Disability Politics and American Literary History: Some Suggestions

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For a long time now, critics have marked the presence of disabled figures in US literature, but only recently, and still sporadically, has disability been granted a *politics* in American literary history. In the last decade, disability studies scholarship has helped us understand "disability" as a category saturated with social meaning, embedded in specific historical contexts, and subject to contestation. *American Literary History* has played a part in this, with the publication, for instance, of two landmark pieces, Lennard Davis's review essay "Crips Strike Back" in 1999 and Tobin Siebers's "Disability in Theory" in 2001, and also of more recent work by Laura Tanner and Ben Reiss, among others.[1] That academic disability studies in the US has emerged with particular intensity, institutionally, within departments of literature is itself a matter for inquiry within the domain of American literary history, but that won't be my topic here. In this essay I will make a few suggestions about the politics of disability in American literary historiography. I take my invitation to move in the realm of suggestions from a review of Stephen Crane's *The Monster* (1899), published in the *Academy* shortly after Crane's death. I will argue that the review suggests a lead to a significant context that has been systematically obscured by late twentieth-century critics on Crane, who have focused on race at the expense of attending to disability dynamics in the novella. A reconsideration of disability politics in this buried historical trace sheds new light, in turn, on *The Monster*'s ironic turn-of-the-century reworking of earlier Civil War literary plots in which race and disability are not separate but rather deeply associated and mutually reinforced.

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The Monster would be claimed by Ralph Ellison in 1945 as "one of the parents of the modern American novel" (65), along with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), but the *Academy* reviewer in 1901 was more anxious about the novella's place in American literary genealogy—and in particular, about who might be the modern American novel's grandma:

> It has been suggested that, in his volume of short stories entitled *The Monster*, the late Mr. Stephen Crane was less original than usual, that he was indebted to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the idea of the title story. These suggestions hardly carry conviction, and we are not surprised to learn, from Mrs. Crane, that the stories which are thus criticized are founded on her late husband's personal experiences. ("Review" 1)

The Monster revolves around two intersecting plots that John Berryman summarized as "rescue-and-punishment" (192). A black man in a small New York town, Henry Johnson, rescues the son of a white doctor from a burning house, survives so badly burned that he now has "no face," and is subsequently terrorized by the horrified townspeople; the white doctor, in turn, saves Johnson's life, refuses to mercy kill or institutionalize him, and is subsequently ostracized by the townspeople. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) seems an odd, and at the same time overdetermined, source for this ironic, corrosive novella.[2] Whatever it was that prompted the accusation, the problem of Stowe's suggestion is resolved here by appeal to Crane's experience. *The Academy* quotes Crane's wife Cora's defense: "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* did not suggest *The Monster*." What did suggest *The Monster*, the *Academy* reviewer went on to specify, was a "real man" ("Review" 1).

Cora Crane described his "reality" in these terms: "Henry Johnson was a real man—that is, he was burned horribly about the face; but he was a hero only in as he was a horror" ("Review" 1)—meaning in part, one supposes, that the real "Henry Johnson" never saved anybody from a burning building. Closer to home, in Crane's hometown of Port Jervis, New York (which Crane fictionalized as Whilomville), his niece Edna Crane Sidbury testified that the prototype for Henry Johnson was not burned at all but a survivor of facial cancer, a man named Levi Hume who hauled ashes in Port Jervis and whose appearance terrified Port Jervis children, "for it could truthfully be said of him 'He had no face'" (248–50). From Crane's unreliable 1923 biographer Thomas Beer, through Berryman's famous analysis in 1962, to Stallman's 1968

biography, critics across most of the twentieth century have specu-
lated that out of Hume's situation Crane's story formed.[3]

But just as soon as Hume's story appears in/as literary
history, it is also cleared away, transformed into another false sug-
gestion, one that, in the words of the *Academy*, hardly carries con-
viction. As early as Berryman, Hume gets pushed aside by the end
of the sentence that introduces him: "*The Monster* was suggested
one niece says by a Port Jervis refuse-collector whose face was
eaten with cancer; but it is any New York town" (193). Here
Whilomville's generic quality (and, in this psychoanalytic analy-
sis, the classic working of the deep psyche) makes the specific
story of the man whose face was eaten by cancer immaterial. By
the later twentieth and into the twenty-first century, a stronger
critical pattern emerges: Levi Hume registers always only as a
screen for the history of something and someone else.

In 1998, Price McMurray, following a lead established two
years earlier by Elaine Marshall, argued against the usual "rehear-
sing" of *The Monster* "as a universal story about social misfits,"
calling instead for a "sufficiently historical reading" of the novella
(52).[4] Doing sufficient history meant, precisely, setting Levi Hume
aside. In "the conventional biographical reading," McMurray
wrote, "the model for Henry Johnson was Levi Hume" (58). But
McMurray's Crane used Hume as a false face (or a false faceless-
ness), behind which lay the real subject of the story: the lynching
of Robert Lewis in Port Jervis in 1891, five years before Crane
wrote the novella. Lewis, a local black man accused of raping a
white woman, was dragged out of a police wagon and hanged in
front of the home of Stephen's brother, Judge William Howe
Crane. William Crane attempted to prevent the lynching and testi-
fied, futilely, against the mob of his neighbors at an inquest a
week later:

> Just as I reached the crowd the body was going up . . . I . . .
> gave a jerk on the rope . . . and the negro fell into the gutter
> on his back. . . . Different people commenced to light
> matches and hold them close to the negro's face. . . . His face
> was covered with blood and I did not recognize him as Bob
> Lewis. . . . Dr. Illman . . . said, "Yes, the man is all right if
> we can get him to the hospital" . . . and the crowd then took
> up the cry . . . "don't let the doctor touch him! Hang all the
> niggers!" . . . Dr. Illman . . . said there is no use, Judge, we
> will only get hurt. . . . I turned toward the tree again but there
> was a dense body of men about it. The negro was hanging. I
> turned away and went home. (qtd in Wertheim and
> Sorrentino 72–73)

The recognition, elaborated further by Jacqueline Goldsby in 2006, that this story comprised an integral, indelible part of the fabric of *The Monster* was a breakthrough moment in the writing of American literary history.[5] In its most basic structures—its doctor-and-judge team, its flames close to the face, its opposition of the doctor's touch to mob torture and murder, and most of all in its juxtaposition of the unrecognizable black face and the dense body of white men—Crane's story, we could see now, was very close to, and also sharply oblique in its relation to, his brother's testimony. Like William, Stephen turned toward this tree, and turned away from it.

But this insight came at the cost of forgetting a man named Levi Hume. McMurray's Crane "superimposed Levi Hume on Robert Lewis," and by doing so, "effac[ed] the racial content of his story and subordinate[ed] politics to biology" (52). In this formulation, the story of a lynching is politics; the story of a face cancer is biology. And the lynching was what hurt; it alone was (sufficient) history.

Here, then, is my first countersuggestion. Face cancer does have a politics. David Halliburton has written that when Henry Johnson is transformed into "something so grotesque that he becomes an outsider even to the outsider community which is the black neighborhood ... how this happens can only be comprehended in relation to the question of race" (187), but isn't it much more the case that it can only be comprehended in relation to the question of disability and of the *politics* of disability?[6] Ostracism, isolation, social devaluation, eugenics, euthanasia, institutionalization— these questions and problems that cluster around the "man whose face is eaten by cancer" are public, political, and social, not biological, medical, and individual. Ralph Ellison's perceptive link of Crane's Henry Johnson to Faulkner's Benjy Compson underscores this. So, in a very different register, does the comment of the editor of the *Century* who rejected *The Monster* when Crane tried first to place it there: "We couldn't publish that thing with half the expectant mothers in America on our subscription list" (qtd in Beer 329). The longstanding, and at that time still very much active, notion of maternal impression at work here, the fear that even a textual version of Henry Johnson might cause pregnant women to give birth to babies with no faces and other unimaginable monsters, had real and oppressive consequences for disabled people at this moment, consequences that were conventionally political—for example, legal.

In 1897, the year of *The Monster*'s composition, the politics of what we now call disability in the realm of law and policy were reaching one crucial peak. Michael Fried has written of a sketch

by Crane written three years earlier (which recounts a New York City crowd's witnessing of a man's epileptic seizure) that the piece's "*ostensible* occasion . . . would seem to fall short of justifying the intensity of feeling that, both in the action of the sketch and in the urgency of its prose, is everywhere in play" (emphasis added). He calls this an "overdraft of intensity" (105–06). For our purposes, this will be my working definition of disability: intensity overdrafted onto the anomalous or changeable body. The overdraft of intensity in this sketch and the overdrafting of "disfigurement" onto Henry Johnson in *The Monster* were by no means peculiar to Crane; indeed, they were typical of the times.

    In the same university archive that holds the manuscript of this sketch by Crane, there lies in another file another form of overdrafting. Two years before Crane wrote *The Monster*, a charity reformer named Charles Kellogg produced what he called a "crude suggested draft" of a version for New York City of a municipal law that was sweeping the country. The ordinance, now known as the "ugly law," prohibited "any person who is diseased, maimed, or deformed in any way, so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object" from "expos[ing] himself to public view."[7] Kellogg's draft version took this template into overdrive, proposing a $1,000 fine for offenders:

> Be it enacted, &c, That on and after the passage of this act it shall be unlawful for any person, whose body is deformed, mutilated, imperfect or has been reduced by amputations, or who is idiotic or imbecile, to exhibit him or herself in any public hall, museum, theatre or any public building, tent, booth or public place for a pecuniary consideration or reward, or to solicit or receive charitable relief, or to go from house to house or to stand or display themselves upon any public street or place to solicit or receive alms.[8]

Kellogg's extreme version of ugly law was never enacted. And as his "crude draft" makes clear, in the history of ugly law, disability was inextricably intertwined with a social dynamic barely in evidence in *The Monster*, the politics of begging. Still, it's worth noting that the same New York City police force that ran Crane out of town for his defense of a woman accused of prostitution enforced informal ugly law, and not only against identified beggars, with some ferocity in the mid- to late 1890s. When we bring back into focus the real target of these laws, the figure of the "unsightly beggar" and through him or her the persistent nexus of disability and poverty, we gain a new perspective on the complex interweaving of economic interest, social policy, and cultural

imagination in the production of the turn-of-the-century American cityscape. In this situation we may find a new, and differently political, context in which to consider Crane's novella. This social and discursive fabric is variously constituted by ordinance, public policy, street and stage performance, memoir, early film, other works of fiction, and journalistic texts, such as a reporter's call for ugly law to sweep the streets in New Orleans: "One old woman with a deep seated cancer on her face is a revolting sight" ("Brevities" 3).

I don't have space to trace the implications of reading the story in this context here. I do, though, want to note that in *The Monster*, a significant and now little-remembered urban development is transferred into, and grappled with inside, a small-town setting. It is a more intimate setting, openly removed from the phenomenology of urbanization in which strangers meet the bodies of strangers. If seen through a nostalgic haze (as the wiles and whiled-awaying of the town's name invites), the closeness of Whilomville ought to mitigate the social phenomenology of ugly law (and even, ideally, of lynching—remember William Crane's testimony: "I did not recognize him as Bob Lewis"). But the story implies that small-town recognitions of the American 1890s (or earlier) did nothing to mitigate the overdrafts of intensity inscribing disability and race. This implication may explain something about Whilomville's peculiar temporal position in the novella, in which the same boy-hero Jimmie, whose exploits form the core of Crane's other Whilomville stories set decades earlier, is hardly older in this one, though *The Monster*'s setting is clearly in an electric present, on the cusp of modernity.[9]

Here is my second suggestion, obvious but nonetheless in need of underscoring. The politics of disability is not separate from, nor analogous to, but always intersectional with, the politics of race. Consider another recent reading of *The Monster*. In the midst of a dazzlingly rich consideration of the novella, Bill Brown suggests another source for Henry Johnson: the real man named William Henry Johnson, who performed monstrosity and minstrelsy on Barnum's freak show stage under the name of "Zip" or the "What Is It." Here is Brown's handling of the question of what Levi Hume has to do with the novella:

> I do not suppose ... that this achieved reference [to the famous freak star, William Henry Johnson] documents Crane's deliberate strategy. Neither Crane nor his readers ever mention Zip ... Crane's niece explained that the author based his character on a white man from Port Jervis whose face had been eaten by cancer. Rather, I take it that "Henry

Johnson" serves as a verbal bridge, in Freud's terms, spanning the gulf between one memory and the other, enabling an individual memory to serve as the screen allegory for the cultural history that the novel refers to only in passing, when it represents Jimmie performing the role of exhibitor. (218)

Once again Levi Hume is screen allegory, not for Robert Lewis but for Zip the What Is It, not for lynching but for exoticized enfreakment. Hume, apparently, is always a screen memory, never a memory, and we might reframe the question of *The Monster*—"What does it mean to have no face?"—as: "What does it mean to become a screen?"[10] But I want to focus on another question.

Note that Brown confidently claims that Levi Hume was white, citing Stallman's biography as his source. So does John Carlos Rowe, also citing Stallman: "Crane based Johnson on Levi Hume, a white man" (144). The same source backs Jonathan Tadashi Naito's more pointed account of Hume's misleading function: "fixating on this individual as the source for Henry Johnson has at least one serious limitation: it does nothing to explain Crane's decision to center so much of *The Monster* upon racial difference; like Crane, the Port Jervis refuse-collector was white [Stallman 333]" (36). In these accounts, Hume is to Henry Johnson as cancer is to burning; Hume is to history as surviving cancer is to being lynched; Hume is to both as white is to black. But a look back to Stallman's biography reveals—surprisingly, given the certainty of these critics' assertions—that Stallman in no way labels Levi Hume as white at the page cited; on that page, his race goes unmentioned. White Hume is invented.

We might deduce Hume's whiteness by negative proof: in American culture, unmarked almost always means white. An odd aspect of Crane's niece Edna's phrasing could reinforce this suggestion, for she takes pains to emphasize that Hume on his rounds was covered with ashes, as if, perhaps, this might explain how Levi Hume became black. (If so, Bill Brown might well have looked not just to Barnum's "Zip" but to "Ash Boy," the "Piebald Negro" who performed on the same stage, as another component of *The Monster*'s cultural history.) But Cora Crane, Crane's wife, raced Levi Hume distinctly, and she raced him as black. The *Academy* reviewer quotes her defense of her husband against the charge of being over-influenced by Stowe: "Out of the crepe-bound face of a negro whom Mr. Crane saw came the story of 'The Monster'" ("Review" 1). And in fact, in his biography Stallman, who supposedly secures Hume's whiteness for Brown, Rowe, and Naito on page 133, describes Hume like this on page 13: a "Port Jervis Negro who horrified the townfolk by his ugly

disfigured face." Brown, and after him, Naito and Rowe, misread this, cannot see this, not because they are bad readers of biography but because American culture (including a great deal of the disability rights movement) leads us to read exactly this way.[11] Still, Spellman's own sources are uncertain. We can't trust Cora Crane's secondhand account. We can't discount it, either. We simply don't know at this point what boxes census-takers would have checked for Levi Hume when it came to deciding his race.[12]

Perhaps this doesn't matter; perhaps facelessness, disfigurement to this degree, functions as a master category or, we might say, a "monster category" (here I am thinking of the recent work by legal theorist Andrew Sharpe, useful as a tool for approaching this novella, on the meanings of monsters in a modernity which disavows the term).[13] Perhaps the man who putatively "has no face" also putatively "has no race." And after all, we are allowed no doubt about the race of Crane's minstrelized, abjected character Henry Johnson. Then again, perhaps Hume's racial identification does, can be made to, matter. I was curious enough about this, provoked by those confident, utterly false footnotes to Stallman, to have made a research trip to Port Jervis, where I had sufficient time to get a sense of what did and did not constitute official "sufficient history" for the town (plenty of leads to Crane, no marker at the place where Lewis was lynched) but not to find records of Hume (after all, even as far back as the early 1920s Thomas Beer, much closer to Crane's time, couldn't find those traces).

The town was smaller than I had imagined; it was easy to find the spot where William Crane must have stood when he gave up trying to stop that dense body of Port Jervis men. I stood there and imagined first white Levi Hume, "faceless" in the middle of a proverbial faceless crowd, none of whom were ever held accountable, and then black Levi Hume, watching the same people whose children were terrified of him torture and kill Bob Lewis, whom he might very well have known. What did it mean for Levi Hume to face, or to be a face in, that dense body? Any answers we might find will come from other domains than biology. And I personally am not interested in answers that boil down to pathos, as in the one essay on *The Monster* I know of that takes Hume's presence seriously, in which Alice Petry argues (interestingly) that performances by the famous "Elephant Man," John Merrick, inspired Crane to "flesh Hume into one of the most pathetic characters in American literature" (347). For me, Levi Hume "fleshed" into Henry Johnson, or Henry Johnson "fleshing" Levi Hume, is most interesting as a *political* character, and it is a basic tenet of the disability movement today that we need to see past the pathetic.[14]

If Levi Hume was white, then the Africanist presence of Henry Johnson operates as what Toni Morrison calls "a disabling virus" within Crane's story: "a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability" provoked in part for a white man by another white man's terrifying difference (7).[15] If Levi Hume was black, then turning back to him does not in any way mean turning away from the politics of white privilege and white supremacy and the complexities of African-American experience; it means writing black American disability history (as it has intertwined with literary history).

The writer of the introduction to the authoritative University of Virginia edition of Crane's work in which *The Monster* is included, J. C. Levenson, cautioned against focusing much attention on Levi Hume, on grounds worth keeping in mind. "Whatever else it may be," wrote Levenson, Crane's "realism is not simply a matter of direct rendering of an observed object" (xiii). I am not arguing that *The Monster* "directly renders" a real man or is "simply a matter" of the observed face or the without-a-face of Levi Hume. "Disability" historically has posed itself as the direct rendering of a body as an observed object, but because it is political it has never been reducible to transparent observation of the literal, and that certainly is not the case here, in this stylized, mannered text. To apprehend Levi Hume in the making of Henry Johnson is not to contact a direct historical object. It is to apprehend a formative discourse. What is the matter in *The Monster*? The question has something to do with the social constitution of disability in its relation to race.

Taking Hume's presence seriously might lead in a number of directions for thinking about *The Monster*. In this context, it becomes newly interesting that the story's moral protagonist is a doctor and its major questions are framed in the terms of bioethics and biopower: whether to perform a "questionable charity in preserving . . . life" (Crane 31); whether "public institutions" and the practice of institutionalizing are in fact "all very good" (64).[16] It becomes interesting that Levi Hume, disfigured by cancer, gets *trans*figured by fiction: what does it mean to remake illness as injury, to turn the effects of cancer first into the burning of a rescuer and then into the scars of a martyr or forgotten hero? This question might lead into another context familiar to Crane's readers, the discourse of the war veteran and in particular of the burned soldier. We get a sense of the extremity of facial trauma in the American Civil War from an anecdote in a recent book on the "reconstruction of warriors": Allied doctors in World War I could find few sources besides a Civil War textbook on treating massive

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wounds to the face, but they decided to suppress the book, which they thought might scare doctors away from going to the front.[17] Since the severity of facial injury for surviving soldiers injured in Iraq today is far greater than ever before, it goes without saying that for us today the burned face is political.

Thinking through these issues might also help us read *The Monster* in relation to a distinctive subgenre to which it bears resemblance: the post-Civil War plot in which a disabled black man is embraced, and sometimes rescued, by a white man, often a former Union soldier, whom he has saved in battle, injuring himself in the process. In John Hay's popular, heavily anthologized poem "Banty Tim," this plot hauls a thick and readily apparent ideological load.[18] A white sergeant stands up to a Jim-Crow mob attempting to run a black man named Tim out of a small town in Illinois, telling the "white man's committee" how Tim saved him at Vicksburg Heights, "[t]hough a shot brought him once to his knees" (21, 24). So, concludes the defiant speaker, "here stays Banty Tim./ He trumped Death's ace for me that day,/ And I'm not goin' back on him!" (24). Michael Denning, identifying a similar story in the dime novel, has named it the black donor plot. In Denning's 1876 example, the "deformed black" aid is also identified as "banty": Banty Bob, a battlefield "black angel" (qtd in Denning 211).[19]

I want to pause here briefly and attend to that repeated word "banty." It seems to imply several things at once. Derived from a term for a fighting rooster, it is undoubtedly a name for a short, tough man. White, nondisabled men could be called "Banty"; Civil War Major General George McLellan, for instance, who was five and a half feet tall, had the nickname, which conveyed, one biographer writes, "as much of his egocentric personality as his cock-of-the-walk physique" (Packard 80). But if the name designates a man who walks with a strut, it also just as often means a man who walks with a limp, perhaps because of its closeness to the bow-leggedness of "bandy" (as close as swaggering is to staggering). The repeated use of the nickname for black disabled donor characters in these postwar texts of the 1870s suggests that the word does a kind of uneasy cultural work, at once honoring, demeaning, and disarming a black fighter.

Both "banty" and its cousin "bandy" suggest a kind of exchange: the give and take of jokes, of blows, of tit-for-tat, as in bandying, and as in bantam wrestling.[20] Traces of this bantying may in fact carry over into *The Monster*. John Carlos Rowe has noticed in passing that when Crane's Henry Johnson is introduced to readers, in a way that both elevates and mocks him, as "a very handsome negro ... known to be a light, a weight" to his black

neighbors, this "apparent oxymoron" hints of "lightweight" (144). It is perhaps not accidental that this glancing reference places Johnson one notch up from the bantam whose boxing presence anchors the postwar "Banty" black/white rescue-exchange plot.

But that plot in its 1870s manifestations (and in Crane's further 1897 reconfiguration) does not simply involve exchange or an even back-and-forth shuttling. This contrasts with some earlier representations of war-injured black soldiers that placed them in exact exchange/equivalence to their white counterparts. An 1865 cartoon in *Harper's Weekly* titled "A Man Knows a Man" showed two one-legged soldiers, one black, one white, shaking hands; the caption read, "Give me a hand, Comrade! We have each lost a LEG for the good cause; but, thank GOD, we never lost HEART" (Fahs 181). Even at such moments, as Alice Fahs has noted, most representations of black soldiers "circumscribed and sharply limited the implications of such manhood in American society, whether through imagined white control of black actions, ridicule, or, most often, death" (181). But a logic of exact equivalence is at least weakly posited.

By the 1870s, however, "Banty Tim" underscores, even as it attempts to correct for, a severely uneven relationship between Tim and his white champion. The scene of absolute white power in the poem, at once problematized and reinforced, becomes particularly clear when we look back once again to the real-life models for "Banty Tim['s]" characters and watch how disability disappears. Hay's speaker, fictionalized as "Tilmon Joy," was modeled on a man named Major Dorus Bates, who lost an arm at Vicksburg.[21] Though the poem registers collective injury in the moment of battle ("ripped/And torn and tattered we lay" [23]), the textual Tilmon Joy is not marked in any way as an amputee; he has lost nothing. At least as much as a story of rescue-exchange, "Banty Tim" is a story in which a black man who has earned credit is now once again brought back into a relation of debility and debt while a white man returns to his place as the nondisabled lender.

Setting *The Monster* beside "Banty Tim," we can discern the pressure of this uneven "I'm not going back on him" narrative. We can also see how the plot depends on a doubled politics, a lynching scene (or something like it) and an apparatus in which a black man comes to deserve defense (and to accrue new debt) by being both first defender *and, necessarily*, then disabled. And we can begin to understand how in Crane's later novella this structure gets refracted: domesticated, altered under new historical pressures, and thoroughly unsettled.

It is domesticated by its feminization, its transfer into the realm of women's gossip, child's-play, and the small-town social wounds and slights epitomized by the plot's ending not with a male-to-male showdown, as in "Banty Tim," but with a failed tea party. The quiet final paragraph stalls in a moment of inaction when Whilomville's womenfolk have snubbed the Trescott family for harboring Henry Johnson. "Trescott found himself occasionally trying to count the [tea] cups. There were fifteen of them," is the story's famously anticlimactic conclusion (475). John Carlos Rowe has provided an illuminating account of the gender dynamics at work here and a reminder of their importance for an understanding of the novella: the stunned Dr. Trescott, reduced by the "fickleness of modern social behavior" to "counting tea cups rather than explaining his moral philosophy, . . . is himself feminized according to the gender hierarchies of the nineteenth century" (161–62). This reduction, and the breakdown of moral agency it implies, becomes starkly clear when we compare Trescott's final stance (or trance) to the stand taken by the speaker of Hay's 1871 "Banty Tim," who as moral hero faces down the mob like a man: "ef one of you tetches the boy,/He'll wrestle his hash to-night in hell,/Or my name's not Tilmon Joy" (24). Underscored by its rough dialect, "Banty Tim" comes to a ringing stop when a plain man draws a line and stakes his name. Dr. Trescott, in contrast, is left in irresolution, unable to reckon, "occasionally trying."

He is left, that is, in an aftermath, one chapter past the not-so-grand stand in which he restates his decision not to institutionalize Henry Johnson during a "bland" talk with a delegation of the town's male leaders (62). That scene stages no facedown; at its height, we are told, Trescott "kept his face in the shadow" (63). Even there his bottom line takes notably passive form: " 'No, John Twelve,' he said, 'it can't be done' " (473). *The Monster* is a story of aftermath—the aftermath of ultimatum, but also the aftermath that is 1897 as opposed to the open, immediately postwar, Reconstruction-era conflicts of the "Banty" plot circulating in the 1870s. A state of ongoing, and of demoralization, replaces the certain moral confrontation of the Banty story. Nothing has concluded, nothing can be repaired. At the same time, this aftermath is a kind of before-math (Trescott, after all, is mechanically "trying to count"), its horizon constituted by new calculations and regulated by the emerging mechanisms and institutions of an impersonal but no less violent modernity.[22]

The clarity of the "I'm not going back on him" plot is unsettled in other ways as well. In an illuminating reading of the novella in 1986, Michael Warner addressed the general "difficulty of judication in Crane," noting that *The Monster* simultaneously

tells two stories, one of which, a story "of ethical dilemma and the problematics of character," opposes the other "heroic narrative," undercutting it "at every point" (87–88). It is not surprising that the language of disability emerges in this analysis; Crane, Warner argues, "persists in signaling valuations even as he disables our mechanism of valuation" (77).[23] After all, in one form of the "aesthetic nervousness" that Ato Quayson has identified in literary representation of disabled characters or disabling situations, disability marks "the site of a major hermeneutical impasse" (49).

"The lack of closure in this kind of representation," Quayson writes, "may also have ethical implications, yet it is the problem of interpretation that remains paramount"; one of Quayson's examples is the portrayal of the burned, "skinless" English patient in Michael Ondaatje's novel of that name, whose truths lie not in an interior but on a "labile surface, like a mocking enigma" (50). Henry Johnson's burn injuries might seem comparatively straightforward. The first description of them puts it bluntly: "As for the Negro Henry Johnson, he could not live. His body was frightfully seared, but more than that, he now had no face. His face had simply been burned away" (29). But Henry Johnson's face(lessness) also becomes a particular kind of labile surface, a problem for interpretation, in ways that a reckoning with questions of disability can help us better understand.

His face had simply been burned away. These plain words insist that we are approaching the limit of the literal. But nothing here is "simple": not the process of the burning, which has elicited some of Crane's most extreme and lavish linguistic displays in the course of its depiction, and not the physiological indexes (Johnson has "no face," but at least one eye; "no face," but yet a mouth to speak with; possibly "no mind," but he remembers and appeals to his former life). A distancing "as" keeps intervening. "As for the Negro," begins the passage I quoted above, and later the judge ushers in the monster label with another "as": "*As near as I can understand*, he will hereafter be a monster, a perfect monster" (29, 31; emphasis added). Language may make a monster perfect, but it can never get near enough. There is no morphological given that we can take for granted in *The Monster*. Even at the moment where Johnson is made into literality—his rescuer brings out of the burning house "a thing which he laid on the grass" (408)— "thing" functions both as the irreducibly real and as the utterly abstract (or, to put it in the story's terms, as a "dark figure" [34]).

This kind of language is well illuminated in a particularly useful discussion of Stephen Crane's style that takes up a few concentrated pages of James Guetti's *Wittgenstein and the Grammar of Literary Experience* (1993). Guetti discusses Crane's

characteristically ostentatious, "high-velocity," metaphors, the ones that foreground their own "inappropriateness, upon which Crane seems to take every conceivable opportunity to insist" (138). Many of Guetti's examples come from *The Monster*—"hyperactive" verbal figures like "the doctor was shaving this lawn as if it were a priest's chin" (9). At "locally linguistic" moments like this, Guetti writes, language idles, presents itself as "language not working, as language out of work" and therefore, with heightened effect, as "language as such," and paradoxically this is what gives Crane's figures "their strangely 'physical' force or even 'reference'" (138–39). Guetti's list of metaphors does not include "he now had no face" or "his face had simply been burned away." These lines usually barely present as figurative. And yet they are spectacularly dark figures, opaque, "markedly" as well as "merely verbal" (137). When we recognize "had no face" or "his face had simply been burned away" as *isolated linguistic behaviors* in Guetti's terms, phrases as inappropriate and hyperactive in their function as the priest's chin simile, we begin to understand them also as language out of work, language, as it were, gone "on disability": descriptors not physical but forcefully, strangely "physical." It is in the hermeneutical impasse of the "he had no face," the impossible "reference" (in its scare quotes) to Levi Hume, that the nervous modern *Monster* lodges, far from the certainties of a text like "Banty Tim."

Disability studies analysis of *The Monster* cannot rest with a focus on a face alone. It calls, in David Hevey's resonant terms, for "traveling off the body" to examine the disabling social situation of Henry Johnson and behind that the shadow situation of Levi Hume (54). Johnson is situated in a town whose behavior a Port Jervis historical website, glancing back as much at Levi Hume as at Crane's fictional character, sums up with striking discomfort and a dubious assignment of cause and effect: "Henry's physical imperfections . . . caused the townspeople to be less than kind."[24] As I noted earlier, Johnson is also situated between two doctors' decisions: whether to euthanize him and whether to institutionalize him.

Critics have debated whether the story's inconclusive ending, paused at the counting of tea cups, presages either Dr. Trescott's putting away of Henry or his ongoing refusal to do so.[25] *The Monster*, of course, permits either reading. But elsewhere there is a clear textual answer to the question of the fate of Henry Johnson, one that follows the ineluctable deep logic of euthanasia that Rosemarie Garland Thomson has identified even in literary plots that are not (as *The Monster* is) explicitly concerned with mercy killing.[26] In the end, the wiping out of Levi Hume in the

literary historical record is matched by the wiping out of Johnson in Crane's more extended writing of Whilomville.

Crane followed—not preceded—*The Monster* with the book of sharp, arch childhood tales he called the *Tales of Whilomville* (1900). There all the grief and melancholy of *The Monster* is evacuated, and the ertswhileness of Jimmie Trescott's Whilomville, its once-upon-the-time-of-boyhood quality, becomes far more exaggerated, turned into a style or a discourse, as in the adverbial form of "whilom" (defined in one dictionary of standard English as "archaic and pretentiously jocular").[27] Mrs. Trescott now participates in her full share of comic tea parties, and she, Jimmie, and his doctor-father inhabit a world without Henry Johnson. Although, as I have pointed out, Jimmie is a younger boy here, the book makes clear, with a kind of literary time warp, that its moment comes after *The Monster*. Moreover, the monster has entirely disappeared. At the pretentiously jocular extreme of the *Tales of Whilomville*, in an excruciating minstrel set piece called "The Knife" involving "an American negro's fondness for watermelons," a black "dude" named Peter Washington is said to idealize the "fastidious," the "late gallant Henry Johnson" (185). Handsome again in memory, Henry Johnson is thus neatly dispensed with. The elaborate comic routines of the *Tales of Whilomville* succeed at making his disfigurement vanish and, without fanfare, at killing him off.

In his stead, disability distributes itself indiscriminately across the black population of Whilomville. Immediately after the burial of the fastidious Henry Johnson, "The Knife" turns to an account of a young black woman who, "to Peter's mind, was a triumph of beauty" (186). "Lurk[ing]" like Johnson "in a corner" and "giggl[ing]," much as Johnson chuckles, "with finished imbecility," she too provokes a judge's fantasies of euthanasia and institutional removal, with the narrator's full endorsement: "It was a giggle on which an irascible but right-minded judge would have ordered her forthwith to be buried alive" (186, 187). Like every other representation of the black residents of Crane's Whilomville, this one depends implicitly upon the kind of "disability argument" Douglas Baynton has analyzed: "Disability arguments were prominent in justifications of slavery in the early to mid-nineteenth century and of other forms of unequal relations between white and black Americans after slavery's demise" (37). Many have pointed out the injustice of such arguments, Baynton goes on, but few have considered "why these attributions are such powerful weapons for inequality, why they were so furiously denied and condemned by their targets, and what this tells us about our attitudes toward disability" (41). The *Tales of Whilomville* foreclose

these questions. *The Monster* opened them. The critical tradition on *The Monster* has, on the whole, shut them down.

The historical development of the policy category called "disability" was one key way in which American culture attempted to manage what Warner calls "the articulation of anxieties about the moral and the human to be seen everywhere in the industrial society of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century America" (92). Crane saw these anxieties everywhere—in the faces of scarred war veterans, in the lynching testimony of his brother William, and in Levi Hume. American literary histories can better attend to these dynamics when the politics of disability are faced, not effaced.

Notes

1. Laura Tanner, "Bodies in Waiting: Representations of Medical Waiting Rooms in Contemporary American Fiction," *ALH* 14.1 (2002): 115–30; Benjamin Reiss, "Letters from Asylumia: The *Opal* and the Cultural Work of the Lunatic Asylum 1851–1860," *ALH* 16.1 (2004): 1–28.

2. Crane's faceless Henry Johnson is formally, exactly stripped of what Stowe called the "indubitable signs"—facial expressions of human feeling—"which showed too plainly that a man could not become a thing" (17). Monstrosity in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is given over to slaveholders, not at all the mobile mode of subjection it becomes in Crane's work. Sentiments endorsed wholeheartedly by Stowe are deflected, interrogated, uncanny, and inconclusive in *The Monster*. A number of textual features may have prompted the association of *The Monster* with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: the engagement with the problem of white benevolence, perhaps, or the representation of cross-race interaction and/or a black rescuer, or at its simplest the black–white axis, or both texts' disquieting ethical situation of their readers.

3. According to J. C. Levenson in his introduction to Crane's *Collected Works*, "Thomas Beer thought at one time that he had traced the origin of Henry Johnson to a 'disfigured teamster in Port Jervis' by the name of Levi Hume, but he could find no one to confirm the suggestion" (xiii). All citations to Crane's work will be from this edition. Levenson cites a letter from Beer to Stephen's brother Edmund, written from Yonkers, New York on 30 October 1922. Edmund had in fact died a month earlier.

4. See also Elaine Marshall, "*The Monster* Seen in the Light of Robert Lewis's Lynching," *Nineteenth Century Literature* 51.2 (1996). Marshall argues that Levi Hume provides a "suggestive context" but adds the lynching as a possible "imaginative source" (205).

5. Jacqueline Goldsby, "The Drift of the Public Mind: Stephen Crane," *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (2006), 105–63.

6. The concentration on racism as disfigurement in much criticism on the novella obscures Crane's extended representation of the black community's terror and ostracism of Henry Johnson. When, for instance, Lee Clark Mitchell writes that Johnson's "accident is 'merely' a literalization of his marginalized social condition, as Whilomville's way of 'figuring out' not only Henry but other blacks as well," *black* Whilomville disappears from that sentence, but the "figuring out" that Crane's black Whilomville does to Henry Johnson becomes visible and explicable when we think in terms of disablement (177).

7. I have just completed a social and cultural history of these ordinances, *The Ugly Laws*, forthcoming from New York University Press.

8. "Crude Suggested Draft by CDK (Charles D. Kellogg)," Community Service Society/Charity Organization Society Papers (Box 144), Columbia University Rare Books Library.

9. See Jonathan Tadashi Naito, "Cruel and Unusual Light: Electricity and Effacement in Stephen Crane's *The Monster*," *Arizona Quarterly* 62.1 (2006): 35–63. John Carlos Rowe also emphasizes the novella's "focus on the transformation of the town to a modern city . . . thanks to problematic progress" (144, 148).

10. On the first question see, for instance, Lee Clark Mitchell, "Face, Race, and Disfiguration in Stephen Crane's 'The Monster,'" *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1990): 152–74.

11. On "white disability studies," see Chris Bell's essay of the same name in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard Davis (2006), 275–82.

12. I have in fact tried to track Levi Hume in the various possible censuses, without success. It may be that his name has come down to us incorrectly, misremembered or misspelled. It may also be that the man described as Levi Hume did not in fact exist. Goldsby, one of the very few recent critics to notice Stallman's assignment of African-American identity to Hume, goes on to argue directly and powerfully that Hume is made up to cover up the story's real source and stake: "William Howe Crane . . . created his own front to conceal *The Monster*'s historical source. . . . Since [his daughter] Sidbury's account [of Levi Hume] first appeared . . . critics have accepted it as *The Monster*'s social origin, making the novella's literary history so much easier to conceive and tell." William, Goldsby argues, disavowed the importance of the killing of Robert Lewis in the shaping of the novella, choosing instead to "console" his daughter "with the story of Port Jervis's black bogeyman" (160–61). Note how a black Levi Hume—a black disabled man—can register here only in bogeyman form. Bogeyman Hume *stands for* disavowal; his cancer exists only as a substitute sign for white terror, violence and denial. Goldsby may be correct, but I want to stress again that we do not know anything about Hume for sure. It is not clear to me on what basis we can conclude that he did not exist, particularly because several historical circumstances cannot be easily assimilated into this story in which Hume is no more than William's cover-up: the fact that William openly testified about the lynching at the inquest, showing no desire to disavow it, for one; the fact that Cora Crane, earlier than and quite independently of Edna Sidbury, also told a version of the Hume story, for another. Nor does it seem fair to assert that the critical consensus has "accepted" the story of Levi Hume, itself barely conceived and told.

13. Andrew N. Sharpe, "Structured Like a Monster: Understanding Human Difference Through a Legal Category," *Law Critique* 18 (2007): 207–28.

14. As in the rallying cry that became the title of the standard history by Joseph Shapiro, *No Pity* (1993). In the version of this paper given as a talk at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in September 2007, the older version of this line was: "it is a basic tenet of the disability movement today that we need to see past pathos"—a moment that prompted Catherine Prendergast's response to follow. She's right.

15. In this reading Henry Johnson is, as Nan Goodman writes that all African Americans in the post-Civil War US were, one of "a class of expendable accident victims . . . defined by its existing marginality and by its actual or imagined incompetence, *whose purpose was to have the accident*" (119; emphasis added). On Morrison's concept of Africanism in relation to the critical literary tradition on *The Monster*, see Rowe, 151.

16. The novella's stance toward the doctor's decisions is indeterminate; his practices smack of Frankenstein's science on the one hand and gesture toward Tolstoy's ethics on the other. On the link to Tolstoy, see Donald Pizer, "Stephen Crane's 'The Monster' and Tolstoy's What to Do? A Neglected Allusion," *Studies in Short Fiction* 20.2–3 (1983): 127–29.

17. See Emily Mayhew, *The Reconstruction of Warriors* (2004). A useful interview with Mayhew, a historian at the Imperial War College in London, by Vikki Valentine may be accessed at http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyID=5571028&sc+emaf. See also the paired stories by Caroline Alexander in the *Smithsonian* magazine, "Faces of War" and "Rivaling Nature," the first on the remarkable work of American sculptor Anna Coleman Ladd, who sculpted cosmetic portrait masks for soldiers with injured faces in Paris during the World War I, second on facial reconstruction for wounded Iraq War veterans. Archived at www.smithsonianmag.com/issues/2007/february/mask/php. A number of critics have suggested that Crane might partly have modeled the "no face" of Henry Johnson on those of Civil War veterans he saw in his childhood; see, for instance, Linda H. Davis, *Badge of Courage: The Life of Stephen Crane* (1998), 217–18.

18. "Banty Tim," written around 1870, was published first in *Harper's Weekly* and then in Hay's *Pike County Ballads* in 1871. William Roscoe Thayer gives an account of this history in *The Life and Letters of John Hay*, Vol. 1 (1915), 356. Hay was of course famous as a public figure, notably as private secretary for Abraham Lincoln, and had extended friendships with many literary men, including Henry James and William Dean Howells. The poem was a set piece in anthologies for decades. See, for instance, its appearance in the collection compiled and self-published by N. R. Streeter for traveling salesmen to read "when trade is dull," *Gems From an Old Drummer's Grip* (1889). By this time "Banty Tim" had already attained the reader's-digest status of "gem" or old saw.

19. Denning argues: "these figures are, to use the vocabulary of Propp's study of folk tales, donors; and as Fredric Jameson (1972, 67–68) has argued, 'The basic interpersonal and dramatic relationship of the narrative tale is . . . neither the head-on direct one of love nor that of hatred and conflict, but rather this lateral relationship of the hero to the eccentric figure of the donor.' The success

of *Huckleberry Finn* and the reason it continues to be contested in American culture lies in part in its elaboration of this relationship" (211). In the tradition I am identifying (and not in *Huckleberry Finn*), the donor is not only black but disabled, and it may be that the term "Banty" became a signifier for this double stipulation. The novel in which Banty Bob appears is Albert Aiken's *The Molly Maguires: or, The Black Diamond of Hazelton*, first published in serialized form in *The Fireside Companion* in 1876. Banty Bob, like Banty Tim, saved the white hero in a Civil War battle, so a third term becomes important in the standard version of the distinctively postwar subgenre: black, disabled, veteran. R. W. Stallman argued wrongly in 1968 that no white American author prior to Crane's *Monster* "had pictured a Negro performing a truly heroic act" (334), a notion put to rest by Rowe with references to Stowe and Twain (151), but other popular texts during the Civil War and after, such as the "Banty" stories, in fact enacted the rescue plot.

20. Or a "shuttling," as in Paul Lawrence Dunbar's description of a black Union veteran as a "shuttlecock" for the white vets who "had seen that black man on bloody fields." See Elizabeth Young's account of Dunbar's 1901 novel *The Fanatics* in *Disarming the Nation* (1999), 199.

21. Hay maintained the plotline was based on an actual incident involving Dorus Bates. An 1899 letter in which he discusses this, in the Hay papers at Brown, is quoted in Kenton J. Clymer, *John Hay: The Gentleman as Diplomat* (1975), 232. Dorus Bates was injured at Vicksburg; he is celebrated in William A. Grimshaw's *History of Pike County; A Centennial Address* (1876).

22. Nan Goodman has brilliantly placed the rescue plot of the novella in an important, related late 1890s context, that of *Plessy*-era race- and class-skewed "Good Samaritan" legal cases, in which blacks and servants were induced to rescue whites and the well-to-do, but not vice versa. Thus, she argues, *The Monster* "takes up the issue of black subservience at the point where slavery leaves off" (120–21). See also Goldsby's important analysis of the novella's relation to emerging forms of modern corporate-monopoly capitalism.

23. The metaphorical reference to disability occurs with striking frequency in critical readings of *The Monster*, as in, for instance, McMurray's "Disabling Fictions." The suggestion is often that references to "real" disability (such as the social experience of Levi Hume) "disable" reading.

24. Killeen Quick, "Stephen Crane's Roots in Port Jervis, NY," http://www.port-jervisny.com/craneroots.htm.

25. Goodman gives an account of both sides of the critical debate on this question, 123–24.

26. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "The Cultural Logic of Euthanasia: 'Sad Fancyings' in Herman Melville's 'Bartleby,'" *American Literature* 76.4 (2004): 777–806.

27. Kenneth G. Wilson, *Columbia Guide to Standard American English* (1993).

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