֵתָן). Indeed, both Ps.74 and Is.51 carry a note of flattery and sychophantism, the like of what one might expect from a human vassal toward their human king. Leviathan is often used as a narrative tool to empower or disempower (this in the case of Job). Elsewhere, however, Leviathan's role as a stand-in for the enemy nation, particularly Egypt, is of the most importance, while still other passages place the emphasis on the mystery of creation and the cosmic waters that the serpent represents. Leviathan is used in both Ps.87.4 and Is.30.7 as a metaphor for the nation of Egypt.<sup>199</sup> In Ps.87, “Rahab” (רַהַב) is listed alongside Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia, while Is. 30.7 expresses the uselessness of Egypt's potential aid, and suggests it would be foolish for Judah to ally with her.

The combat and enthronement themes prominent to many passages concerning Leviathan express only two ways of understanding the monster, who also exists as a symbol of primordial chaos, and indeed, it is this aspect of the monster that is of most interest to my own research. These themes are particularly prominent in passages that

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<sup>198</sup> Day, *God's Conflict*, 20.

<sup>199</sup> Day makes a compelling argument for the identification of Rahab as Egypt in Ps.87.4, noting that in the list of nations that makes up the passage, it would be unusual for Egypt to be omitted. Is.30.7 is intriguing to Day not only for its metaphorical association between Rahab and Egypt, but because the text likely dates to before the exile, one of few Old Testament references to the dragon of which this can be said. Ibid. 90.

reference *tehôm*, or the primordial waters. If we look once more at Ps.74 we find reference to necessity of the defeat of Leviathan for the flourishing of creation. As we have discussed previously, this is used as a means of emphasizing Yahweh's power, but it also tells us something about Leviathan itself. Timothy Beal makes the point that in Psalm 74 it is:

in this context of national and cosmological disorientation that the psalmist recalls God's creation of the world in terms of a chaos battle, and it is in this context that Leviathan, Yam, and the sea monsters (*tanninim*) are recollected not as part of creation, but as God's uncreative archenemies.<sup>200</sup>

The state of chaos is integral here to Leviathan's purpose and nature. The “disorientation” Beal describes is both part of Leviathan's significance as an expression of Israel's national disorientation and separation from Jerusalem, as well as a symbol of the imbalance of cosmic and cosmogonic forces. All is not right with Yahweh's creation, as the destruction of the temple proves. As a symbol of what came before Yahweh's ordered creation, Leviathan is a perfect metaphor for all that is wrong with the current state of affairs.

Despite encompassing this variety of meanings and interpretations, however, Leviathan retains an iconic status within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. It changes, and yet so much about it remains the same across cultures and throughout time. The “twisting serpent” (נָחָשׁ עֹקֵף לְתוֹן) we find in Is.27.1 is one that recurs in modern conceptions of sea monsters, and the medieval and Renaissance *mappamundi* that depict Leviathan-like serpents encircling the earth, and roaming the ocean's

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<sup>200</sup> Beal, *Religion*, 27.

uncharted areas.<sup>201</sup> Similarly, the gaping maw ringed with teeth (𐤀𐤒𐤑) from Job 41.14 finds its echo in medieval depictions of the Hellmouth.<sup>202</sup> Leviathan's appearance in the Bible is retained in much of the later mythology, even if the details change, and the symbolism develops into something new. Prominent examples of this noted by Beal include the use of Leviathan to represent order in Hobbes's 1651 treatise *Leviathan*. The work is a political and philosophical text that identifies the name "Leviathan" with sacred order in place of primordial chaos. In Hobbes's version, Leviathan is a force for good, and a symbol of the positive forces at work behind state control over the British Commonwealth. The biblical force of chaos has been transformed, seemingly, into its opposite, and yet Hobbes chooses the name in full knowledge of the symbolism traditionally associated with the serpent. Hobbes's decision comes not from Leviathan's association with chaos, but because Yahweh proclaims none equal or superior to Leviathan save Yahweh himself in Job 41.33.<sup>203</sup> This transformation of Leviathan from chaos monster to symbol of political and governmental control develops further in the Clive Barker horror series *Hellraiser*, wherein Leviathan is a hegemonic and terrifying diamond-shaped entity that looms above a hellish labyrinth. At the conclusion of the second

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<sup>201</sup> As it encircled the world, biting its own tail, the twisting serpent of Isaiah draws on the symbolism of the *ouroboros*, or "tail-eater," a symbol of cyclical time. As Van Duzer explains, "in this case the earth is the sea monster: the monstrous holds the whole earth in its serpentine grasp." Chet Van Duzer, "Hic sunt dracones: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 419-20.

<sup>202</sup> The Hellmouth is a popular image from medieval art, architecture, and mystery plays. Luther Link, *The Devil: A Mask Without a Face* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), 76.

<sup>203</sup> Beal, *Religion*, 91, 98. See also: Kim Ian Parker, "That 'Dreadful Name, Leviathan': Biblical Resonances in the Title of Hobbes' Famous Political Work," in *Hebraic Political Studies* 2, no.4 (2007): 430-1.



film, *Hellbound: Hellraiser II*, it is revealed that Leviathan is a psychological manifestation of the human victims' fears. According to Beal, this version of Leviathan has nothing in common with its biblical precursor, and draws solely on the awe and fear evoked by Hobbes's symbol of state control. Although it is true that the terrifying order exemplified by Barker's monstrous diamond seems to have evolved from Hobbes's creation of an order-associated Leviathan, the revelation that "it gains its power and its terror only from those subjects who subordinate themselves to it," has much in common with what renders the chaos monster dangerous and terrifying in the first place. As David Williams says of the monstrous:

The language of the monstrous is parasitic, depending on the existence of conventional languages; it feeds, so to speak, at their margins, upon their limits, so as to gain the power to transcend these analytic discourses and, true to its etymology (monstrare: to show), it points to utterances that lie beyond logic.<sup>204</sup>

This is true not only of the monstrous, but of the chaotic as well, and it is remarkably similar to observations made by Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger*. We catch glimpses, here, of "pattern" within the chaos Douglas refers to when she says that, "it [disorder] also provides the materials of pattern .... disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realised in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite."<sup>205</sup> Barker's Leviathan is chaos formed into horrific pattern (order). Feeding off of the hell-bound psyches of its victims, it destroys their bodies

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<sup>204</sup> Williams, 10.

<sup>205</sup> Douglas, 94.

while re-shaping the ordered into new means of torment. As with Douglas's disorder, Leviathan in *Hellbound* "is destructive to existing patterns" yet can be said to possess infinite "potentiality. It symbolises both danger and power."<sup>206</sup>

Transposing these ideas onto the biblical Leviathan has curious results. Leviathan is the monstrous body that gives form to the primordial chaos out of which Yahweh fashions creation in Genesis 1 and Job 26. This primordial, watery substance is the fabric from which everything after it is created, and possibly also out of which Yahweh himself emerges. The patterns we see form out of chaos are the shapes and ordered forms of creation, the classification and separation part of Douglas's unlimited potential that is inherent in disorder. Though Douglas is chiefly concerned here with human ritual and magic, the observation nonetheless rings true to the process of creation exemplified in the *chaoskampf* tradition. Says Douglas:

Ritual recognizes the potency of disorder. In the disorder of the mind, in dreams, fancies and frenzies, ritual expects to find powers and truths which cannot be reached by conscious effort. Energy to command and special powers of healing come to those who can abandon rational control for a time. Sometimes an Andaman islander leaves his band and wanders in the forest like a madman. When he returns to his senses and to human society he has gained occult power of healing.<sup>207</sup>

Douglas goes on to list many more examples of this phenomenon, in which a magician allows "disorder" or chaos to take over in order to retrieve a kind of pattern (in this case the power of healing) from the disordered realm. In these cases, the incomprehensible vastness of chaotic space has given birth to new information,

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

and to a new reality—something concrete and regulated that the magician is able to give name to and make use of in the ordered world inside the lines. A similar process occurs during Yahweh's creation, since all pattern and order that is formed by Yahweh is made manifest through an interaction between the magician (in this case Yahweh), and the substance of chaos (*tehôm*, Leviathan, the waters). The experience is likewise akin to that of the hero who slays the monster, for so often in monstrous narratives, the hero is required to give something of their own humanity in order to be able to defeat the monster, and to engage with it on its own turf. The hero, in this instance, must identify with the monster and exhibit monstrous traits themselves so as to be able to subdue it.<sup>208</sup>

We see, according to Cohen's first thesis, that the meaning of the monster changes over time, and according to his own analysis this is deeply linked to his second thesis, that the monster always escapes.<sup>209</sup> Beyond the world of the text, Leviathan survives within our cultural landscape precisely because its symbolism is transformative and transitory. There is an elusiveness to the study of the monster, with true and conclusive knowledge of its meaning fleeting. This is true even for the Bible's characters, for indeed we find that Job himself misunderstands Leviathan and its relationship to humankind, asking of Yahweh, “Am I a sea or a dragon that you set a watch over me?” (אֲנִי-יָם אִם-תַּנִּיחַ :כִּי-תִשְׁמַר עָלַי תִּשְׂמָר) in Job 7.12.

Having been tormented by Yahweh, who has set out to test Job's faith by

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<sup>208</sup> Gilmore, 86.

<sup>209</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 4.

exposing him to suffering, Job begins to identify with Leviathan. Indeed, Job's entire speech in Job 6-7 evokes comparison between Yahweh's unjust torment of Job, and Yahweh's subjugation of the serpent. For instance, in Job 6.9, Job begs that Yahweh be merciful and end Job's misery by crushing (יִדְּבֹר) him. Though the verb used in Ps. 74.14 to refer to the crushing (רָצַץ) of Leviathan's heads is different, there is nonetheless an undeniable resemblance between Job's request for utter destruction, and Yahweh's historical vanquishing of Leviathan. The same is implied when, in Job 3.8, Job proclaims, "Let them curse it [the day of Job's birth] who curse the day, those who are ready to rouse Leviathan" (יִקְבְּרוּ אֶת־יְמֵי־יָוָם; עֲרָר לְיָמֵינוּ הַעֲטִיתִּים, עֲרָר לְיָמֵינוּ). Indeed, Job longs for the darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ) of Leviathan's uncreation in Job 3.5-7.<sup>210</sup> That Job is wrong, in Yahweh's estimation, to identify himself with the monster, is made evident in Yahweh's speech from the whirlwind. In Job 41, Yahweh waxes lyrical concerning the very inhuman Leviathan, whom only Yahweh is capable of bringing low. The speech quiets Job, who in Job 42.3 then admits that he was speaking of matters he had not the ability to comprehend.

Of course, monsters escape in much less metaphorical ways as well, seemingly immortal as they are killed only to reappear again and again. Both Gilmore and Cohen note this propensity for our monsters to reform out of mist and

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<sup>210</sup> That Leviathan and *tehôm* are also associated with darkness is fairly well accepted. Day, *God's Conflict*, 46. Indeed, this is not uncommon of chaos monsters in general. The Egyptian serpent Apophis is threatening to creation largely due to his continued efforts to swallow the sun. He is thwarted only by the efforts of the gods, who must accompany the sun during its nightly barge-ride through the underworld in order to protect it from Apophis. Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology*, 107.

mystery, to harrow our heroes once more.<sup>211</sup> Building on Joseph Campbell's theories of comparative religion, Gilmore describes the archetypal pattern that pervades monster narratives:

The story is threefold, basically a repetitive cycle. First, the monster mysteriously appears from shadows into a placid unsuspecting world, with reports first being disbelieved, discounted, explained away, or ignored. Then there is depredation and destruction, causing an awakening. Finally, the community reacts, unites, and, gathering its forces under a hero-saint, confronts the beast. Great rejoicing follows, normalcy returns. Temporarily thwarted by this setback, the monster (or its kin) returns at a later time, and the cycle repeats itself. Formulaic and predictable, the dialectic is predictable to the point of ritualism. The predictable narrative is so widespread in myth, its symbolism so ubiquitous, its moral messages so recurrent, its imagery so consistent, that it is odd (indeed monstrous!) that anthropologists have not followed the lead of other scholars in delving into the subject.<sup>212</sup>

I quote Gilmore's analysis in its entirety not only to demonstrate the mechanisms at work behind the cyclical monster story, but also to draw attention to the ways in which Leviathan's narrative can be said to differ from Gilmore's definition.

Leviathan, for instance, can hardly be said to “appear” into an already existent world when its very nature is the natural state of uncreation itself. There is no initial emergence for the king monster, for it was never necessary for it to emerge. It is, in fact, the thing from which all else emerges. Additional differences appear to rear their heads when one considers the details of Gilmore's analysis. Is Leviathan ever addressed as a specific threat to a community? Is there an initial disregard for the dangers Leviathan poses, and does the community rally behind its hero-saint in

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<sup>211</sup> Cohen, *God's Conflict*, 4-5. Gilmore, 13.

<sup>212</sup> Gilmore, 13-4.

order to defeat the twisting serpent? One's immediate reaction to such questions is to argue that these, too, are ways in which Leviathan's narrative does not fit within the cyclical paradigm championed by Gilmore, and yet there are obvious cyclical elements to Leviathan's mythology. Though Yahweh “crushes” (רָצַץ) the heads of Leviathan in Ps.74.14, feeding its body to the people in the wilderness, and though Rahab is likewise crushed (רָצַץ) to the point of being killed in Ps.89.10, Leviathan has yet to be defeated in Is.27.1. Likewise, Leviathan is alive and well in Ps. 104.26, and in Job Yahweh speaks of Leviathan as though it is very much a continuing force within creation, and not something that has been killed permanently. Leviathan is not simply defeated, or at least not forever or in its entirety. Rather, much like the symbol of the *uroboros* Leviathan forms a circle, beginning again even as it ends. The cyclical nature of Leviathan is also reflected in the enthronement symbolism of the Feast of Tabernacles, which, according to John Day, is likely the *Sitz in Leben* of the festival. The Feast of Tabernacles takes place at the end of the agricultural year, and so has associations with the harvest and themes of renewal. Celebrations of this type are arguably inherently cyclical, and in this case the theme of enthronement emphasized during Tabernacles is one that suggests a renewed conquest over chaos by Yahweh (order). During the festival, Yahweh's dominion over creation is reasserted, with the implication of a continuing or recurring battle. Furthermore, both Leviathan, and its bovine twin Behemoth share associations with the concepts of *urzeit und endzeit*,<sup>213</sup> making their defeat

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<sup>213</sup> Beginning and end times. Day, *God's Conflict*, 82.

necessary both at the beginning of time, and time's end. Leviathan is thus the ultimate returning monster, its very form symbolic of the cyclical nature of both time, and the conflict between the forces of order and chaos. Though he is speaking about the god Baal's defeat of the primordial dragon Yam, Norman Cohn's observation about the result of their initial conflict is significant. Despite Baal's victory, "the chaos monster Yam is not destroyed, only contained, held at bay—after all, he too is a god."<sup>214</sup> The cyclical element of chaos monster mythology and of the *chaoskampf* in particular, is integral to that mythology's functioning. Although it may appear, as Wakeman points out, that the monster Leviathan (as well as Yam, Apophis, and others) are crushed, scattered, or otherwise killed and disposed of, "it is the independent will of the monster that ceases to exist when he is 'broken.' His powers continue to be exercised."<sup>215</sup>

Though, as I have said, it is tempting at first to read a disparity between Gilmore's definition of the cyclical monster narrative, and Leviathan's depiction in the Bible, it is also possible to interpret the serpent's narrative through the lens of its role as metaphorical stand-in for Egypt, or Babylon. The suggestion that in such stories, a given community (in this case Israel) must unite beneath the leadership of their hero finds echoes in the stories of the Exodus, and even in the Exile. Though in the Exodus narrative the obvious hero-saint of Gilmore's paradigm would seem to be Moses, the truly opposing force to Egypt and Rahab is Yahweh himself, who

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<sup>214</sup> Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), 124.

<sup>215</sup> Wakeman, 40, note 1.

remains in a state of semi-constant tension with the forces of chaos. In this case the “semi” is important, for just as Yahweh can restrain Leviathan in Job, Yahweh likewise controls the destiny of Israel and its relationship to Egypt by hardening (הַקְשִׁיחַ) Pharaoh's heart against them in Ex.7.3. In this way, Leviathan, or the enemy nation it represents, remains a constant threat to Israel, and one that must be defeated regularly. Similarly, while Leviathan cannot be said to “appear” spontaneously in the biblical narrative, the nation of Egypt can and does. It is likewise a force that is capable of depraved acts against the target community, and it commits acts of atrocity, violence, and subjugation against Israel leading up to Israel's unified resistance against Egypt under the guidance of both Moses and Yahweh.

Cohen's second thesis suggests that the monster escapes cultural and literal extinction through its ability to shapeshift to suit public and social need. Accordingly, “the monster's body is both corporal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift.”<sup>216</sup> Cohen's example is the vampire's ability to represent a variety of societal anxieties particular to the times in which it appears. This he explains using the examples of homosexuality in Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 film *Dracula*, compared with F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), wherein the vampire is burdened with cartoonishly racist Semitic characteristics.<sup>217</sup> Leviathan escapes both in its ability to exist in cyclical combat with Yahweh, and also in its own ability to change to suit the needs of a varied cultural

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<sup>216</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 5.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*



context. The continued historical importance of the Bible, especially to Western culture, makes Leviathan a monster that is unlikely to ever quite disappear, to be “caught” in a metaphorical sense that would mean erasure. Perhaps it is this continued cultural relevance that allows Leviathan to avoid mutating to quite the degree of monsters like the vampire. That said, we have already addressed how Leviathan changes even within the Bible itself, then later as a representative of oppressive order in Hobbes's *Leviathan*. Similarly, the very name “Leviathan,” along with its companion “Behemoth,” has been co-opted as a term for something very large, usually sea or sky-faring vessels. The features essential to Leviathan's bodied imagery are the ones retained—Leviathan is colossal, and is associated with a vast, typically watery, expanse.

That monsters change is perhaps to be partnered with the fact that even from one state to another they so often take the form of hybrid creatures. Again, both Cohen and Gilmore make note of this, and they are not the only ones to do so. As a “harbinger of category crisis” in Cohen's third thesis, the monster finds yet more ways to escape through its defiance to codification.<sup>218</sup> The monster is a paradox of form, composed of mismatched pieces—the horns of a goat here, the body of a young man, and the wings of a bird or bat. As we discussed in our last chapter, monsters are referred to by Cohen as ontologically liminal, while for Gilmore the term “ontological fusion” is applied.<sup>219</sup> While ontological liminality might refer to the ability of the monster to upend binary expectations of culture and cosmos, ontological fusion refers to the more physically

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>219</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 6. Gilmore, 9.

immediate tendency of the monster to combine seemingly incongruous categories of being. In monstrous fashion, Leviathan demonstrates characteristics of the fused hybrid, and of the extra-binary rebel whose very form marks it as something “other” and outside the limits of what is considered normative and binding.

In a very literal sense, Leviathan confounds categories of taxonomic classification just as much as any other hybrid monster. Examining Leviathan's detailed description in Job, Leviathan clearly comes across as a beast outside our conception of natural biology. Bearing the characteristics of dolphins, whales, crocodiles, serpents, and unknown monsters, as well as gigantic size, Leviathan is a true monster in physical form and prowess. Apart from its inability to be slain, captured, or even injured by human hands or weapons (unlike the real-world animals to which it has been compared), Leviathan lays claim to scales (דָּגָנִים) in Job 41.14 has, “eyes like the eyelids of the morning” (עֵינָיו, כְּעַפְעָפֵי-שָׁחַר) in Job 41.18, and a heart of stone (בָּרֶךְ) in Job 41.24. Even Leviathan's sneezes are extraordinary, flashing forth light (עֲטִישׁוֹתָיו, תִּהְלֵל אֹר) instead of mucus in Job 41.18. Descriptions of Leviathan change subtly in various books and verses in which it appears, as can be seen when Job describes Leviathan in Job 26. Here, Leviathan is “the twisting serpent,” and yet in Job 41.12 Leviathan is said by Yahweh to have limbs (רַגְלָיו), putting one in mind of a gigantic lizard, perhaps even a crocodile. Leviathan's gigantic size and the unusual amalgamation of animal parts of which it is composed are firmly in line with Gilmore's interpretation of physical monstrosity, for according to Gilmore, “no matter how monsters differ otherwise, no matter where they

appear, monsters are vastly, grotesquely oversized. Looming intimidatingly, they pose a special challenge.”<sup>220</sup> Likewise, Leviathan's toothy mouth (Job 41.14) is of particular relevance to Gilmore's definition, and a perfect example of what he calls the monster's “malevolent maw,” an expression not just of its fearsome appearance, but of the monster's connection to a deeply felt psychological fear of being eaten.<sup>221</sup> Leviathan confounds modern classifications of “fish” and “mammal” as David Williams notes, as well as the gendered categories of male and female.<sup>222</sup>

Not only this, but Leviathan confounds and challenges the very concept of category, classification, and separation. In order for creation to be born, Leviathan must be defeated and forced into submission. Leviathan is thus a symbol of the original resistance to separation and binary classification. As a symbol of the undifferentiated primeval material, Leviathan is paradoxically a creature of harmony, and one of disorder, for while the amorphous wellspring it represents lacks a capacity for classification, its implied uniformity could equally be said to embody a preternatural perfection. “Sameness,” or undifferentiation, is, arguably, the source of what renders Leviathan terrifying in a biblical context, for should Yahweh ever fail to defeat Leviathan, the threat the serpent poses is a threat against creation and its differentiation out of chaos. To lose to Leviathan, in other words, would mean a return to what was, to universal sameness.

According to the work of both Gilmore and Cohen, monsters are likewise used by majority populations to dehumanize and scapegoat vulnerable minorities and perceived

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<sup>220</sup> Gilmore, 174.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid. 176.

<sup>222</sup> Williams, 186.

enemies of a given culture, and this is what Cohen means by his fourth thesis, that the monster “dwells at the gates of difference.”<sup>223</sup> According to Cohen, “any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual.”<sup>224</sup> Cohen makes use of his own biblical example, citing dehumanization of the inhabitants of Canaan in Numbers 13 as a “distortion” of a human population to suit the needs of the text, audience, and author. The biblical example, he claims, should be familiar to his audience.<sup>225</sup> The tendency of the monster to be used in this way has the secondary effect, for Cohen, of regulating the behaviour of the preferred and dominant group. As we discussed in our previous chapter, monsters often act as cautionary examples that demonstrate inappropriate behaviour, choices, and the consequences of those behaviours and choices. According to Cohen, for instance, monsters encourage women to avoid behaviours that would cast them in the role of monstrous temptresses such as Scylla, or Lilith.<sup>226</sup> Leviathan is used in a similar way, though its dramatically inhuman body and character mean that such messages come across in less obvious or physical ways. Nowhere, for instance, does a man transform physically into a scaled sea monster as punishment for aberrant behaviour, and nowhere does a larger group literally become the monster in the form of Leviathan the chaos serpent. As should be clear by now, however,

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<sup>223</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 7.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> In Numbers 13, spies are sent by Moses to discern whether the lands in and around Canaan are plentiful or barren, well-fortified or unprotected. Wary of the well-defended settlements they find, Moses's spies return with tales of monstrous inhabitants, giants who descend from the Nephilim. *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

there are numerous occasions in the Bible in which Leviathan or Rahab appear as symbolic and monstrous representations of enemy nations and peoples, seemingly exemplifying the worst characteristics of humankind through their association with Egyptians or Babylonians. Unlike the vampire, Leviathan does not take on racial or racist characteristics of the Egyptians or Babylonians. For a monster such as Leviathan, who occupies a cosmic rather than personal role as monster, monstrous characteristics such as this one tend to manifest in metaphorical rather than actual ways. This is particularly clear in Is.30.7, Is.51.9-10, and Ps.87.4. Here, Israel's enemies are quite literally described as monsters, sharing the name and monstrously chaotic character of Leviathan. Recall that Ps.87.4 lists Rahab along with several powerful nations, and it is probable that the name “Rahab” (רַהַב) is being used to refer to Egypt.<sup>227</sup> A more explicit link is made in Is.51.9-10, which juxtaposes what appears to be a straight description of the combat myth and separation of the waters during creation with Yahweh's parting of the Red Sea:

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! As in the ancient days in the generations of old. Was it not you who cut Rahab [and] wounded the dragon? Was it not you who has dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep (*tehôm*); who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to cross?

עוֹרֵי לְבָשִׁי-עֹז, זְרוּעַ יְהוָה--עוֹרֵי כִימֵי קֶדֶם, דְּרוֹת  
 עוֹלָמִים; הֲלוֹא אַתָּה-הִיא הַמְחַצֵּבֶת רַהַב, מְחוֹלְלַת תַּנִּין.  
 הֲלוֹא אַתָּה-הִיא הַמְסַרְבֶּת יָם, מִי תְהוֹם רַבָּה; הַשְׁמָה  
 מַעַמְקֵי-יָם--דֶּרֶךְ, לְעֵבֶר גְּאוּלִּים.

To compare one's enemies with the “king monster” is to ally them with the forces of uncreation. Not only are Egypt and Babylon threats to Israel's freedom, independence,

<sup>227</sup> Day, *God's Conflict*, 90.

and continued existence, but their danger is comparable to that of a force that regularly and perpetually seeks to unmake the created world. Israel, in this context, would appear to represent a microcosmic symbol of order in a macrocosmic universe. The ills perpetrated against Israel are here representative of the a greater threat to the ordered cosmos. In Is.51.9, Yahweh has defeated Leviathan in order to calm and then divide the waters, and in Is.51.10 those waters take on a more literal role as the waves of the Red Sea, a symbol of Egypt's defeat and subjugation. The Egypt in Is.30.7 is toothless, no longer an enemy, perhaps, but barely worthy of friendship or of calling on for aid. Thus she is referred to as “the silenced Rahab” (רַהַב הַיָּם שָׁבֵת)<sup>228</sup> by the text's author, whose agenda is to prevent a pact with Egypt. The comparison suggests, as Gunkel phrases it, that Egypt “may be like Chaos in its great might, but it is only a conquered monster which rattles its chains, but which cannot break them. It will be no help and no salvation.”<sup>229</sup>

Yet counter to this, monsters are important for their ability to communicate new avenues of thought, interpretation, and experience. Through the lens of the monster, we are able to engage the “other” as a point of view, and to consider the story not from the perspective we are usually taught, but from the perspective of the hero's foe. This too is part of “dwelling at the gates of difference,” for though monsters quite literally demonize minority and vulnerable populations, this demonization can often have the paradoxical effect that it grants such populations a voice. I have remarked previously that, unlike

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<sup>228</sup> Though contentious, this reading is supported both by John Day, and by Hermann Gunkel. Day, *God's Conflict*, 89. Gunkel, *Creation*, 26. To contrast, Wakeman suggests reading the phrase as “to act like Rahab,” though this seems unlikely. Wakeman, 59.

<sup>229</sup> Gunkel, *Creation*, 26.

Yahweh, Leviathan lacks a narrative voice, and perhaps even desire or will of its own. Though it must be acknowledged that Leviathan, as a symbol of chaos, suggests a return to chaos, it is unclear whether this is due to the serpent's own wants or needs, or whether it is simply a case of inertial movement toward its natural state. Without the will of Yahweh opposed upon it, is it possible, for instance, that *tehôm* would collapse like so much ooze, returning to a "resting state" of primordial chaos and unlimited potential? It would seem counter-intuitive, perhaps, to suggest we read any text from the perspective of an entity that may lack any sense of self-determination or will, and whose very purpose is to represent undifferentiation, and yet analyzing a "king monster" from its own point of view has curious implications for how one approaches cultural "others" generally, as well as how one interprets the moral status of creation. What, we might ask, is Leviathan struggling for? There is conflict, or at the very least tension, between Yahweh and Leviathan, or else why the need for defeat in the first place? Definitive answers are beyond the scope of any one study, yet nonetheless these questions are worth asking.

If we examine Leviathan in its role as "ultimate Other," we engage with a radical yet divine symbol of unlimited potentiality. This relates to Cohen's observations concerning the work of René Girard. According to Cohen, "the political-cultural monster, the embodiment of radical difference, paradoxically threatens to erase difference in the world of its creators."<sup>230</sup> This is nowhere more true than in the case of chaos monsters, who represent difference and "otherness" while simultaneously evoking concepts of an age before difference could be said to exist. The monster can be, and is, reformed to

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<sup>230</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 11.

accommodate the anxieties of the cultural that invokes it, and in the very act of mutating suggests that difference itself is transitory and illusory. The monster in this case is the ultimate *tabula rasa* upon which to inscribe our doubts, fears, and desires. Leviathan in particular is associated like other “king monsters” with an original conflict, an original difference. There is an implied separation between Leviathan (read as *tehôm*) and Yahweh. As ultimate Other, Leviathan can be said to resist difference, to suggest a return to limitlessness. I hesitate to use the word “harmony” here, for that would suggest calm, and we know from a biblical context that Leviathan is in need of calming. Rather, visualizing Leviathan as an ocean expanse, the serpent is perhaps better understood as a collective and collected body of water, out of which waves form and dissolve. We may see, or think we see, shapes and images in the waves and in the water, but they vanish as quickly as new images appear, so that we are not quite certain of what we saw to begin with. In a human context, so too might we recognize in difference the tendency to mutate, to deceive, and to disappear. Variations in gender, ethnicity, nationality, when used to uphold systems of oppression and classification, ignore the created nature of these concepts, mistaking imagined and illusory patterns that emerge from the waves for the entirety of the ocean and its unlimited possibilities.

We are told in Genesis 1 that the earth was “formless and void” (תהו וָבִהוּ), but “void” in this case does not equal “nothing,” for there is material with which Yahweh is able to fashion the universe. What is lacking is the ability for difference to manifest in any permanent or long-lasting sense, and in this way pre-creation is devoid of any concept of



“otherness,” any notion of “monstrousness.” The perspective of Leviathan, of undifferentiated creative material, is the perspective of “the other” before binary classification can be imposed upon it by an outside source or entity. Leviathan is the monstrous blueprint onto which we transfer the details of the individual monsters we create and change over time.

Monsters, therefore, are mixed categories that contest binary thinking and hierarchical systems by allowing for new, non-binary categories and forms of existence. This is once again akin to what Mary Douglas refers to when she explains that the spaces outside order contain infinite possibilities for pattern.<sup>231</sup> As Douglas notes in her discussion of boundaries, there is power both within the structured apparatuses of society and the behaviours it reinforces, but there is also power in the margins:

The idea of a society is a powerful image. It is potent in its own right to control or stir men to action. This image has form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure. Its outlines contain power to reward conformity and repulse attack. There is energy in its margins and unstructured areas. For symbols of society any human experience of structures, margins, or boundaries is ready to hand.<sup>232</sup>

This is applicable not only to the literal structures themselves, but to the unseen behavioural structures of ordered society. The creation of distinctions between “us” and “them,” “inside” and “outside,” “ordered” and “disordered,” establishes systems and degrees of power for the people and monsters to which they are applied. There is danger too, Beal points out, in attributing the characteristics and personas of chaos monsters to

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<sup>231</sup> Douglas, 94.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.* 114.

our cultural “others.” In the Bible, this is particularly the case, since the enemies in question are not merely personal ones, but national dangers. Says Beal:

Making enemies into monsters is a kind of conjuring, and conjuring is always more than one bargains for. To make another nation into a monster does more than simply mark it as a clear enemy. Insofar as chaos monsters are the otherworldly within the worldly, such conjuring also endows the enemy with a kind of supernatural, primordial, mysterious otherness, an agency that resists being reduced to an easy target, and that never stays down for long. To name an enemy after a chaos monster, especially when the same name is used for a chaos god in a closely related tradition (e.g., Yam/Yamm and Leviathan/Litan), is to risk imbuing it with a kind of sacred chaos—a sacred chaos with which God may even be allied, much to Israel's and Judah's horror.<sup>233</sup>

While the process of monstrous “othering” has the effect and intention of taking away power, it has the additional consequence that it grants new forms of power. The monster represents and encapsulates our fears, and yet it also evokes fear and disorientation, through which it exercises its own form of control. Egypt may thus be demonized through its association with the monstrous Rahab, but it is also raised up to a level above the purely human, acknowledged as a semi-divine force, despite its “silenced” state.

A related concept is addressed in Cohen's fifth and sixth theses, which state that “the monster polices the borders of the possible” and that “fear of the monster is really a kind of desire.”<sup>234</sup> By this fifth thesis, Cohen means to say that monsters act as cautionary tales that restrict the mobility of individuals within a community, rendering some choices (and/or the upward mobility of a person) seemingly “impossible.” Leviathan

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<sup>233</sup> Beal, 33.

<sup>234</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 12, 16.

demonstrates this characteristic most strongly in the Book of Job, in which, as I have previously argued, Job begins to identify with Leviathan insofar as Leviathan is likewise subjugated and afflicted by Yahweh. What might be interpreted as Job's pride, however, is policed by Yahweh using the example of the monstrous Leviathan, who is invoked to strike fear and awe in the heart of Job. After Yahweh's speech from the whirlwind, in which Yahweh describes the nuances of Leviathan's power and physique, Job admits that he has overstepped his bounds. In Job 42.3 we find that Yahweh's speech, and Leviathan's might, have put Job back in his place:

Therefore I have uttered that which I did not understand;  
things too wonderful for me, that I did not know.

לֵכֶן הִגִּדְתִּי, וְלֹא אָבִין  
נִפְלְאוֹת תִּמְנִי, וְלֹא אֲדַע

Job's theodical concerns are here put to rest, for the truth is both terrifying, and beyond human ken. If Leviathan is a monster that only Yahweh can hope to vanquish, what manner of creature is Yahweh? It is better, perhaps, that Job not probe any further, and that instead he stay away from thoughts of the primordial serpent and what it represents.

In this way monsters, Leviathan included, can be said to police boundaries, and the association is more than metaphorical. As Gilmore notes, monsters “are said to live in borderline places, inhabiting an 'outside' dimension that is apart from, but parallel to and intersecting the human community.”<sup>235</sup> These areas are most often transitional and marginal, as we have discussed. Monsters make their homes in swamps, caves,

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<sup>235</sup> Gilmore, 12.

mountains, neighbouring woods, and the depths of the sea. Perhaps more than any other monstrous attribute, Leviathan demonstrates this characteristic most clearly. Not only is Leviathan “the dragon that is in the sea” (אַת־הַתַּיִן, אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּם) of Is.27.1, but it should be apparent at this point that Leviathan is particularly connected to the concept of *tehôm*, the deep, and the primordial waters described in Genesis 1. These borderline places, as much as the borderline identities and ideas that Cohen describes, are likewise policed, for what is the story of Red Riding Hood and the wolf but a cautionary tale about the dangers of the forest, and of the stranger? Journey too far out, or too deep, and the ocean will swallow you whole.

There is, however, an element of temptation to the monstrous, as we see in Cohen's sixth thesis. In the case of Leviathan this is, again, perhaps best represented by Job, who begins to identify with Leviathan. As Job contemplates Leviathan and how the serpent relates to his own existence and nature, the man from Uz comes perilously close to something otherworldly and dangerous. Job is entranced, perhaps, by what Cohen calls the monster's “sublime despair,” which Cohen interprets as a point of envy for humankind.<sup>236</sup> There is an element of escapism to identification with Cohen's monster, and though Job's identification with Leviathan may appear darker in tone than the term “escapism” suggests, I would argue that Job's association with Leviathan provides him some relief from the very tangible and human afflictions with which Yahweh has cursed him. The problem, of course, for Job, is that he takes matters too far, wallowing in his fantasies rather than quickly disabusing himself of them. Job escapes his dalliance with

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<sup>236</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 17.

Leviathan only because Yahweh appears to him and puts an end to his despair, allowing Job re-entry to the “world of comfort and light” described by Cohen, and which awaits the typical horror movie audience after their brief visit to the realm of the monstrous.<sup>237</sup>

As with many of the other monstrous attributes we have examined so far, the “king monster” demonstrates a typically monstrous characteristic, but on a cosmic, rather than a personal, scale. In this way, the monstrous and numinous are often paired, as we see in the work of Richard Kearney and Timothy Beal, and it is on this point that much of my next chapter will revolve. To summarize, while the monster is undeniably fearsome, it nonetheless receives a degree of veneration from its host culture. Since the monster is able to transgress where and when humans are not, it exemplifies the forbidden desire, the taboo behaviour, and the ability to traverse the boundaries of the safe and unsafe. It has therefore also come to inhabit a place of respect and divine mystery. Though Gilmore suggests that malicious intent is key to identifying a monster, he nonetheless acknowledges the paradoxical duality that the monster represents for most cultures:

Promiscuously combining incongruent organic elements, the monster also unifies the moral opposites that comprise human comprehension. Ugly and malevolent, the monster is demonic of course, but it is also paradoxically divine: in its mystery and power, god-like and unfathomable, an object of reverence, and of admiration—even of identification—as well as of fear and loathing.<sup>238</sup>

What this says about Leviathan and its relationship to Yahweh will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, along with several other of Gilmore's points that specifically apply to the relationship and fearful symmetry between Leviathan and Yahweh.

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Gilmore, 192.

Conclusion:

If the meaning and substance of the monster is said to change both according to the context of a text's creation and the context during which it is read, then my own interpretation can itself be understood as yet another rendering of Leviathan and its purpose. As I seek to prove the relevance of Leviathan and monster theory to each other, my research reveals an agenda that privileges particular aspects of Leviathan that are relevant to my points, and which help to solidify my arguments. In contrast, it would be arrogant to assume that my work, inherently subjective and flawed, does not in the process downplay elements of Leviathan's narrative that do not appear supportive of that same agenda. When the modern reader engages with texts that feature Leviathan they likewise filter Leviathan through their specific cultural experience and expectations. A modern reading of Leviathan would perhaps consider the monster in light of later developments in world mythology and folklore, such as the Loch Ness Monster, or the proliferation of the *ouroboros* symbol. These associations would further imbue the character with additional traits that maintain a direct connection between our modern "leviathans" and their biblical progenitor.

Central to my own conception of Leviathan is the theory of a "king monster," which I have introduced here in the hopes of building a foundation of knowledge upon which to draw in Chapter 4, and in future study. The "king monster" is not simply a chaos monster, though often chaos monsters will numbers

amongst their ranks, but instead refers to archetypal monsters that represent the epitome of a given sub-species of the monstrous. Often such monsters, I would argue, belong to the class of chaotic sea serpents and primordial dragons, but I do not wish to limit the term to that classification at this time. Rightly or wrongly, “king monsters” are those creatures that symbolize the most fearsome, the most awe-inspiring, and often the oldest monsters of the culture in which they appear. The “king monster” is therefore also often associated with “first things,” the combat tradition, or the origins of good and evil (whether the monster is the source of one or the other). As its name would suggest, like Leviathan, it is necessary for the king monster to be defeated in order for another to take its title and its place.

Chapter 4: Gods in Parallel: Yahweh and Leviathan in the Old Testament

If monsters are paradoxes, so too are the heroes who oppose them, for even if the monster's nemesis begins life as an ordinary human, they do not remain that way by the end of the story. In the case of the combat myth and its associated heroes and monsters, we deal not with humans at all, but with gods. By their very nature, the divine and semi-divine heroes who are set against chaos monsters are inhuman, and so the question is not how or whether they become less human, but in what ways the divinity of these characters manifests, and how that manifestation affects humankind within the narrative.

In the previous chapter, I suggested that in Job, the titular character makes a grave mistake by associating himself with the biblical chaos monster Leviathan, and this is a part of what prompts Yahweh to conjure Leviathan and end their discussion. In his speech from the whirlwind, Yahweh is intent, I argue, not simply on proving either his or Leviathan's individual prowess, but on drawing a connection between himself and the chaos monster. Job is concerned not only with why he suffers, but why the just endure any suffering at all in a creation that was intentionally molded by Yahweh. In answer to Job's theodical quandry, Yahweh summons the very representation of chaos itself, a being of the primordial ocean out of which creation was fashioned. If Job had hoped for a satisfying affirmation of Yahweh as an intrinsically just and loving god, then he is left wanting by Yahweh's enigmatic response. Mystified by Yahweh's answer that there are, perhaps, more things in heaven and earth than can be gleaned by Job's mortal mind, the prophet returns to a life of practical and earthly matters. Despite the threat early on in Job's narrative that he had danced dangerously close to something unknowable and



terrifying, he is let free to return to the world of human concerns.

In a sense, though perhaps rather radically, we might argue that Yahweh summons the image of Leviathan to demonstrate that Yahweh, too, is a kind of monster. Certainly, Yahweh's answer to Job's desperate plea of why evil exists in Yahweh's creation seems to be depressingly apathetic, if not outright hostile. As Timothy Beal notes, the contradictions of Leviathan as primeval enemy of Yahweh and created plaything merge in the speech from the whirlwind, describing a creature that strikes fear in the hearts of gods and men, but with whom Yahweh appears horrifyingly allied. For Beal, “this last challenge is to convert Job's desire to rouse Leviathan into repulsion, causing him to draw back from the vertiginous abyss. Yet God is not similarly repelled. As the speech continues, the challenge of taking on Leviathan merges with the challenge of taking on God.”<sup>239</sup> The speech from the whirlwind thus repels Job not simply by summoning Leviathan's monstrous image, but by pushing even further to associate that image with Yahweh.

What, then, should Job have expected? And what does it say about Yahweh, Leviathan, and creation? In the following chapter I will present the available evidence regarding the relationship between Yahweh, Leviathan, and creation, and how the Bible presents the origin and existence of all three. This will be followed by a brief re-examination of the enthronement conflict between Yahweh and Leviathan, which will lead into an analysis of the fearful symmetry displayed by Yahweh and Leviathan, and how that symmetry is expressed through the lens of the hero-monster cycle touched on in

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<sup>239</sup> Beal, 51.

the previous chapter. The discussion will conclude with further analysis of the implications that Yahweh and Leviathan's parallelism has for humankind, particularly as expressed in the Book of Job, and will be followed by a summary of my findings.

As in my previous chapter, it is my contention that applying monster theory to an analysis of Leviathan's role in the Old Testament both lends credence to existing arguments concerning the similarities shared by Leviathan and Yahweh, and reveals new avenues of inquiry that have repercussions for both monstrous studies itself, and our understanding of Yahweh and Leviathan's characterizations and roles in the Bible.

#### Origins: Yahweh, Leviathan, and Creation:

Central to understanding Leviathan and Yahweh's relationship is an understanding of pre-creation, and the ways in which it is depicted both in the Bible, and in the Near Eastern creation narratives that are believed to have influenced the biblical version of the myth. We have already summarized Leviathan's part in the creation story as it is introduced in both Genesis 1 and Job 26, as well as identified some of the common themes shared by biblical and non-biblical versions of the myth. The following section will add further detail and context to a discussion of the *chaoskampf* and what we can learn from the Bible about what I will argue are Yahweh and Leviathan's shared origins. Though the Bible, by its nature, presents conflicting and contradictory versions of both Yahweh and Leviathan's narratives, it remains possible to address common and recurring themes in their stories that are enriched, and perhaps informed, by chaos monster traditions from elsewhere in Near Eastern and Mediterranean mythology.

In the beginning, Genesis 1 tells us, there are gods (אֱלֹהִים)<sup>240</sup>, an earth that is “formless and void” (תְּהוֹ וָבֶהוּ), and that “darkness” (חֹשֶׁךְ) was upon “the deep” (תְּהוֹמֹת). From what happens next, in Genesis 1.6-8, we can intuit that *tehôm* is a watery expanse, for in Genesis 1.6 the *elohîm* (gods) create a firmament that “divides” (לְדַדְּיָל) “the waters” (מַיִם). This is likewise borne out in the broader cosmogonic tradition, which often describes pre-creation as “a kind of precosmic soup,” in the words of Timothy Beal.<sup>241</sup> As John Day notes, the belief that a watery expanse rested both above and below the earth was common to Near Eastern mythology, and so it is unsurprising that we find such a tradition expressed in the Old Testament.<sup>242</sup> While an interpretation of Genesis 1-2 that suggests the pre-existence of the primordial waters may be contentious, there is evidence elsewhere in the Old Testament that supports the view that the Bible participates in this same mythic tradition. In his analysis of the phrase *tohu wabohu* (formless and void) regarding the state of the earth, David Tsumura similarly points out that the terms do not unequivocally support a reading that the earth was “not there,” but rather, that, as

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<sup>240</sup> The plural is used here rather than the singular, and this has been interpreted by a number of scholars as a reference to the Divine Council mentioned sporadically throughout the Bible. Possible references to a Divine Council, of which Yahweh is part, can be found in Genesis 1, 2-3, 6, and 10, as well as Psalm 98, and Job 1-2. The word itself, *elohîm*, is typically understood to have arisen from the name “El.” In Canaanite mythology, El is the creator deity, and the father of the thunder god Baal (with whom Yahweh himself shares many similarities). John Day argues that, unlike Baal, whose name falls out of favour in the biblical context, the name “El” becomes associated with Yahweh because the characteristics El represents (undying, eternal, creative) are traits that accorded with the theological understanding of Yahweh and his role. John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 14-5. Penchansky, 23-40. Later passages in the Bible reaffirm Yahweh's role as creator deity, however, and so despite the anomaly, I have chosen to address the creation story in Genesis 1 as though it is part of Yahweh's biblical narrative. It may be worth noting, however, that the existence of multiple gods, many of whom appear to work alongside Yahweh, has implications for the prospective divinity of the monstrous and chaotic Leviathan.

<sup>241</sup> Beal, 14.

<sup>242</sup> Day, *God's Conflict*, 4.

Tsumura phrases it, the earth was “not yet normal.” The purpose for this, Tsumura argues, is to explain a state of being supposedly beyond human comprehension in human terms of concrete meaning. We should therefore understand the phrase's association with “void” and “emptiness” in the context of an unfurnished, or empty, house. There is not nothing, but there is something lacking that sets the house apart from what we would deem the “normal” state of a house.<sup>243</sup> Therefore, though the earth at this time may be “formless and void,” creation does not necessarily spring from nothing. There is a raw material with which Yahweh is able to form the firmament. This raw material is “the waters” (וַיְהִי), which are never explicitly listed amongst the created cosmological and geographical features that Yahweh has made himself. Rather, the gods act upon the waters in Genesis 1.6, causing the firmament (רָקִיעַ) to separate the waters from each other, and later, in Genesis 1.9, the waters are manipulated by the gods to form the sea. Representative of the primordial substance that forms creation, the waters and *tehôm* hearken back to an earlier cosmogonic tradition that places chaos at the heart of the creative process. As Beal states regarding his reading of Genesis 1 in the context of Near Eastern and Egyptian mythology, “cosmogony [is] . . . about cosmos *emerging out of* chaos, and apocalypse . . . about cosmos *returning to* chaos.”<sup>244</sup>

Vestiges of the *chaoskampf* narrative can be seen in the creation narrative from Genesis 1, but a clearer image emerges in its descriptions from Psalms 74.13-7 and 104, as well as Job 26, which associate not only Leviathan and Rahab with chaos, but the

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<sup>243</sup> David Toshio Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 13, 23, 35.

<sup>244</sup> Beal, 15.

subjugation of the combined forces of chaos with Yahweh's enthronement over creation. In Psalm 104.3-5, as in Genesis 1, it is implied that creation is founded “upon the waters” (מַיִם), and in Ps.104.6 *tehôm* (תְּהוֹם) is used to cover the earth. This is similar to the description of how the *elohim* create the firmament in Genesis 1.6-8. Unlike Genesis, however, Psalm 104 makes more of Yahweh's continued subjugation and manipulation of the waters, since in Ps.104.7-9 Yahweh is said to control the waters with a “rebuke” (רָעַב), and to form a boundary (גָּבַל) so that they cannot again flood the earth. The natural state, in this case, seems to be chaotic, since *tehôm* and “the waters” require boundaries to be established so that ordered creation can be maintained. In Job 26.10, as we have noted previously, Yahweh “inscribes” a circle upon the waters (סָבַב), a verb that suggests movement and bodily action rather than speech. Elsewhere, the sea as well as Leviathan itself require Yahweh's physical manipulation in order for creation to begin. Thus we find in Psalm 74.13 a reference to Yahweh “dividing” (פָּרַק) the sea, and later, in Psalm 74.15, to Yahweh's “cleaving” (פָּרַק) of springs and torrents. Aggressive and violent imagery related to the process of creation should be familiar at this point, even expected, but more significant to my current argument is that the use of force to *change* rather than *create* the waters suggests that while mutable, this material may have co-existed with Yahweh, and was not necessarily dependent upon him prior to its subjugation at the time of creation.

Additional evidence can be found in Psalm 24.2, wherein the Psalmist emphasizes Yahweh's kingship over creation with reference to how he “founded” (יָסַד) and

“established” (כִּי־בְרָא) creation atop seas and rivers. As K. William Whitney notes with allusion to the combat element of the creation narrative, “the defeated foe, Seas/Rivers, is, therefore, the stable base upon which the whole creation is founded.”<sup>245</sup> Whitney’s statement again suggests the pre-existence of the waters, and with them Leviathan, prior to creation. He likewise notes the existence of commentaries alluding to the use of Leviathan in particular as the base upon which the world rests.<sup>246</sup> Despite the anomaly of Ps. 104.26, wherein Yahweh is said to have formed Leviathan himself, a reading of Leviathan, *tehôm*, and the waters as one and the same further supports the view that the primordial waters existed prior to creation, and were integral to the process.<sup>247</sup>

Likewise, given the relationship between Yahweh’s enthronement and his defeat of Leviathan, it might be suggested that Yahweh and Leviathan could have existed in tandem. Genesis in particular lacks the details of the *chaoskampf* as they appear in the Ugaritic texts, the *Enuma Elish*, or Psalms, Isaiah, and Job, and yet traces of the combat myth are retained in the text’s references to *tehôm* and the centrality of the gods’ manipulation of the waters to the creative process. Similarly, Psalm 104.26 reasserts Leviathan’s status as Yahweh’s creation, and yet in verses 1-6, Yahweh’s mastery over the primordial waters appears to be the most important part of his lordship. Such skill as Yahweh demonstrates would surely be meaningless if he had created the primordial

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<sup>245</sup> Whitney, 163.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid. 115, note 57.

<sup>247</sup> Much of Wakeman’s research is related to proving connections between Leviathan, Rahab, and what she refers to as, “the myth obscured.” In the case of *tehôm*, Wakeman acknowledges that while the term refers to a body of water, it has generally been accepted that it derives from the name of another primordial chaos monster: the goddess Tiamat. Wakeman, 86-7.

waters himself. Rather, the fact that Yahweh's power over them requires reasserting and addressing by the narrators of various Psalms, suggests that though he might command the waters currently, it was not always so. Indeed, their natural state is one opposed to separation, as we see in Psalm 104. That Yahweh is capable of asserting a force strong enough to keep the waters separated is, I contend, intended to be both remarkable, and a demonstration of his ultimate power. Since Leviathan's defeat is a requisite to Yahweh's use of the waters in creation, the implication is that Leviathan (and the waters with it) was around in order for its authority to be contested.

In the hero-monster myth described by David Gilmore in his contribution to monster theory, one of the key elements of this cyclical narrative is the Oedipal component of the story. Keeping in mind the work of Day and Whitney to link Yahweh with the Semitic deity Baal,<sup>248</sup> Yahweh is a perfect example of Gilmore's suggested paradigm:

The monster may stand for the Olympian castrating father of fantasy, and so the hero-myth simply works as an allegory for the Oedipal conflict in which the recurrent cannibal imagery serves as a metaphor for castration displaced to the entire body . . . . We will see this Oedipus-writ-large scenario ad infinitum in the mythologies of the early civilizations with heroes like Marduk, Seth, Thor, and so on. These heroes are always *young* warriors (sons); they always vanquish *old* and ancestral ogres, giants, dragons, and the like, many of which are depicted, like parents, as remnants from some distant past when the earth was young, that is, during thematic infancy of the human race.<sup>249</sup>

Here, the hero (or in this case, hero-god), is set against a foundational ancestor whose defeat appears to be a necessary component of the continuation of the human race.

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<sup>248</sup> Day, *God's Conflict*, 35-7. Whitney, 164.

<sup>249</sup> Gilmore, 17.

Leviathan is cast in a multitude of roles in its biblical narrative, as our previous chapters have demonstrated. While in Genesis 1.21 the *elohim* create the sea monsters (תַּיִתּוֹן) and in Psalm 104.26 Leviathan is a plaything of Yahweh's, the serpent is presented in Psalm 74 as a beast to be feared, conquered, and subdued. These remnants of the *chaoskampf* in the biblical tradition are suggestive, as I have argued, of a familial connection between Yahweh and Leviathan, or at the very least between Yahweh and the primordial and watery chaos that Leviathan represents. While this interpretation may be contentious, I believe it is representative of how the biblical combat myth may have originated, especially in light of the connections forged by John Day between Canaanite mythology and the conflict between Yahweh and Leviathan. If Leviathan and *tehôm* are to be understood as biblical symbols of a procreative and pre-creative substance, then their role within biblical mythology and hierarchical cosmogony may be better understood through comparison with earlier Near Eastern myths that feature the same or similar motifs. The conflict between the two forces of chaos and order that is reflected in Yahweh's subjugation of the primordial waters, is akin to Gilmore's description of the conquered ancestor. Many of the Near Eastern hero-gods analyzed by Wakeman are associated with similar stories of castration and usurpation. In these myths, themes of kingship are linked with an Oedipal narrative that demonstrates the necessity of a progenitor god's death in order for the conquering god to claim his birthright. In Hittite mythology, the god Kumarbi is challenged by the god Anu, whose testicles are bitten off and swallowed by Kumarbi. Kumarbi, a male deity, is impregnated when he swallows the



testicles, and eventually gives birth to the storm-god, letting forth a gush of water when he does. The young storm-god later defeats Kumarbi and takes his place as king, the very succession Kumarbi sought to avoid when he attacked Anu (the storm-god's first father) in the process. The storm-god in this narrative is a curious hero, for on the one hand he represents a clearly Oedipal narrative in that he is both born of Kumarbi, and is also the author of that god's defeat, but on the other he is a champion of Anu, his other father.<sup>250</sup> Similar myths of castration, male pregnancy, and divine kingship occur in Greek and Egyptian mythology. In Greek mythology, Kronos plots with his mother, Gaia, to castrate and kill his father Ouranos, only to be usurped himself by his son, Zeus. Like Baal and Yahweh, Zeus is also a storm-god, though chaos, in this instance, is his great-grandfather and is not Kronos himself. Despite this distinction, Kronos remains linked with chaos thematically. As Wakeman makes clear, because Kronos is responsible for the separation of Gaia (earth) and Ouranos (sky) when he castrates his father, he is both thematically and semantically the heir of his grandfather, chaos, for the word chaos derives from a Greek term "meaning gape, gap, yawn."<sup>251</sup> In Wakeman's estimation, it is logical that the separator precedes what is separated, making chaos itself responsible for its own division into heaven and earth.<sup>252</sup> We know from Genesis 1, however, that it is not Leviathan (chaos) who creates the heavens and the earth, or who divides the waters, but Yahweh. That Yahweh is the separator that Wakeman refers to, rather than Leviathan, entrenches Yahweh further into the camp of chaos, for not only may he be born from the same water

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<sup>250</sup> Wakeman, 25.-6

<sup>251</sup> Ibid. 26-7.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid. 27.

as Leviathan, but he behaves like a chaos god. Fittingly, this is exactly the question posed by Timothy Beal, whose research identifies the Hebrew god with chaos. As Beal argues, perhaps unknowingly tying biblical interpretation with monster theory, “these ambiguities with regard to chaos monsters and God's relation to them are unresolvable, revealing a religious tradition whose inherent tensions between orientation and disorientation, between order and chaos . . . go to the very core of its one God.” Beal's claims are in relation to what he calls “Psalms of Disorientation,” better known as Psalms of lament, as well as the conflicting portrayals of Leviathan in the biblical narrative, and how those conflicting portrayals relate to Yahweh.<sup>253</sup> The theme of divine, he suggests, underlies and makes sense of both Leviathan's role in Psalms, as well as his interactions with Yahweh in Job.

Without Leviathan, it seems, Yahweh would not possess the control over creation that he does. The world is formed from chaos in Genesis, demonstrating that Yahweh's greatest strength is his ability to clutch and maintain the desired pattern from out of the seas of disorder. As Gilmore concludes regarding the importance of the monster to the hero-monster dynamic:

But such monsters as sphinxes bring forth the necessary heroes to defeat them, and because such heroes make civilization by the example of monster-taming, without the former there would be no civilization at all. In fact, one may say that monsters and heroes arise simultaneously in virtually all ancient cosmologies as paired twins, indeed as inseparable polarities of a unified system of values and ideas underlying order itself.”<sup>254</sup>

Although, as Gilmore rightly points out, the commonalities between diverse cosmogonies

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<sup>253</sup> Beal, 29-30.

<sup>254</sup> Gilmore, 27.

across the world may suggest a historical connection, it is perhaps more rewarding for the scholar of religion to consider what the similarities between origin myths and monster stories have to tell us about shared human psychology. The chaos monsters that help shape our cosmogonies are similar, argues Gilmore, because they encapsulate our global hopes and fears. “From the earliest moment on,” he says, “we are confronted with an Oedipal theme: child against parent, monster and human one blood, linked by hatred and violence as well as patrimony.” As Gilmore wisely notes, however, since humans create monsters as much as monsters make man, are monsters truly our fathers, or are we theirs?<sup>255</sup>

#### Enthronement:

Any Oedipal narrative implies a shift in power. In the case of the *chaoskampf* this power shift is firmly established as one that involves control not just of creation, but over the material that makes up creation, and which Yahweh has trapped and contained beyond the firmament (אֲרָבָה) that he establishes in Genesis 1.6. Yahweh's control of the waters is just as intimately tied to his kingship as is the initial defeat of Leviathan, since it is the result and symbol of that victory. This is made clear not only in the passages I discussed in the last chapter, in which the combat myth is directly referenced along with Leviathan itself, but also in passages that generally link themselves to Yahweh's lordship. John Day uses the examples of Jeremiah 5.22, and Psalm 29 to make a similar point, and in both of these examples we find evidence of the link between Yahweh's status and his power over

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid. 36.

the waters. In Jeremiah 5:22, Yahweh describes how he contains the sea within the barrier he has created, and how it rages in vain:

Do you not fear me? said the Lord; do you not tremble at my presence?  
I have placed the sand as a boundary for the sea; a perpetual decree that it  
cannot pass.  
And though the waves thereof toss themselves, still they do not prevail.  
And though they roar, they do not pass over it.

הַאֲוֹתֵי לֹא-תִירָאוּ נְאֻם-יְהוָה, אִם מִפְּנֵי לֹא תַחֲלִילוּ  
אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַרְתִּי חוֹל גְּבוּל לַיָּם, חֶק-עוֹלָם וְלֹא יַעֲבֹרְנָהוּ; וַיִּתְגַּעֲשׂוּ  
וְלֹא יוֹכְלוּ, וְהִמּוּ גְלִיו וְלֹא יַעֲבֹרְנָהוּ.

Once again, Yahweh's wrath and majesty are reinforced with reference to his control over the waters, the fabric of which creation is made. The only water that will pass such a boundary is the water allowed to pass by Yahweh; the only thing of chaos that has continued agency in the ordered world of creation is Yahweh himself. In my previous chapter I laid the groundwork for a discussion of Yahweh's defeat of Leviathan, and the relationship between the subjugation of the serpent and its chaotic forces with Yahweh's kingship over both Israel and creation. It seems likely given the terseness and purpose of first creation in Genesis 1, along with later descriptions of the combat myth, that in combating the serpent, Yahweh's intent was always to gain control of the necessary elements of creation, and in so doing, perhaps, create the components required for subduing Leviathan. Since Leviathan and Yahweh may share divine origins, as I have argued in my previous section, it stands to reason that Leviathan, and any associated serpents, are the only potential threats to Yahweh in either the created or primordial

realms. In the passage from Jeremiah quoted above, there is the suggestion that the waters retain a degree of independence, not much, perhaps, but enough that they can be said to attempt to break past the boundaries Yahweh has built for them. While this may be taken to refer to simple ecological realities such as the breaking of the waves against the shore, the fact that the passage refers to observable, natural phenomena should not preclude it from carrying an additional, more cosmological meaning. Yet all the same, whatever power Leviathan and its waters retain is still dominated and controlled by Yahweh who, in Isaiah 51.15, suggests that he is quite capable of summoning the waters himself, wreaking havoc for humankind:

For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea, whose waves roar.

אֶנְכִי, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, רֹגַע הַיָּם, וַיִּהְמוּ גִלְיֹ

Yahweh's kingship is intrinsically tied to his ability to provide and maintain order and stability within the realm of his creation. Indeed, Yahweh's kingship over Leviathan allows him to make use of the serpent and the boundaries formed to enclose it to support the foundations of his creation, even as the serpent and its chaotic forces threaten to reabsorb the ordered world that Yahweh has pulled out of them. This is best observed in the *axis mundi* and *circuitus mundi* traditions, which posit a Leviathan that is either the axis upon which the world pivots, or the *ouroboros*-like symbol that holds the world within its looped body.<sup>256</sup> Found in midrashic and apocryphal writings related to

Leviathan, the association connects Leviathan both with the foundation of the ordered

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<sup>256</sup> Along with traditions in which Leviathan takes on either one of these roles is an interpretation in the commentary of Rashbam that suggests the existence of both a male and female Leviathan, one of the monsters forming the *axis mundi* while the other forms the *circuitus mundi*. Whitney, 118.

cosmos, as well as liminality (in the *axis mundi* tradition, Leviathan is quite literally positioned at the limits of creation).<sup>257</sup> Post-enthronement, Leviathan is both a plaything (as in Psalm 104), and a trophy, as we see here. “The image,” says K. William Whitney, “is striking: the victorious warrior towering over the vanquished Leviathan upon whom he has founded the whole cosmos.”<sup>258</sup> In the case of the *axis mundi* and *circuitus mundi* traditions, Yahweh can be said to be both literally and symbolically enthroned atop Leviathan. Similarly, in Psalm 29.10, Yahweh “sits enthroned atop the flood” (יְהוָה יֹשֵׁב עַל־בְּרִיחַ), a passage that Whitney interprets as a development out of the Ugaritic Baal myth. In an Ugaritic hymn to the god Baal, Baal is described as sitting enthroned upon a mountain that represents his victory over the “Flood-dragon.”<sup>259</sup> As touched on in my first chapter, scholarship remains in disagreement over the exact influences, and degree of influence, of other Near-Eastern traditions on the Bible's version of the combat myth. David Tsumura rejects, for instance, both Wakeman's identification of *tehôm* with the goddess Tiamat, and Day's suggestion that beneath the creation narrative in Genesis lie the remnants of an earlier, Canaanite *chaoskampf* myth featuring a *tehôm*-dragon of unknown name. In the place of either interpretation, Tsumura suggests that the identification of such a cognate Canaanite proper noun would not necessarily link *tehôm* in Genesis with that word, but rather, should be understood in terms of the common noun

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid. 117.

<sup>258</sup> Whitney compares the picture he paints with depictions of St. George defeating the dragon, which often feature the image of the saint on horseback as his lance pierces the dragon, pinning it to the ground. Ibid. 125-6.

<sup>259</sup> Translation of the Ugaritic hymn is Whitney's. Ibid. 164.

that acts as the Semitic root of either word.<sup>260</sup> The argument is attractive in its simplicity, and yet it does not satisfactorily address Day's suggestion that Genesis represents a demythologization of the *chaoskampf* narrative that is present elsewhere in the Bible itself. We have, for instance, not only comparison with outside, Near-Eastern traditions and Hebrew midrash at our disposal, but also passages from the Bible itself that associate Yahweh's kingship with his defeat and/or control of Leviathan, Rahab, or the waters (cf. Ps.74.127, Job 26, Is. 51.9-10). In particular, Tsumura argues, the Ugaritic god El is considered sole creator of the universe, and so there is no room for Yahweh or Baal to occupy both the positions of creator and of cosmic champion against chaos. Yet, as Tsumura himself points out, Yahweh combines features of multiple deities.<sup>261</sup> In his analysis, Tsumura seems inclined to separate biblical themes of creation from those of divine combat and enthronement, yet the concept of enthronement is itself tied to creation, as Whitney argues.<sup>262</sup>

For Yahweh, the purpose of kingship is not merely to protect Israel, but to protect his own differentiation from the chaos that preceded him. We see this, too, in the cyclical hero-monster myth championed by Gilmore. The monster and hero share origins, and often demonstrate superhuman abilities that mirror or compliment one another.<sup>263</sup> The threat is therefore always present that the hero will reveal his monstrous nature, abandoning the community he has sworn to defend against those forces that dwell in the

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<sup>260</sup> Tsumura, 37-8, 42.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid. 55-6.

<sup>262</sup> Whitney, 15.

<sup>263</sup> Gilmore, 12, 192-3.

ever-numinous *outside*. Lordship over Leviathan allows Yahweh control not just of the serpent's powers of fecundity and destruction, but also over when and how their shared characteristics will manifest. Control over Leviathan, control over the monster, allows Yahweh control over his own innate nature and the consequences of freeing the part of him that is akin to Leviathan. Like the Horus/Seth dynamic in Egyptian mythology, the king is both hero and monster, and his power lies in his ability to choose the one or the other. It is the possibility for choice, as well as Yahweh's natural associations with the primordial *tehôm*, that informs the fearful symmetry between the monstrous and chaotic Leviathan, and the hero-god Yahweh.

After the Conquest: Yahweh and His Systems of Control:

A certain degree of symmetry between Leviathan and Yahweh should already be apparent now that we've analyzed the similarities between their origins, and the ways in which Yahweh's defeat of Leviathan helps establish Yahweh's kingship.

Timothy Beal is concerned with similar themes in *Religion and its Monsters*, asking the question of whether creation is falling apart or whether God is a chaos monster.<sup>264</sup> The question is natural considering when and how Leviathan is most often referenced in the Bible. Beal points to Leviathan's role in various Psalms of Disorientation and lament such as Ps. 74.14 as “the voice of horror—psychological, political, cosmic horror” in Hebrew scripture. In instances such as this one, Leviathan's presence, argues Beal, represents not only the chaos that once was, but that all is not right

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<sup>264</sup> Beal, 29.



with the world in the context of the Psalm's authorship.<sup>265</sup> Similarly, when one considers the theodical themes underlying the Book of Job, Leviathan can perhaps be said to firmly encapsulate a sense of theological, national, and cosmogonical crisis for the authors and narrators who summon him. Leviathan simultaneously forces and allows its human conjurer to ask whether the world is falling to pieces because Leviathan is rising again, or if it is God's terrible will that misfortune befalls humankind?

Given the evidence, it seems likely the latter is true, for multiple biblical passages support Yahweh's ability to open the flood gates at will, spilling the waters he previously bound onto the earth in ravaging floods. This is most famously the case in the Flood Myth from the story of Noah. Displeased with how creation has developed, and in particular with the humans he has formed to live within it, Yahweh allows the waters he separated in Genesis 6-11 to flow freely together, flooding the earth. This is described in Genesis 7.11:

On that same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open,  
and the windows of the heavens were opened.

בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה, נִבְקְעוּ כָּל-מַעְיְנֵת תְּהוֹמוֹת רֶבֶה  
וַאֲרֻבַּת הַשָּׁמַיִם, נִפְתְּחוּ

Composed of the same chaotic, primordial material as his own creation, and perhaps Leviathan as well, Yahweh's own power manifests as an ability to control and manipulate *tehôm*. Early on in Yahweh's biblical narrative, his capacity for destruction, as well as his method for doing so, is introduced through the vehicle of the Flood Myth. In the span of only seven chapters, then, Yahweh transforms from divine and ordered creator to a

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

chaotic destroyer of worlds. In Genesis 8.1-2, of course, the chaotic waters of *tehôm* are tamed once more, and rather tellingly, this is done using the same means as in Genesis 1.2. When the flood waters subside, it is because Yahweh's spirit (רוח) passes over the earth. The same word is used to describe Yahweh's movement across the surface of the waters in Genesis 1.2. It is the same word that begins Yahweh's creative process. One is reminded that the word *ruach* carries the additional meanings of “breath” and “wind.” As a force capable not only of taming the seas, but also of awakening them, “wind” is a perfect analogy, and one that suggests a consciousness on the part of the author of the noun's implications. Wind is the perfect metaphor for Yahweh's interactions with the natural world, for indeed, though wind is experienced and observable it remains unseen and invisible save by its effects on other objects and things. The movement and moods of any body of water appear to be governed only by the wind, and depending on the strength or calmness of the wind, water behaves accordingly. Indeed, in Ps.88.16-7, another Psalm of Disorientation according to Beal, Yahweh himself is described with reference to the flood. The narrator proclaims his despair in the face of Yahweh's wrath, describing how Yahweh's attacks “surround” the speaker like “the waters” (רוּחַי כַּמַּיִם).

Leviathan itself is treated in a similar way to *tehôm*, for though it is used to represent real-world ethnic and national enemies of Israel in passages like Is.30.7, 51.9, and Ps.87.4, there is an underlying suggestion throughout the Old Testament that even these real-world forces are being manipulated by Yahweh in order to increase the hardships endured by Israel. I addressed this in the previous chapter with reference to

Yahweh's hardening of Pharaoh's heart in Exodus 7.3, but there are yet more examples of Yahweh's control over Egypt and other non-Hebrew nations, both friendly and antagonistic. Yahweh hardens hearts (דַבַּר-תֵּן לִבִּי) yet again in Joshua 11.20, in which Yahweh sets Joshua's enemies against him in order that they will be destroyed by Joshua's forces. In Judges 2.1-5 it is Israel that is punished by Yahweh, who threatens them with violence not only from enemy nations, but from the gods of enemy nations. In Isaiah 45.1-2, Yahweh explains that the Persian King Cyrus is his instrument, which he uses to subdue Israel's enemies. This is in spite of Cyrus's own nationality and beliefs, which are not those of the people he helps free. Similarly, in Isaiah 10.5-9 Yahweh is said to count a number of foreign kings amongst his puppets, calling Assyria “the rod of my anger” ( הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִפְּצֵן אֶת-אֲרָם ). In Jeremiah 34.1-6, Yahweh informs the people and king of Judah that he will give (תִּתֵּן) the city of Jerusalem to Babylon.

“Order” is as much, if not more, about control over creation as it is opposition to chaos, for though there is tension between the two forces, it is a tension bred from necessity rather than moral superiority. As much as we might like to read this conflict in terms of good and evil, so often in the biblical narrative Yahweh demonstrates the same lack of moral absolutism as Leviathan. In the passages referenced above, for instance, Yahweh uses forces associated with “evil” to punish or guide Israel, willing even to sacrifice his chosen people if it suits his desires. In Ezekiel 20, Yahweh gives a lengthy speech on the inadequacies of Israel, most in relation to Israel's consistent tendency to fall back on old or foreign traditions and sacrifice to idols. Yahweh spares Israel his wrath in

Ezek. 20.9 and 20.14 not out of mercy or love, but “worked for the sake of [his] name” (‘תָּשׁוּ לְפָנָי שְׂעָרָי). In Ezek. 20.26, Yahweh's anger appears to intensify, as he describes how he “polluted them with their own gifts” (דָּמְתֵם בְּדָמְתֵם אֲדָמְתֵם) after giving them false directions in 20.25. If the enemy nations are evil, it is with Yahweh's consent and blessing, for their own innate natures, in the context of the narrative, cannot be other than what Yahweh has allowed them to be. If they are evil, it is because they are not Israel. Yahweh's own moral ambiguity is, of course, not only apparent in his use of the nations, but in his actions throughout the Bible. In Genesis 22 and Judges 11.34 Yahweh engages in the psychological torment of Abraham, Isaac, and Jephthah when he asks that Abraham sacrifice Isaac, and that Jephthah uphold his promise to sacrifice his own daughter. Likewise, in Job 1-2, Yahweh's decision to torture Job in order to test Job's devotion to himself is hardly an act free of moral uncertainty.

Even in Yahweh's exhibitions of strength and domination post-combat we find he retains chaotic characteristics, commanding the forces that once bowed to Leviathan, as well as Leviathan himself. These he uses not only in defense of his creation, but also against it, for though Yahweh has formed an ordered world from chaos, both he and the material from which his creation were made may still derive from the undifferentiated and primordial waters that Leviathan represents. Beyond the physical manifestations of Yahweh and Leviathan's similarities, and the effects of such similarities on their interactions with Israel and its fellow nations, there are the perhaps more influential and important philosophical similarities between the two figures. With its associations with

the unknowable and inexpressible vastness of pre-creation, Leviathan seems to perfectly encapsulate the numinous and terrifying qualities of the divine.

Symmetry:

All of the traits discussed previously demonstrate shared elements between Yahweh and Leviathan, and each of them intensifies what is arguably the most awesome (in its traditional sense) of all their commonalities. Reading Yahweh as a being out of chaos, and ourselves as his creations out of chaos, carries the dangerous repercussion of granting Leviathan and Yahweh dual status as symbols of divine chaos, and unlimited potentiality. There is an admission in such an association, that Yahweh is entirely “other” to human comprehension or nature, and that in one's attempts to gain full understanding of Yahweh's nature and methods, one risks stumbling head-on into the chaotic and interstitial spaces that remain in between the safe and fixed boundaries dictated by the order Yahweh first created.

To express this idea, both Richard Kearney and Timothy Beal draw on Rudolph Otto's seminal work, *The Idea of the Holy*, which introduces the now widely-used concepts of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* as it relates to the numinous, and the “wholly other.” This is engaged by Kearney when he claims that:

even biblical monsters; e.g. Leviathan and Behemoth in Job, Rahab in Psalm 73 or the dragon in the Apocalypse are typical manifestations of the wholly Other. As such they serve as dark counterparts of the utterly transcendent Yahweh. The monstrous ( *das Ungeheuere* ), Otto maintained, is a “fairly exact expression for the numinous in its aspects of mystery, awefulness, augustness and 'energy'; nay, even the fascination is dimly felt in it. For Otto, as for Freud before him, the coincidence of representation and horror marks a

specific experience of the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*). But the differences between the two approaches here are, I think, most revealing. Otto construes the uncanny as a sign of the utterly transcendent numen, “a completely unhomely experience of the *mysterium* that has broken into the home from a wholly other realm.” By contrast, Freud sees no suggestion of radical transcendence here, only traces of repressed unconscious trauma. For Freud:

The *unheimlich* encounter with the monstrous is a revelation not of the wholly other but of a repressed otherness within the self. The monster, as personification of the *unheimlich*, stands for that which has broken out of the subterranean basement or the locked closet where it has been hidden and largely forgotten.<sup>266</sup>

We find a link here between biblical theology, the general study of religion, and monster theory, as Kearney expresses ideas that are essential to an understanding not only how the monster operates on a psychological level, but also how Leviathan the “king monster” operates in particular vis-à-vis its readers, author, and the biblical narrator. It should probably not surprise, given my previous two sections, and in particular my discussion of Leviathan and Yahweh's shared origins from chaos, that Otto and Freud's interpretations of the numinous are instructive concerning the serpent's symbolism. Each acknowledges and engages with the concept of “otherness,” while Kearney's observations tie the concept of an unknowable, mysterious, and fascinating terror with Leviathan and Yahweh. This is how the fearful symmetry between the two biblical characters is most deeply felt, as we find in Job's identification with Leviathan, as well as the despair he expresses when attempting to understand a force he cannot hope to (Yahweh).<sup>267</sup> Thus, as I explained in chapter 3, Job refers to Yahweh's subjugation of Leviathan in Job 6, and 7.12 when he

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<sup>266</sup> Kearney, 35. Beal, 53-4.

<sup>267</sup> I use the name “Yahweh” here for consistency, though it should be noted that *elohim* is the word that appears in the text.

bemoans Yahweh's ill-treatment of him. In these passages, Job's mistake is not that he deifies the monster, or that he redeems it, but that he dares to associate himself with a force beyond not only his understanding, but his very ability to understand. In Job's attempt to learn something of Yahweh's intention and nature he assumes that, like his conception of Leviathan, Job himself must be an evil thing worthy of annihilation and suffering. What else, the text proclaims into the void, could be the reason for the pain and misfortune of just people, including both Job himself and the nation of Israel as a whole?

In Job 42.3, following Yahweh's speech from the whirlwind describing Behemoth and Leviathan, Job thus signifies that he is no longer interested (or at least willing) to ask further questions, stating that he was dwelling on things too “wonderful” (תִּיבִּרִי) for him.<sup>268</sup> The word wonderful (תִּיבִּרִי) to describe, at this point, the discordant natures of Yahweh and Leviathan, seems to draw attention not only to their positive attributes, but also their monstrosity, and though Job moves on and has his blessings restored, nowhere does the text indicate that he was happy again following this encounter. Indeed, after Yahweh's speech from the whirlwind, it would seem odd that Job could retain or restore his sense of happiness and harmony, now that Yahweh has disabused Job of the notion that his god is morally distinguishable from the chaos monsters Yahweh has tamed. Yahweh is certainly more powerful than either Leviathan or Behemoth, or so Yahweh claims, but he is not “good” in the sense that Job formerly understood the concept. That

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<sup>268</sup> According to The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, the word carries the meaning of “extraordinary,” “wonderful,” or “marvellous,” with the additional and occasional implication that something is “difficult to understand.” The overall association is one of a great overwhelming, and the idea that Job has touched on something beyond his ability to understand or, possibly, *withstand*.

is, Yahweh is not uncomplicated, his methods and means incomprehensible to the human mind.

Part of the terror, of course, of Job's experiences, derives from the fact that he strays into the unknown territory of the chaotic and the numinous. In other words, perhaps, Job transgressed the safety net of the boundaries set in place by Yahweh at the time of creation and wandered where there be monsters. As Ken Gelder explains in the introduction to Part 3 of *The Horror Reader*, "monstrosity most often resides at (or is relegated to) the edge of culture, where categories blur and classificatory structures break down."<sup>269</sup> Gelder understands this precipitous area of culture through Douglas's concept of pollution and the blending of formerly distinct categories and places. This is not so different, I would argue, from Otto and Freud's interpretations of the numinous as it relates to monstrosity. Douglas recognizes and addresses, in her ritual case studies, the potency and danger of marginal spaces and ideas. Says Douglas:

In these beliefs [concerning sorcery] there is a double play on inarticulateness. First there is a venture into the disordered regions of the mind. Second there is the venture beyond the confines of society. The man who comes back from these inaccessible regions brings with him a power not available to those who have stayed in control of themselves and of society. This ritual play on articulate and inarticulate forms is crucial to understanding pollution. In ritual form it is treated as if it were quick with power to maintain itself in being, yet always liable to attack. Formlessness is also credited with powers, some dangerous, some good. We have seen how the abominations of Leviticus are the obscure unclassifiable elements which do not fit the pattern of the cosmos. They are incompatible with holiness and blessing. The play on form and formlessness is even more clear in ritual beliefs about society.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Ken Gelder, ed., *The Horror Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), 81.

<sup>270</sup> Douglas, 95.



Though Douglas is talking about ritual, and in particular the ways that ritual can grant sorcerous power, her observations are uncannily similar to those made in monster studies regarding the role and cultural space occupied by the monster. Like the sorcerer in Douglas's case studies, the monster too occupies and moves across those spaces partitioned off from order and wellness. The monster, like the sorcerer, returns to the ordered world of humanity with something of the numinous. Often this "something" expresses itself in violent or terrifying ways, but, as Kearney points out, it is not the only role the monster plays, for, "the interrogation of sacrificial monsters reveals the paradox that the monster is not only a portent of impurity (the root of *monstrum* is *monere*, to warn) but also an apparition of something utterly other and numinous (from the root *monstrare*, to show)."<sup>271</sup> In like fashion, Job engages with both the numinous and the monstrous. Though we do not see Job metaphysically breaking the boundaries of creation and uncreation, on a psychological level Job engages with Leviathan—the ultimate symbol not only of the "wholly other," but of the monstrous as it is understood in Hebrew cosmogony. Unlike the sorcerer, however, Job does not return from the numinous realm of undifferentiated space with supreme power, or indeed any kind of authority. The gifts bestowed on Job by Yahweh, are the practical, almost conciliatory offerings of everyday life. Even those, as I have suggested, must be bitter blessings, for though Job is granted a new family and his prosperity is restored, it is not the same family that was taken from him. Timothy Beal argues that, in Job 42.7-8, Yahweh, in acknowledging the truthfulness of Job's inquiry (as opposed to that of his friends), offers some consolation to Job. At the

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<sup>271</sup> Kearney, 34.

same time, as Beal points out, the consolation that Job's theodical questioning was justified lacks the markings of a happy ending for the character, for though Job may have gained some understanding of Yahweh's ambivalence and occasional cruelty, the question might be asked of whether Job would be better off to be proved wrong in this instance? As Beal says, "there is some terror here, insofar as the challenging and questioning that God encourages is a soliciting of chaos against order . . . . We are left, like Job, in a world that at any moment may crumble into primordial chaos, even at God's bidding."<sup>272</sup> The threat is ever-present, once Job is aware of the truth, even if he does turn away from his questioning in Job 42.6. Beal likens the revelation to a child throwing a tantrum, and a parent throwing an even bigger tantrum to put them in their place. Is it the will of the child, then, that the parent demonstrate a tendency toward still greater rages?<sup>273</sup> Yahweh, too, is able to transgress, for though he has formed creation and lords over it, he is, perhaps, a creature yet outside what he has made. If Job returns with anything, therefore, from his foray into theological and cosmogonical disorientation, it is with the knowledge that Yahweh, too, is a "king monster."

The numinous, the monstrous, and concepts of purity and danger, are all ideas that attempt to bridge a gap between what is knowable and ordered, and what is unknowable and chaotic. As Cohen postulates, "the monster of abjection resides in that marginal geography of the Exterior, beyond the limits of the Thinkable, a place that is doubly dangerous: simultaneously 'exorbitant' and 'quite close.'"<sup>274</sup> It is the landscape in which

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<sup>272</sup> Beal, 55.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 20.

Job finds himself lost, tormented, as Timothy Beal suggests, by the all-seeing gaze of a god that has revealed himself to be a monster.<sup>275</sup> In Job 41.9-11, Beal notes, Yahweh gradually shifts from referring to the terrible features of Leviathan to the insurmountable and equally terrible features of God, for “god identifies with the monster over against all challengers.”<sup>276</sup> Job is such a challenger, or hopes to be during his dark moments of theological doubt and horror. If Yahweh himself is, perhaps, the child of ancient chaos (and with it Leviathan), Job's identification with the serpent is more than simply a theological mistake, but a familial insult to the greatness and numinosity of Yahweh and Leviathan's nature?

Despite their relationship, of course, Yahweh remains a force opposed to the forces of chaos, or at the very least in opposition to Leviathan's return to power. The subjugation of Leviathan and *tehôm* are both necessary for Yahweh to fashion and maintain what can only be described as an “unnatural” manifestation of order within chaos. Yahweh may relate to Leviathan, may even play with it and relish it as he does in Ps.104.26, but, as David Williams expresses it:

The original state of being is one of prodigious chaos symbolized by a monster defending unified, timeless, undifferentiated being from the limitations of form, order, and the multiplicity of beings that a warrior-god wishes to impose through the dismemberment of the monster. The use of the body as the locus of deformation introduces into the significance of such monsters as the giant and the shape-shifter considerations not only of physiological, psychological, and cognitive realities but of fundamental metaphysical truths as well. These figures, whose whole body is the arena of monstrosity, remind us that the arch-model of order, the supreme trope of the integration of parts and whole, is brought into existence through the

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<sup>275</sup> Beal, 37.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid. 51-2.

disintegration and mutilation of the deformed, which is prior to it.”<sup>277</sup>

Williams is speaking here in the context of the monstrous and the body, and of Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*. Yet even so, his description seems to suit the image of Leviathan's body as it is crushed, beheaded, and caged in order to create ordered creation out of something inherently and eternally chaotic. The cyclical nature of the monster-hero story suggests that an unnatural state of order, differentiation, and binary codification is impermanent, and will eventually return to a state of undifferentiated togetherness. In recognizing this, Job is cursed with glimpses of the true knowledge, not of mortality, but of the transitory nature of creation, and the illusion of safety within the lines.

Conclusion:

Publishing within a year of each other (Beal in 2002, and Gilmore in 2003) Timothy Beal and David Gilmore's studies both conclude with chapters entitled “Our Monsters, Ourselves.”<sup>278</sup> Their findings, despite differences in approach and goal, both suggest fundamental and revealing relationships between the monsters we imagine and create, and the forces at work both inside our cultures, and within our psyches. While Leviathan and Yahweh's fearful symmetry and relationship with creation may not necessarily express a fundamental truth about the universe, it certainly suggests human truths that inform how we conceive of the universe and our relationship to it.

In identifying Yahweh and Leviathan as either partners in creation, child and

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<sup>277</sup> Williams, 126.

<sup>278</sup> Beal, 173. Gilmore, 174.

parent, and/or siblings out of chaos, I have argued that the Bible's monstrous characters are more complex than they may initially appear. The use of monster theory to explore their nuances grants us a broader understanding of the ambiguities and contradictions present in both Yahweh and Leviathan's narratives, and it is my hope that my use of it to integrate Mary Douglas's theoretical work with biblical criticism and cultural analysis has illuminated something new in an exploration of the characters.

In introducing the concept of the “king monster” to monster theory, and associating such an entity both with Leviathan and with Yahweh, I have drawn attention to aspects of Yahweh's biblical narrative that paint him as a creature both of chaos and of order (in the role of both hero and monster). Unfortunately for Job, Yahweh's conquest of the dragon in the sea, which Job himself alludes to in Job 26, does not negate Yahweh's connection to chaos. This fact becomes clear to Job in Yahweh's speech from the whirlwind, in which Yahweh conjures up Leviathan in all his monstrous glory. Yahweh's display of his divine, yet horrific parentage, as well as his own Oedipal subjugation of the primordial progenitor, is not the act of benevolent and loving god, but of a god just as morally ambiguous as the monstrous Leviathan itself. Is Leviathan ever truly a threat to Yahweh? Certainly the serpent is used to threaten humankind and the solidity of creation, but the threat is one controlled by Yahweh, rather than opposed by him.

The idea and the symbol of the monster, I have argued, cannot promise answers, but only suggest them. It is a concept that mutates to suit its context, whether geographical, temporal, or cultural, and its usefulness lies in its ability to defy definition, or categorical precision. In allying Yahweh with the monstrous, I

have likewise argued for a reading of both Yahweh and Leviathan as morally ambiguous, ethically neutral. Creatures from betwixt the realms of chaos and order, and who are able, unlike us, to safely navigate the boundaries of safe/unsafe, pure/impure, and heroic/monstrous, Leviathan and Yahweh thus exemplify the seemingly contradictory confounding of categories that lies at the heart of monster theory.

### Conclusion

This discussion has addressed and summarized the current scholarship concerning both Leviathan, and the definition of the monster in monstrous studies. Through my use of John Day, Mary K. Wakeman, K. William Whitney, and Timothy Beal's biblical analyses, I have attempted to combine research on the historical and linguistic connections between the biblical Leviathan and its proposed ancestors from Near Eastern *chaoskampf* mythology, with an approach based in monster studies. In particular, Leviathan's role in Yahweh's enthronement narrative has been key to an examination and evaluation of the remaining elements of the combat myth in the Bible. Likewise, I have endeavored to demonstrate not only how Leviathan can be read through the lens of the monstrous schemas developed by the likes of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and David Gilmore, but also how a study of Leviathan the monster enriches our understanding of “the monster” as a cultural and literary archetype. In my final chapter, I have drawn attention to passages from Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah, and Job, in an investigation of potential vestiges of a combat narrative centred around creation, and which tie both Yahweh and Leviathan to *tehôm* as beings out of (or related to) chaos. While this last claim is based on a certain amount of conjecture, comparison with other Near Eastern and Mediterranean iterations of the *chaoskampf* demonstrate that such a connection between hero-god and chaos monster are not without precedent. Indeed, given the thematic connections made between Yahweh and Leviathan in Job, and in particular the speech from the whirlwind, such a relationship appears remarkably consistent with Yahweh's moral ambiguity throughout the Old Testament. In examining both possible and well-established

connections between the two characters of Yahweh and Leviathan, I have endeavored to gain a better understanding of Leviathan's biblical and narrative role, and of the fearful symmetry that both the Bible, and monster theory, tend to support.

Monsters, by their very nature, are tricky creatures—one minute they stand before you, fanged and terrible, ready to devour anyone who ventures too close. The next they are far away again, fleeing to the hills, swamplands, or to the depths of an unknowable ocean, perhaps even outside conventional space or time. They transform and transgress with abandon, surprising us with their ability to traverse beyond the limits of human knowledge or expectation. The monster is ambiguous, marvellous, and strange. As a monster who dwells not only at Cohen's "gates of difference,"<sup>279</sup> but one who inhabits the time before time, and the space before spatial differentiation, Leviathan, I have argued, is a "king monster." Leviathan is therefore a pinnacle of monstrosity in whom many of our lesser monsters find their ancestor, and who represents more than any other type of monster the outside that is inside, the monstrosity present even within the boundaries of safety and normalcy. When Job invokes Leviathan, he rouses a formidable force outside human understanding or experience. Even more frightful than the serpent's twisting shape, however, is the reflection of the chaos monster in Job's god, and the implications that reflection has for humankind within the biblical narrative.

Investigating and analyzing Leviathan's biblical narrative is a difficult task. Like his fellow monsters, Leviathan shifts and defies capture, and in many of the biblical passages I have discussed we are left only with vestiges of a much larger and more

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<sup>279</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 7.



complex narrative. My study is limited, therefore, not only by the constraints of time, but also by the available and remaining literature. Likewise, in focusing on biblical depictions of Leviathan, I have ignored or underrepresented folkloric traditions related to Leviathan and the *chaoskampf*. These apocryphal and oral sources speak to the broader culture surrounding the character, and offer a rich body of material for future scholarship to examine Leviathan and Yahweh through the lens of monster studies.

Despite being a character with no speech of its own, nor any discernible desire for good or evil, Leviathan nonetheless reveals more about Yahweh, perhaps, than most other biblical characters. Through their conflict, combat, playfulness, and partnership, Leviathan and Yahweh demonstrate a fearful symmetry that, like any good monster story, renders precarious our confidence in the ground beneath our feet. The monsters, it turns out, are not merely out there, but in here as well.

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