Crafting a Monstrously Queer Space: A Medicalized Gothic Reading of Nathaniel Highmore's *Case of A Foetus found in the Abdomen of a Young Man*

SHANE AARON MILLER

"Whatever falls out contrary to custom we say is contrary to nature, but nothing, whatever it be, is contrary to her. Let, therefore, this universal and natural reason expel the error and astonishment that novelty brings along with it."
Michel de Montaigne

Historically the Gothic style in literature has positioned itself in opposition to Enlightenment goals and processes. As the Enlightenment project heralded the ascendancy of rationality, empiricism and the scientific method, Gothic works constructed a world where passion refused to be usurped and the supernatural and mystical still held sway. The Enlightenment promised a world that was limited to material reality, controllable, and ultimately knowable. The Gothic world was one of apparitions, long-lost, deadly knowledge, and was doomed to remain unknowable and uncertain. If the Enlightenment promised to dispel the darkness, the Gothic showed that darkness would always lurk in the shadows, and that there was a night to each day. The Gothic, in other words, was the dark side of Enlightenment rationalism (Edwards 1).

The nineteenth century was a critical year for both the nascent discipline of medicine and the literary genre of the Gothic. For medicine, this century would introduce germ theory, anesthesiology, and the introduction of statistics to epidemiology. Gothic literature, on the other hand, would enter a second wave that saw the creation of Gothic classics such as *Frankenstein* (1818), *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and *Dracula* (1897). In addition, this new period of Gothic development was marked by the increasing presence and role of medicine and science within Gothic narratives.

It was in the midst of these dueling worlds that in 1815 a young surgeon named Nathaniel Highmore, a member of the Royal College of Surgeons in London, published a thirty-page pamphlet about a particular case that he had treated. The pamphlet was titled: *Case of A Foetus found in the Abdomen of a Young Man at Sherborne, in Dorsetshire*. As the title suggests, the pamphlet

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relates the story of a fifteen or sixteen-year-old boy named Thomas Lane who, upon falling violently ill, was treated by Highmore. After a month of palliative care, Lane died. Upon performing an autopsy, Highmore discovered that what he presumed to be an inflamed spleen, was, in fact, a large sac or tumor. Further investigation revealed that the sac contained a horribly deformed, yet recognizable human fetus.

The pamphlet comes at an interesting time in the history of medicine, where key discoveries about bacteriology, virology and basic sterility had yet to be discovered, yet as a field, medicine had formalized into a discipline, employing the scientific method to study natural law and the human body, in turn using those insights to diagnose and treat illness and injury. Medical writing had already developed into a recognizable genre employing empiricist writing styles that privileged induction based on observation (Taavitsainen 435) and had adopted the language of materiality and precision. Yet this turn to objective description and causal explanations limited to known natural law did not preclude medical terminology from continuing the longstanding tradition of placing human deformity, especially deformed births and aborted births, within the category of the monstrous. Rather than dismissing such language as holdover terminology that was standard, but devoid of judgment, the continued use of the term demonstrates the blatant association of disability with monstrosity and the accompanying negative valuations it implied, and arguably continues to imply (Bogdan 138).

Highmore's pamphlet was an effort to demonstrate the superior explanatory power of natural law and medical science via its ability to advance the discovery of truth, in turn validating the goals of the Enlightenment project. Yet the strong presence of Gothic stylistic elements in the pamphlet served to forestall this potential closure and instead introduced ambiguity and uncertainty into the public reception of this extraordinary medical case. Highmore's pamphlet, in its effort to privilege medical/scientific explanations, inadvertently presents the alternative Gothic reading as a cold, but ultimately equally preferable, strategy to make sense of the inexplicable and unrecognizable.

In developing my analysis of Highmore's pamphlet, I employ a critical rhetorical framework informed by monster theory and queer theory to examine the ways in which different features of the text work to frame an event that seemingly defies accepted understandings of gender and reproduction. Highmore's monster asks readers to make sense of a seemingly impossible event, but provides them competing resources to work through their sense-making. This tension, fused within a text that itself is a monstrous hybrid, develops a space wherein readers can recognize the monstrous in themselves and others.

This paper begins by demonstrating the ways in which Highmore's pamphlet blends Enlightenment and Gothic elements, creating a hybrid text that uses

elements of each to supplement the other, in particular using the Gothic to finish a narrative that the Enlightenment pieces simply cannot satisfactorily conclude. The final section of this paper explores the ways in which the sublime imagery disrupts comfortable social categories and boundaries to create a queer category or space, home to the monster and non-monster alike.

I wish to argue that *Case of a Foetus* may be read as an example of the queering, and thus humanizing, potential of monstrosity. Neither a medical nor Gothic reading of extreme human difference is sufficient to fully humanize the subject: both have considerable limitations inherent to their constitutive qualities. Medical discourse, by virtue of dealing with patterns of idealized normalcy, risks conflating the unusual with the unhealthy or threatening. The Gothic treats the unusual as supernatural and evil, intentionally or unintentionally malevolent. Yet what I have termed a medicalized Gothic reading can use the materialism and empiricism of science to erase evil or supernatural malevolence while embracing the Gothic acceptance of the unknown, mysterious and unique.

Doing so has tremendous significance for all subjects who reside in abject, monstrous lands. And no less significance for those who do not. For what is at stake in our readings of difference and deviance is nothing less than the question of who we include in our moral community. To whom do we owe the same considerations, the same obligations and duties as ourselves? To whom ought we feel compassion for? For whom should we care? A medicalized Gothic read of monstrosity creates a queer monstrous category that embraces all, for it disrupts the binaries of normal/abnormal and human/monster, and in so doing, reminds us that "We are all of the devil's party. . . . [all] at least partially monstrous" (Halberstam, *Skin Shows* 27).

An Ambiguous Hybrid: *Case of a Foetus* as Gothic Medical Science

Case of a Foetus is a text that blends stylistic elements of medical empiricism with Gothic narrative tropes, forming a text that is itself liminal and monstrous, straddling the divide between Gothic mystery and Enlightenment knowledge. Highmore's stated intent was for the pamphlet to have a dual readership consisting of both medical professionals and lay readers.

> It has been the author's care to abstain, as much as possible, from technical phraseology, so as to render the work acceptable to the general reader; to this end, the narrative has been separated from the anatomical description, &c. But, in detailing the circumstances of this extraordinary Case, at once interesting to the naturalist and the philosopher, nothing has

> been omitted that could tend to cast a ray of light on any point connected with the subject. . . . (Highmore 11)

To that end, *Case of a Foetus* is divided into six sections: an Introductory Address, Case of the Foetus, Description of the Foetus (a recounting of the initial diagnosis, treatment, and progression of the case), Explanation of the Plates (two vivid, labeled sketches of the anterior and posterior of the fetus), and a series of concluding statements about the boy's health growing up, and Highmore's professional thoughts.

Highmore shifts between objective medical description and personal narrative both from one section of the pamphlet to another, as well as within sections, producing a text that is a hybrid of medical empiricism and vivid, graphic prose. The second section of the pamphlet, "Case of a Foetus," is a straightforward narrative that follows a chronologically linear progression: the mother's request for medical help, the original diagnosis and medical treatment provided, the patient's death, the autopsy and subsequent discovery of the fetus, and the ensuing interest of both the medical community and thousands of members of the general public.

The pamphlet is inarguably medical/scientific in nature. Highmore positions the pamphlet as a reluctant, but necessary, attempt to advance truth. The entire incident is bookended between opening and concluding statements that stress the importance of publicly sharing the details of Lane's case as a means of contributing to human knowledge and progress. Highmore begins the piece by positioning himself as the reluctant narrator[1]:

> . . . it is hoped that due allowance will be made for the production of an individual, wholly unaccustomed to the business of writing; and who involuntarily as it were, comes forward in the character of an Author, mistrustful of his power to do justice to the part which has been assigned him. (Highmore 11)

The Introductory Address concludes with Highmore's explicitly stated motive for writing: ". . . feeling actuated solely by the desire of promoting a spirit of inquiry into circumstances but imperfectly known, and of thereby contributing to the advancement of truth" (Highmore 12). The pamphlet concludes by lamenting the potential knowledge lost to the irrational reluctance of family and friends to allow autopsies to be performed. The final sentence of the pamphlet opines: "From the want of these only means of elucidating the real nature of such cases, the proper

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[1] A move that is strikingly similar to the unreliable narrator at the heart of so many Gothic stories.

mode of treatment is but too frequently lost in obscurity, or left to the operation of mere conjecture" (Highmore 30).

Even the narrative, which Highmore suggests was separated from the medical description for the benefit of lay readers, is laced through with specialized medical terminology. He lists the medicines applied by their Latin names – Potassae Nitras, Pulvis Seillae and Pulvis Opii (Highmore 15) – his narrative of the examination of the body details how:

> On dividing the parieties of the abdomen and exposing its viscera, a large tumour, of an irregular but somewhat oval form, presented itself. It occupied portions of the epigastric, umbilical and left hypochondrae regions: and was uncovered by the omentum, which was found in a ruffled state, lying above the tumor.

Similarly, the illustrated plates of the fetus are carefully diagrammed and meticulously labeled, identifying such features as "the integuments arising from the neck," "the funis, 3 ½ inches in length, arising from the abdomen of the foetus, and inserted into the dense part of the cyst," and "the head of the tibia, denuded" (Highmore 24-5).

While the pamphlet contains numerous stylistic markers recognizable as medical or scientific in nature, it also employs an empirical framework for its analytical work. In the final section, where the nature of the fetus and possible causes are discussed, Highmore presents several possible explanations that have been provided, but ultimately sides with the one most in keeping with understood natural law. 'However, if we view it somewhat in the light of an extra-uterine foetus, with the difference of a double conception; . . . if, I say, this view of the subject be taken, there seems nothing in the matter which is wholly at variance with the known laws respecting generation" (Highmore 30). Highmore's confidence in the scientific method and known natural law unsurprisingly causes him to privilege the explanatory power of an empirically-grounded explanation.

Finally, the fact that the booksellers identified as selling the pamphlet specialized in having medical libraries and that the manuscript was placed into the library of the Royal College of Surgeons in London, demonstrates that the text was conceived of as a legitimate medical treatise (The British Museum; T. Bradley). In addition, the pamphlet was cited in numerous medical publications for over a century after its publication, demonstrating that it circulated and was utilized as legitimate medical discourse (Beck; Burrows; Ogilvie; Tanner). Thus, the stated intent of the author, linguistic style, philosophical orientation, and publication and sales history, all mark the pamphlet as medical discourse.

Yet, while the pamphlet is steeped in medical language and an empiricist worldview, it also contains numerous Gothic elements. One of the most apparent Gothic qualities is the monstrous nature of the fetus itself. Highmore's first

description of the fetus, upon opening the sac that contained it, exclaims: ". . . I opened the sac, at the contents of which we were amazed! – We found that the substance assumed, in many respects, a completely human form; but in others, it was cramped and mis-shapen" (Highmore 18). In the next section, "Description of the Foetus" Highmore provides more details such as the long, matted hair measuring twelve inches in length; the much-curved spine; and the short, ill-shaped hand with only three fingers. The descriptions are detailed, specific and graphic: "The knee was dislocated; the skin over it had been absorbed, and the joint was exposed. The ankle was also dislocated, and turned inwards; the common integuments had been absorbed, and the bones were exposed and perishing. It had six imperfectly formed toes" (Highmore 22).

This description is accompanied by two vividly illustrated plates depicting the fetus (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). These plates provide graphic visual depictions of the extent of the deformity, in particular allowing readers to see both the human-like qualities of the fetus, alongside the distorted, damaged and unrecognizable elements of the fetus. Human features such as limbs, fingers, toes and hair are all readily identifiable, yet appear alongside exposed bone, warped extremities, and the absence of a recognizable head. We see here the first signs of slippage between medical and Gothic texts. Medical texts were some of the earliest instances of scientific writing being vernacularized (Taavitsainen). Perhaps not unsurprisingly, this vernacular quality in turn drove a sustained interest in freaks and marvels. "In fact, early nineteenth century scientists and obstetricians continued to find themselves drawn into investigating a range of strange reproductive claims, largely because so many of the public embraced wondrous possibilities" (Cody 300).

This juxtaposition of human and non-human in a single form is also a defining characteristic of monstrosity, as is a severe degree of deformity (Asma). The description of the fetus, as well as the illustrated plates, both provide vivid evidence of the excessive deformity and human/non-human qualities. Although human, the fetus is warped, has exposed bone in place of a head, and has a crevassed, flower-like appendage at the base of the neck.

The fetus is also perhaps the most literal embodiment of the doppelganger, the menacing, mirror-other that threatens one's identity and existence. The nineteenth century witnessed the birth of the doppelganger as a common presence in Gothic literature where "A character's sense of encountering a double of him- or herself . . . was established as a powerful new Gothic motif" (Mullan). That this encounter often ended badly for one, if not both selves, is a hallmark of the doppelganger, yet even more central to the role of the doppelganger is their ability to act as the human conduit of evil and malevolence. In describing the role of the doppelganger, Botting notes "Evil has a banal, human existence, produced from accidents and circumstance to escalate beyond human control" (107). Even within

the framework of Highmore's medical explanation, the accidental nature of both the pregnancy and twin fetus are evident themes. Yet the doppelganger was also used in Gothic literature to disrupt the accepted understandings of everyday experience. Brown argues that doppelgangers share a key characteristic – "they break down the categories of ordinary experience" (Brown 129). Highmore's fetus is precisely this kind of challenge to ordinary experience, not only in terms of the novelty of the situation, but more importantly, the challenge it presents to natural law and the prevailing gender binary.

The monstrosity of the fetus emerges in large part from the violation of natural law – a fetus had developed inside the body of a male. Foucault has noted how monstrosity is riddled with paradox, involving as it does the combination of the possible and forbidden. Monstrosity, according to Foucault, violates the law, yet leaves the law (both legal and natural) with nothing to say because it is the natural form of the unnatural (Foucault 56-7). The discovery of a human fetus inside the abdomen of a young man is precisely this kind of natural unnaturalness that – by disrupting the uncontested, essentializing assumptions behind the gender binary – Foucault places at the heart of monstrosity. It is also the kind of boundary disruption that lies at the heart of the sublime, a point I will return to shortly.

The monstrous nature of a fetus inside a male is amplified by the description of the circumstances leading up to the boy's death that Highmore provides – the fetus is described as having repeatedly moved inside the boy. Recounting the mother's statement, Highmore relays the following episode:

> She observed that a few days previous to that time, he exclaimed, affrighted, `Mother! do come to me, I have something Alive in my body!' Upon saying which, he almost immediately fainted. She went to him, and found a very considerable motion in the swelling, which was not merely apparent to the touch, but equally visible to the eye; and resembling, as she would have expressed herself, the motion of a child during gestation" (Highmore 14).

Not only is the gestation of a fetus inside a male body monstrous, it also exemplifies the kind of anxiety over sexuality and sex roles that came to dominate Gothic fiction (Botting 3). Gothic terrors are immense in scope, threatening not only the subjects of the fictional world, but threatening the very order which the terms of propriety and honor depend on (Botting 7). By blurring the accepted distinction between biological sexes and the prevailing orthodoxy of how humans reproduce, a story such as this provides precisely the kind of social and natural destabilization that is a hallmark of the Gothic.

Excess meaning, Ruptured knowledge: The lingering fragility of the Enlightenment

Highmore's pamphlet thus comprises a monstrous text, combining as it does medical, scientific, and Gothic elements into a single document. While the ostensible motive was to advance medical knowledge, the text itself was an excess of possible meaning that disrupted, rather than solidified, interpretation and in turn demonstrated the far-from-settled status of the Enlightenment project.

To begin with, it is worth noting that the pamphlet is bookended between claims about the role that sharing the story and details can play toward the broader goal of advancing truth. Highmore unequivocally favors a causal explanation that is empirical and consistent with known medical science. In addressing the question of conception, Highmore observes:

> if we view it somewhat in the light of an extra-uterine foetus, with the difference of a double conception; and that, by some accident which it is not very difficult to imagine, the impregnated ova got connected together, the one forming an attachment to the uterus of the mother, and the other . . . to its twin brother; if, I say, this view of the subject be taken, there seems nothing in the matter which is wholly at variance with the known laws respecting generation. (30)

While Highmore prefers an explanation of conception that is consistent with medical science, notice that he must fill in unknown details: ". . . by some accident which it is not very difficult to imagine . . . ." Forced, as he is, to draw upon imagination to make the medical-scientific explanation feasible, Highmore is unable to unambiguously rule out other, non-empirical explanations. The fact that he introduced these competing accounts in the preceding paragraph (an unnatural crime or an impregnated ovum introduced via the intestines) and in turn dismissed them because to accept either account "would require an assumption of so many material facts, not proved, that it sees unnecessary to enter into the discussion" (Highmore 30) works against his intended claim that his preferred explanation is the only reasonable one. Indeed, all competing explanations require that additional facts be supplied via the imagination, and the inventional choice to include what he considers to be discredited theories only serves to either introduce them to the audience, or refresh them as a possibility for the audience. Either way, the superiority of his preferred causal theory would likely not be as obvious to the non-medical readers, reminding us that Gothic stories are "attempts to explain what the Enlightenment left unexplained" (Botting 23).

If Highmore is unable to directly explain away the ambiguity and terror that lie at the heart of his discovery, his use of Gothic elements fills in the lacunae

for him. Indeed, I would suggest that contrary to our presupposition that the Gothic is more inclined to instill terror than the medical/scientific, it is the Gothic that supplies the balm to our troubled minds. Highmore's preferred explanation is of a pregnancy gone wrong. It is a story of a fetus that went undetected inside the body of a living child for over a decade, lurking and growing until it eventually killed its twin in an excruciating ordeal. Rare as the possibility may be, it is nonetheless, in the medical story, a possibility. A possibility that defies detection, that defies treatment, and that denies us the agency to prevent it. A terror. And yet it is precisely such agency that the causal explanations Highmore dismisses offer his readers, for an "unnatural crime" is not an accident. It is, rather, a willful act, and as such, under our control. It is precisely the horror of the Gothic supernatural that displaces the even greater terror of the unavoidable medical condition. Medical science might displace the evil of Gothic imagination, but it substitutes that with the passivity of the patient completely at the mercy of unknown and uncontrollable biological processes.

Thus, the plethora of possible explanations that all required additional supplementation by the imagination (at least for the non-expert reading audience) constituted an excess of meaning that was unresolvable. Educational yet titillating, horrifying yet fascinating, ostensibly human yet disturbingly other, Highmore's pamphlet is riddled with paradox and ambiguity. Indeed, this ambivalence in the face of excess is ultimately one of the endearing qualities of the Gothic (Botting 8-9) and as Cohen reminds us, the monster's body is always a cultural body, something that always signifies more than itself (Cohen 4). In the case of Highmore's recounting of *Case of a Foetus*, the text demonstrates the as yet unsettled authority of Enlightenment reasoning and the ease with which Gothic constructs still inform the construction and reading of an ostensibly medical document.

Intended as it was for dual audiences of medical expert and lay person, the pamphlet was especially prone to be used voyeuristically. The nineteenth century was the culmination of the growth of asylums to warehouse the aberrant. Whereas in earlier times the deformed, the mad, and the crippled would have been visible in most European cities, the advent of asylums made the aberrant invisible which sparked an increase of interest and curiosity in sordid reality (Stiker 110). The pamphlet was thus delivered to the reading public as social interest in deformity and human oddities were fueling the growth in freak shows and side-shows. Indeed, Bates has argued that the famous French physician Pare may have included monsters in his medical accounts because they were popular and would increase circulation even though they were considered beneath serious academic consideration (Bates 75). Highmore's own comments demonstrate that there was already tremendous professional and public interest in the case even prior to the publication of the pamphlet, when he refers to the unspecified number of medical

gentleman who return with him to the Lane household (to verify the body was indeed male) and the "some thousands of persons [who] flocked to my house, wishing to be satisfied of its truth" (Highmore 20). Such interest, both medical and prurient, is in keeping with the Gothic cultivation of fascination which Brown argues is at the core of great Gothic novels (Brown 4).

The full-page illustrated plates would have thus found an eager audience and provided precisely the kind of glimpse into sordid reality that was sought after. Although the plates are accompanied by detailed anatomical description, the images themselves are vivid, and hauntingly beautiful, enough that they do not require any exposition to apprehend that one is looking at the monstrous – at a fundamental deformity that seemingly defies natural law. That such depictions would be simultaneously horrifying and fascinating to audiences is indeed part of the structure of the Gothic itself, or what Halberstam identifies as a "rhetorical style and narrative structure designed to produce fear and desire within the reader" (Skin Shows 2).

Sublime Disruption: Creating a Monstrously Queer Space

The visual images depicted in the plates have an undeniable sublime quality to them, and this sublime nature of the illustrations demonstrates the disruptive potential of Highmore's text. To begin with, the illustrations are exquisite. They not only evidence superb technical skills in illustration, but balance a richness of detail alongside an elegance and simplicity. The use of shading, perspective and implied texture imbue the illustrations with an objective realism. His use of varied line width, rich contrast, and scale (through the depiction of recognizable human shapes like fingers and toes alongside unrecognizable, indeterminate features) give the images a sense of mass and proportion. Both illustrations are presented in a way that maximizes their symmetry, and this symmetry, combined with the preponderance of curving and flowing lines, provides the images with mesmerizing beauty.

Yet this beauty and elegance are mitigated by the starkness of the images and the inescapable confrontation with the monstrous deformity they depict. Figure 1, for example, contains graphic, detailed foreground views of the denuded leg and foot where the bone and exposed tissue are clearly visible. The exposed bone of the knee, in particular, uses sharp angles and a thick outline that starkly contrasts with the flow and curves that make up the rest of the image. In Figure 2, the denuded knee and foot are once again visible, this time in the background, and a hand with misshapen, crooked fingers and long, pointed nails, are positioned in what appears to be a beckoning manner.

But perhaps the most disturbing element of the illustrations is the mass at the top of the body as depicted in Figure 1. Highmore's written description of the fetus mentions:

> It had no head; but at the basis of a denuded first vertebra, some slips of skin arose, which followed nearly the course of the funis, with some medullary substance, around which was entangled a considerable amount of matted hair, part of which measured twelve inches in length. (21)

Yet Figure 1 depicts a mass that has been cut in half and laid out in such a way that the effect is to create a strong resemblance to a barely-recognizable head. While the shape and comparative size do not resemble a human head, the orientation of the body and placement of the mass at the top of that body locate it where a head should be. The presence of two dark ovals on close to the same plane, roughly two-thirds of the way up the mass, give the distinct impression of eyes. The image as a whole gives a distinct impression of something almost human but distinctly Other.

This blend of harmony and discordance, beauty and horror, visually reinforce the liminal nature of the fetus that Highmore discovered. Both illustrated plates exemplify the simultaneous allure and repulsion, fear and attraction, that constitute the sublime. As aesthetic theory developed in eighteenth century Europe, the sublime came to be understood as a beautiful terror (Monk 87) wherein the terror itself is what provides the pleasantness derived from the representation (Hogle 14).

The sublime is inextricably bound up with the visual. Kant argued that while the sublime lay in apprehension and not the image itself, it was the limits of the image, the image's inability to fully capture what we receive from our encounter with it, that produces the sublime.

> For the sublime cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas of reasons, which although no adequate presentations of them is possible, may be excited and called into mind by that very inadequacy itself which does admit of sensuous presentation. (Kant 92)

Thus illustrations such as Highmore's are capable of producing an encounter with the sublime, but wherein does the terror of the sublime lie?

The terror that the sublime produces lies in the threat that the representation presents to our sense of self and the categories and boundaries that we rely on to define daily social life. An understanding of the monstrous sublime, informed by Queer theory, demonstrates the ways in which a Gothic perspective can create a category or space that Halberstam describes as celebrating the queer and

dangerous (*Skin Shows* 143). A space where boundaries are blurred, identities merged, and our shared monstrousness is embraced.

Edmund Burke located the terror of the sublime in the threat it posed to self-preservation and for Burke, the natural world was the locus of the sublime threat (Burke 36). For Kant, the sublime was induced by "[t]he apprehension of an object otherwise formless and in conflict with ends. . ." (Kant 134). The fetus of Highmore's pamphlet is both a manifestation of nature and formless; a stillborn entity incapable of achieving its intended ends. Gothic has long embraced and deployed the sublime, constituting "perhaps the most sublime of all our literary modes" (Brown 11). And it is within this Gothic framework that a more precise nature of the threat posed by the sublime can be found. The terror the Gothic sublime produces is the terror of a loss of a sense of self and the categories that we use to navigate the world. "The great horror in the gothic is a primordial dissolution that can obscure the boundaries between all western oppositions. Oppositions of all kinds cannot maintain their separateness" (Hogle 11). Highmore's fetus threatens to disrupt boundaries of human reproduction, of sexual dimorphism, of dead and alive, human and Other. The illustrations evoke terror because they threaten to dissolve our most fundamental beliefs about the nature of our world and ourselves. They constitute, in the words of Brown, "a pure metaphysical sublime, epistemological or even ontological rather than merely psychological" (Brown 12).

Such disruption, and the threats it entails, is a hallmark of Queer theory. Indeed, numerous scholars in Trans and Queer Studies have recognized the productive potential of the tropes and motifs of the monstrous, precisely for the fear and terror that the dissolution they provide engenders. Although historically tropes of monstrosity have been used to exclude queer individuals from the larger human community (Nordmarken 39; Koch-Rein 134), queer scholars have begun to mine these tropes for their ability to challenge and destabilize oppressive discourses.

One such challenge has been to the objectification and voyeurism endemic to the modern western medical tradition. In this sense, Highmore's pamphlet is exemplary. In the name of science and the pursuit of knowledge, the most intimate details of the patient's life and circumstances are made public. Indeed, the autopsy and illustrated plates literally make visible and public what had been inside, invisible, and private. Beauchamp has noted that pregnant bodies have, in general, been treated as public bodies by the law, media and medicine (7), but the desire to make public these bodies is intensified when the pregnancy deviates from natural law or social custom. Indeed, any reproduction that occurs outside of the female womb is socially disruptive, but male pregnancy presents "a figure feminized in his ability to bear children, queer in challenging traditional gender roles, disabled because freakish and often subjected to medical and therapeutic

care" (Davidson 126). It is thus not surprising that trans bodies are often displayed by others for their shock value and attention-grabbing potential, in part because their bodies are coded as socially disruptive. But this disruption stems from their ability to invoke culturally shared fears of the non-normative and unnatural (Beauchamp 4). Although Davidson and Beauchamp are discussing transgender individuals, note that the social and medical response is identical to what Highmore describes and presents – a case study that he expects to be of great public interest, precisely because of the ways in which the fetus violates social expectations of the natural and normal male body.

The queer monster also challenges the normalizing gaze of medical science. Susan Stryker, in her retelling of Frankenstein's monster, uses the voice of the monster as a means to combat the normativizing intent of medical science (244) by having the monster challenge the naturalization of normalcy:

> I offer you this warning: the Nature you bedevil me with is a lie. Do not trust it to protect you from what I represent, for it is a fabrication that cloaks the groundlessness of the privilege you seek to maintain for yourself at my expense. . . . Heed my words, and you may discover the seams and sutures in yourself. (247)

The queer monster, in other words, insists on its belongingness, demands to be recognized as a part of the natural world that its very existence challenges. In "Becoming Ever More Monstrous" Nordmarken discusses the ways in which his transitioning and transgender status is disruptive precisely because it challenges the very concept of normalcy. "I challenge their conceptions of gender: I shake the foundations of their narrative. I upheave their ideas of Truth and their trusty methods to know it" (40). Nordmarken's description could just as easily apply to the situation that Highmore presents – the foetus was every bit the shake-up to perceived Truth and Enlightenment methodologies in 1815 as trans bodies continue to be today.

A queer understanding of monstrosity thus offers us the potential of a monstrously queer space within which to rework and reframe our understandings of both our monsters and ourselves. Queer monstrosity uses the challenges that monsters provide to our familiar borders and comfortable categories to both rediscover the humanity of the monster, as well as confront the monstrosity that we all contain, all share, and are therefore all bound by. For Koch-Rein, the promise of such a queer space is that "rather than refuting the attribution of monstrosity, [it] has called for its embrace to restructure the world in such a way that it makes livable what is now deemed monstrous gender" (135).

This queer space not only welcomes the monster, but in so doing, recognizes that separation between ourselves and others, whether monstrous or not, hurts everyone.

> We all suffer from this separation from each other. Oppression is a form of collective trauma. It is inside all of us. We are not singular entities separate from each other – we all have multiple selves, and we all form a collective body. Oppression separates us all from parts of ourselves as well as from each other. (Nordmarken 40)

The monstrously queer space is thus an ecumenical space, one where the blurring and breaking of boundaries and the problematizing of normalcy leave room for all.

But it is also a queer space that contains monsters. And monsters, above all else, can be, perhaps must be, a bit threatening. Halberstam, in a discussion of Thomas Beatie's pregnancy, recognizes that when it comes to public displays of gender non-conformity, "the fault lines between disgust and acceptance are remarkably narrow" (78). Too often, queer monstrosity is repackaged to be conformist and safe, using the narrative of shared humanity and universality to displace the queer narrative about difference ("Pregnant Man" 78). In order for the monster to reach its full potential, it must keep its metaphorical teeth. The sense of sublime displacement, of threat to our readily available understandings of the world and our place in it, can only change that world if they remain threatening. A monstrous queer space is one that both affirms our shared connections while simultaneously letting the monster be itself, in all of its marvelous, threatening glory, challenging what we think we know.

If I am correct, then engaging with this case study, engaging with Highmore's pamphlet today, creates not a safe space, but a fertile, frightening, space. A look at the foetus is a look at both a vivid, material reminder that nature is neither tidy nor respecting of boundaries, as well as a glimpse at the monstrous potential lurking inside any of us. Highmore's pamphlet is thus a mirror reflecting back to us our own untidiness, our own blurred and confusing boundaries in terrifying disarray; a portent of what lies inside any of us that might horrify others if it were ever to see the light of day.

My intent has been to demonstrate that a medicalized Gothic reading can generate new possibilities for inclusion. Such a reading creates a space that welcomes the monster and non-monster alike. By disrupting the binaries of normal/abnormal and human/monster, new connections and affinities can be foregrounded, and we can heed de Montaigne's caution to not mistake what is customary for what is natural.

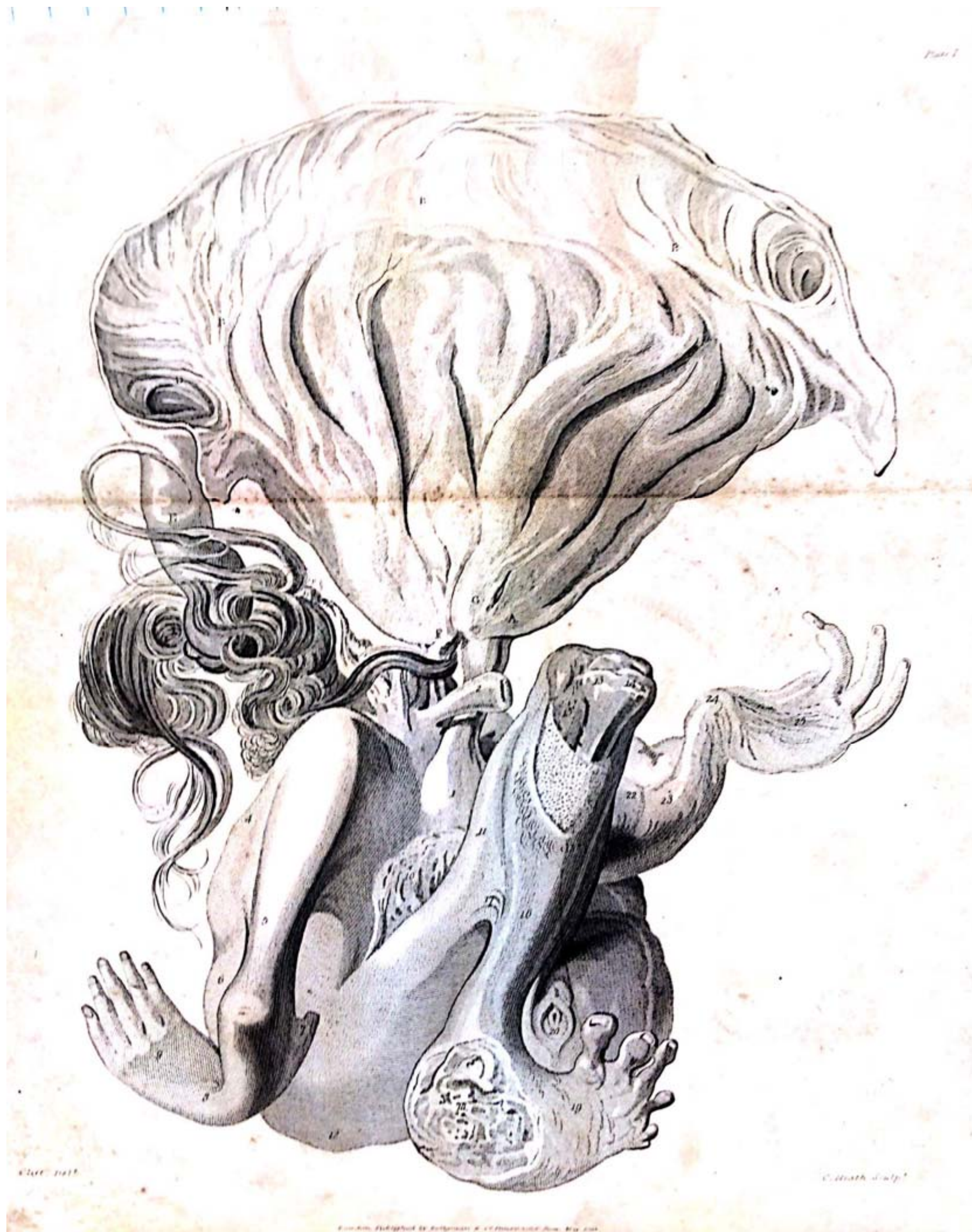

Figure 1

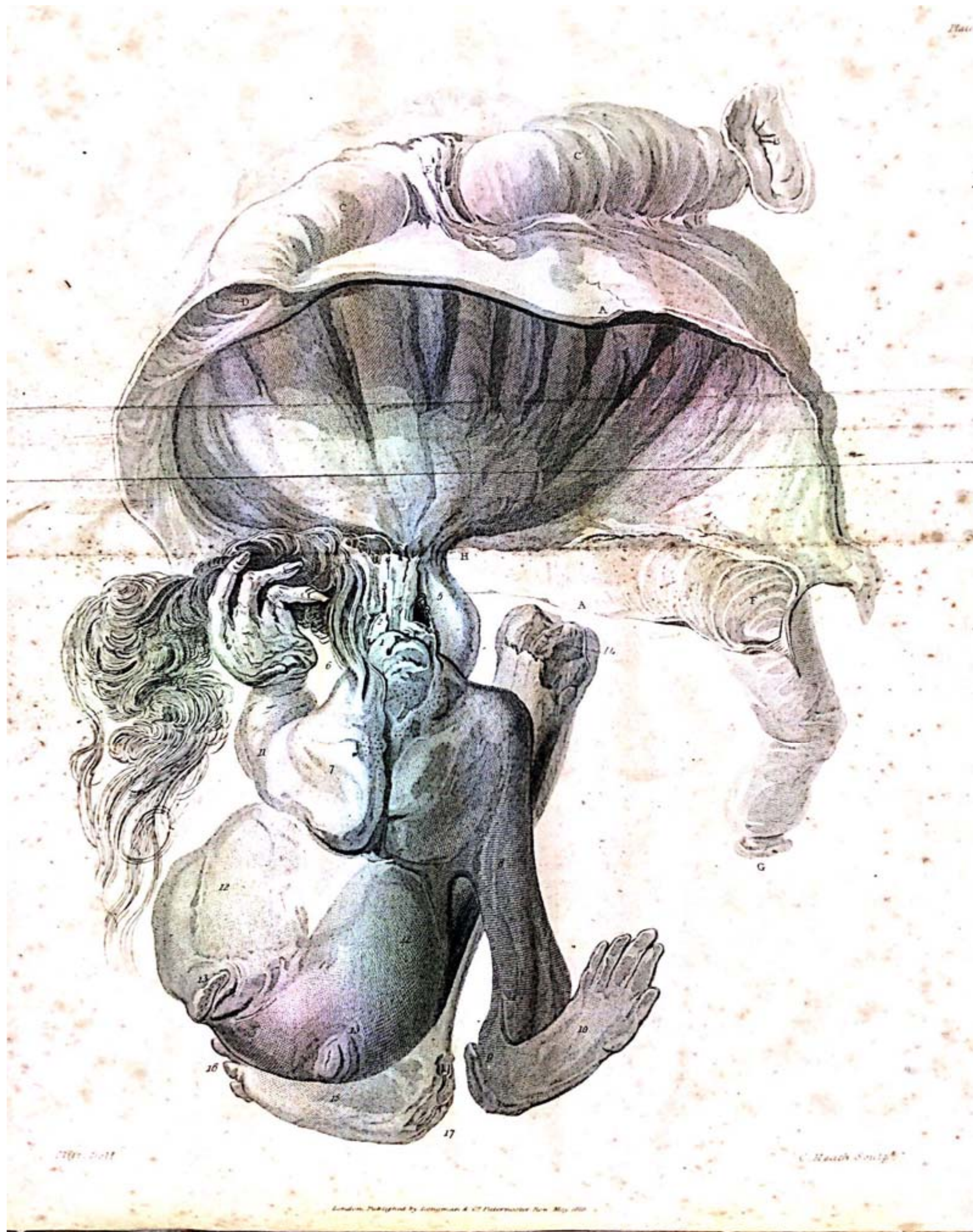

Figure 2

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