

## *Monstrilio* Transcript

Welcome to Reading the Rainbow, brought to you by the Dauphin County Library System. For the book curious looking for their next good LGBTQ+ read. Listen in as queer library staff discuss the Own Voice stories they've been reading.



Em: Hi, my name is Em and I use they/them pronouns.

Ben: And my name is Ben and I use he/him pronouns.

E: And today we are talking about the book *Monstrilio* by Gerardo Sámano Córdova. And Gerardo Sámano Córdova is a writer and artist from Mexico City living in Brooklyn. He's currently a writer-in-residence at Fordham University. He holds an MFA in fiction from the University of Michigan. He has studied with Alexander Chee at Bread Loaf as a work study scholar and with Garth Greenwell at Tin House. His work has appeared in *Ninth Letter*, *Passages North*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *The Common*, *Catapult*, *Apartamento Magazine*, *Barrel House*, *The Columbia Review*, *Elastic Magazine*, and most recently *American Short Fiction*.

B: And here's a brief description of *Monstrilio*. In this book, grieving mother Magos cuts a piece out of her deceased eleven-year-old son Santiago's lung. Acting on fierce maternal instinct and the dubious logic of an old folktale, she nurtures the lung until it gains sentience, growing into the carnivorous little *Monstrilio* she keeps hidden within the walls of her family's decaying Mexico City estate. Eventually, *Monstrilio* begins to resemble the Santiago he once was, but his innate impulses—though curbed by his biological and chosen family's communal care—threaten to destroy this fragile second chance at life.

E: So, content warnings for this book are: animal death, body horror, child death, death in general, gore, blood, grief, cannibalism, and injury and injury detail. And that's a laundry list of things, but I feel like within the context of the book, I mean it is, it's not pleasant necessarily.

B: Yeah, there's some gruesome parts.

E: Yeah, don't let that deter you, especially if you're interested not even so much in horror, just like a really fascinating discussion of like grief and loss and also queerness. Which we can get into. Ben, what did you think?

B: I really, really enjoyed this book.

E: Yeah.

B: I think from the very beginning, the way that Córdova describes, or not even describes, I think his language is so emotive of grief. That everything's so like stripped down, bare, everything's so like, I don't quite know how to say, it's like plain and straightforward in a way that just feels very honest and like raw. So, I think that makes the kind of gruesome parts a little bit harder because they're not trying to cushion themselves in anything. Does that make sense?

E: No, that makes a lot of sense. It's really like visceral, I think is what this book is. And it's not so much the characters or even like— Any instances of violence in this book, you understand why they're happening, but that doesn't make it comfortable to read. And like you said, I think it is really just straightforward in its like viciousness sometimes because of the nature of *Monstrilio* and M and what like he is. Let's talk about the characters, or I guess the structure of this book and then we can talk about the characters.

B: So, yeah, in terms of structure, the book's broken down into four sections and each section transfers to a different narrator. So, the first section is narrated by Magos, who is Santiago's mother. And the very first paragraph is just her in the throes of grief right after her young son has died. So, it's like heart-wrenching from the beginning. And then after some of the story happens, it switches to one of her good friends, Lena, who kind of takes over. The third section is told from the perspective of Joseph, who is Santiago's father. And then in the final section, Monstrillo himself narrates.

E: Yeah, the structure of this book, and we talked about this a little bit before, just the structure of this book is really interesting in that you can feel one way about something and then as soon as it shifts perspective, you can feel, not entirely differently, but you get a lot more nuance as to the situation. And it's starting off with Magos is interesting too because she is by and far, in my opinion, like the most, she's very out for herself. Like, she is the most self-centered of all these characters. And I feel like, I mean, this could be different by the end of the novel, but I feel like she is the least empathetic to M, insofar as that she really doesn't want to accept that this is a monster that she has grown and created. And another thing that's interesting about the structure too, is that we don't get to hear from these characters after their chapters are over. So our perspective completely changes, which is different than other books that I've read where it's like multiple narrators. It's just one person, you get what they're thinking, and then you move on to another person in a different period of time, like in the chronological story, which I think is, I don't know, it's an interesting way to structure a book.

B: Yeah.

E: But Magos, I have a question actually that our author has provided for us at the end of this book. So if you want to read this book, if this discussion piques your interest, and you want to do like a book club, there are discussion questions that I think are really good, and we're not going to use all of them, but we are going to use a couple. So Magos is a complicated character who makes several surprising, uncomfortable, and even disturbing choices in this novel. Do you feel like her actions were justified? Why or why not?

B: I think justified is a very interesting label to try to put on her actions, because like you said, the fact that she is the narrator, we see what leads her to every choice she makes. So I think the most striking example of this, and luckily it happens right at the beginning, so it's not a spoiler to talk about, but the fact that she cuts her son open and removes a piece of his lung, that part I think is going to be a very divisive moment for people.

E: Yes. It's a tough scene to get through. It's pretty gnarly.

B: And as you read it, the way that she's describing what she's doing, I don't quite know the words to say, you can't relate to her really.

E: She's like in a manic episode almost is what it feels like. She has this unstoppable desire to have a piece of her dead son, and I think that is not necessarily the most unusual thing culturally, because we do actually have a couple of instances in which other people are like, oh yeah, that's like people will carry around hair, right? Or what is the thing, somebody else in the novel mentions some fleshy thing. It doesn't really matter that much, but it's, I mean, just the way she goes about it is so, yeah, it's not like a lock of his hair. It's part of his lung. But that is really instrumental to her understanding of her son though. So I think we could talk about Santiago a little bit, who is the child who dies, and he's born with only one lung. So when we talk about "justified," if Magos wants something that is like her son, to remind her of him, she goes for the lung because it's like that's, and we get a lot of scenes also of memories of her literally pumping air into her son's lung because he can't breathe very well and he's not expected to live as long as he does anyway. But yeah, it's, I mean, she terrifies her husband when she does this. Like she doesn't go unnoticed when she arguably mutilates her son's body.

B: Well, and speaking of if it's justified or not, it's interesting how it is so gruesome and unbelievable that she does that to the body, but the choice that she makes to do that results in the coming to being

of the character of Monstrilio. So that lung ends up kind of morphing and transforming into the character that becomes kind of the central part of the book. So it's interesting to think about. Is she justified in doing that? But after finishing the book, would you have preferred that she left the boy as dead? You know what I mean?

E: I think everyone may have been a little better off had she not. Just from like a mental stability standpoint, right? Because like she does this and doesn't even realize that she could grow a boy out of a piece of lung. She finds this out from Jackie, who is her mother's housekeeper, arguably her mother's lover. It's hinted at. We don't, it's heavily implied or at the very least heavily speculated. But once she finds out that if she feeds the lung, it might grow into a boy she's like hyper fixated on protecting this lung against anything. And I think that's really interesting too, because she's lost her son. She also handles her grief in a way that doesn't make a lot of sense to the people around her, especially her husband, who she ends up, you know, kind of driving away. Not even kind of, he moves away and they're separated for quite some time. And people don't really understand what she's doing, but she does. And she's like singularly focused on the protection of this lung over herself and over her loved ones as it grows from like a hunk of flesh into the creature that we come to know as Monstrilio. And it's, I don't know, in thinking about it as a metaphor for how somebody handles grief, like she refuses to accept the loss of Santiago in that way, right? And I think that's really interesting and also does a lot of damage to her relationships because she's not really thinking very clearly about what she's doing. Or I mean she is, but it doesn't make any sense. Like she doesn't share her motivations with other people. And even when she does, they don't make as much sense to the other people around her.

B: Well, I think that was one of the big differences between her and Joseph is that when Santiago died, Joseph, his grief was very expected. It was very traditional. He was crying all the time. He was kind of in bed a lot and just in grief that was recognizable as grief. Whereas Magos cut the lung out and then flew back to Mexico and then she just didn't want anybody talking to her or mentioning anything. And so, yeah, the way that she kind of barred herself off from any kind of emotion through the whole thing I think showed the big difference between those two characters.

E: Yeah. Well, and it's interesting too because she has this understanding that Monstrillo is Santiago. And this comes into much greater play later on in the book as Monstrillo ages. But her reluctance to harm this thing that's doing harm to other living things causes a lot of problems, right? And I think arguably more than anyone, Magos is the point of conflict for this book, I think. Because her insistence on protecting this thing endangers everyone, including her mother at one point. But at the same time, it's like even when you get to Lena, Lena is Magos' best friend from childhood, lived with her and her mother for a time during university. Lena is in love with Magos and Magos is fully aware of that, but kind of just appreciates the infatuation more than she has any desire to really act on it.

B: And uses it to kind of get Lena to do what she wants. I think she exploits that a lot.

E: Yeah. Oh, definitely. And so Lena's part in the book is second after Magos'. And so we get a perspective from somebody who is very close to the situation and doesn't have a whole lot of qualms about doing something about this monster, right? Insofar as that she's willing to get rid of it entirely, which Magos refuses to let happen at multiple points. And I don't know, Lena's interesting because she's fully aware that Monstrilio is not Santiago. She mentions it several times in her chapters. But she loves what Monstrilio is for what he is.

B: I liked Lena and I like the way that you're describing her relationship to Monstrilio. Because by the end, I think she becomes one of the most safe people for Monstrilio once he's more grown. Because she has always taken him at face value for what he is, you know. Well, would you agree with that?

E: I think so. I mean, she, especially towards the end, I don't think we necessarily see it so much in her POV chapters. But definitely by the time we get to Joseph, she knows what Monstrilio is. And after they've allowed him to grow into a person, she never for a second sort of questions his behavior,

but just takes it as like the innate nature of what he is. But she is also complicit in like mutilating Monstrilio, which without giving away too many spoilers, there is something particularly dangerous about the development of this creature that they have an opportunity to sort of mitigate via a medical procedure, because Lena is a surgeon. And that fundamentally changes the way that Monstrilio behaves. And then they, Lena and Joseph, way more than Magos, have to sort of reckon with emotionally the burden of that choice and the very clear effect that that has on Monstrilio's mental well-being. Like he's described as very playful, and then he's described as going through what they can only perceive as like a very deep sense of depression. Even though he's a creature at this point, doesn't have language, doesn't appear human, it's very clear that he's incredibly mentally distraught. So it's hard to say what her action has done to change his growth, his mindset. And they do this because Magos has this sort of outlandish theory that if they go through with this procedure, that Monstrilio will inherently be less like a wild animal and develop more into a human. And that does seem to be the case in the short term, but in the long term, we see that that's not true. And Lena realizes right away that she doesn't want to do it. But I don't remember why she ends up...

B: That's what I'm trying to think, because when they first brought up the idea, she was like the most adamant, we should not do this, we don't understand how that would impact him. But she does go through with it. And I think as you're talking, I'm realizing an interesting kind of set of relationships ends up existing across the book, which is not only each narrator has a very distinct relationship to Monstrilio himself, as well as a distinct relationship to Santiago the boy before he died. And I think those differences inform a lot about who that character is and also change how Monstrilio himself develops based on his relationship with these people. And then I think something I'm realizing right now is that there's also this relationship between... Well, I guess there's different phases of Monstrilio, because he first was Santiago the boy. In the beginning of the book, in Magos' chapter, he's just, I mean, a monster. And I think the book kind of questions what is monstrous and why we would call something that or label something as monstrous. But in the beginning, when he's first kind of coming to life out of the lung, it's just kind of a mound of material with like a mouth. And so it's very monstrous. I think phases of his development, I would say, would be like the dead boy, him as kind of like the mouth only, and then like him with mobility, and even like developing some kind of agency. And then him as a new kind of boy again. He kind of becomes a human again, which is kind of during Joseph's chapter. And then in the end, I think the last phase of development that we see is his own relationship with his own appetites, like his development of a conscious awareness of himself as something different than what maybe other people think he might be. And even what he thought he was. He kind of starts exploring his own sexuality and really starts sincerely questioning his own, like the animal that he had been in his past. And the way that each person engages with each different version of him throughout this development, I think, changes him. It tells us a lot about who the character is. We can talk a lot about this book as an allegory for a queer experience and how each of these people might experience queerness. And if we think about it in that way, I think each phase of Monstrilio's development and the way each person feels either threatened by or endeared to each version of Monstrilio gives us a lot to think about in terms of that person's relationship to their own queerness.

E: Definitely. And we talked about this before too. Magos refuses to acknowledge Monstrilio as something that is inhuman. And she also refuses to acknowledge Lena's feelings for her, which doesn't mean that she's inherently queer, but we do come to find out she kind of is. And so she, in that first stage of development, that refusal to see Monstrilio at that point as anything but her son is, like you said, really indicative of her relationship to her own queerness. Because it's in the back of her head. She knows that something is not being addressed. And she even has a conversation with her mother about it at some point. Her mom says, like, why don't you just get together with Lena? Because Joseph is, they're separated at this point. They haven't come back together. And Magos is like, yeah, I don't know. Like, she doesn't want to talk about it. And then Lena fully embraces Monstrilio for what he is. And she also, well, I don't know if I would say that she fully embraces her queerness. She has a really interesting relationship with her sexuality and is really seriously seeking intimacy but has had a difficult time finding it.

B: And I think she approaches everything so analytically. So I think she is the one who, like, can, I mean, she views Monstrillo as kind of a medical anomaly. She's very concerned with his physical development, how his different parts function together. And I think she treats her own self and her own sexuality the same way. Breaks it down. She kind of discovers, like, I need this and this and this from a partner. So she'll try to find those specific things even if they don't kind of come together to be meaningful the way she wishes they could.

E: Well, and then when she, like, when she performs the procedure on Monstrillo, she recognizes that she's done something that can't be undone, or at least she thinks can't be undone, and that causes her, like, an incredible amount of grief. And this idea that she would change him caused her an incredible amount of grief. And I feel like, I mean, we have a couple of flashbacks with her, but it kind of almost relates to her growing up and her understanding of herself in that she had a parent who, no matter how well she behaved, called her a monster, right? And so then she hurt herself trying to adhere to this standard that she realized after a certain amount of time she was never going to meet. Yeah, that's really, I hadn't thought about that until just now. It's like, even in her own life, will try to do things to meet an end, but then come to the conclusion that she's just avoiding the reality of herself? I don't know if that makes any sense.

B: Totally. Well, and when you're talking about how she came from this background of being labeled in a way that damaged her identity, like her development, I guess, in some ways, it reminds me of this quote from the book. Let me find this. This is a moment that I really liked. She's alone in the room with Monstrilio when he's still pretty under, I don't know, underdeveloped, when he's still pretty monstrous. And this is what happens. "It, [Monstrillo,] opened its mouth wide, revealing the fullness of its fangs, two rows extending halfway across its body. I was jealous of the monster, how it didn't care what it was or did. No shame. It held itself up with a certain pride. But mostly I was jealous of the way Magos cared for it, despite it being a monster. I'm not scared, I said. It hissed. I hissed back." And the moment where she just hisses back at the monster, I was like, that's a pretty powerful indication that, and reading that whole moment, after we just talked about her background and how she's kind of jealous of this thing that is so recognizably monstrous, that still just has a mother to love it, and that has love from Magos, who she craves so much. It's pretty heartbreaking, but then rather than be heartbroken, that she just hisses back, I think she's a pretty powerful character.

E: She was definitely my favorite character in this novel. Do you want to talk about Joseph a little bit? Because we've hardly mentioned Joseph, but I think he's also really important to the story, and his perspective is interesting because he is, well, first of all, immediately horrified at what Magos has done by cutting a piece of Santiago's lung away, but then we also don't hear from him until about three quarters of the way through the novel.

B: And not only his perspective, but he's not present for so much of the story in the beginning.

E: From Lena's perspective, I appreciated him a little bit more because they were university friends. I mean, all three of them had met in college, but Lena and Joseph were very good friends, and then Lena was living with Magos, and so Magos met Joseph through Lena, so they all have, like, they're longtime friends. So Lena has a lot more sympathy for Joseph than Magos does, and then by the time you get to Joseph, he's so deeply empathetic. He clearly has spent a lot of his life, well, a lot of Monstrilio's life, ruminating on, one, the mutilation that they did. He feels very bad about this change that they've forced him to endure. But also he, too, recognizes that Monstrilio isn't Santiago, but he tries really hard to get Monstrilio to curb his insatiable appetite for blood and flesh for the sake of keeping him safe and keeping him protected as a member of society. He cleans up every single one of Monstrilio's messes that we are made aware of, right? Yeah, he does go away for a while. He leaves Magos because even...

B: Or Magos leaves him.

E: Oh, that's right, yeah, no, because she goes—

B: She kind of abandons him.

E: Right, she goes to Mexico City to be with her mother, and Joseph is left alone in his grief and thinks Magos to be this, like, sadistic person for cutting open their son's body, and then he finds out about Monstrilio, and he's like, what's going on? Like, I don't know what to do with this, but he, like Magos, I think grieves the loss of his son so much that he's willing to pretend that this thing is like a child to them. And, I mean, they raise it like a child, but he's well aware, because he's the one who cleans up all the violence, he knows that this isn't their son, but he still loves M, and I think that that's, I don't know, that's tough thrust into this scenario that's, like, completely incomprehensible, and he does the best that he can, and he does seem to care about M's feelings a lot more than Magos ever does, right?

B: Yeah, yeah.

E: I don't know.

B: Yeah, I, in the beginning, I felt for him a lot when he was in such grief, and then when he was so appalled by Magos, he just seemed like a real person, and a lot more grounded. Magos was really hard to comprehend sometimes, the way that she would act and treat people, and so Joseph felt like a very grounded version. So he finds a different relationship after Magos with somebody else. He would express in his thoughts, so we were privy to a lot of information about kind of how he wasn't very satisfied with a lot of things going on, but he never communicated to anybody, and I think he had felt so trapped into this situation that he couldn't cope with, with how Monstrilio was kind of sometimes out of control or stressing him out.

E: And Joseph, within the context of his relationship, had only been referring to his son-not-son as "M," but then his romantic partner finds out that Magos calls him Santiago, and then he starts calling M Santiago, and I was like, dang.

B: But he didn't say anything. He could have, without even going too in-depth about who slash what Monstrilio is, he could have told his partner, like, oh, actually, I prefer, and even this person prefers to be called this name, but instead he just kind of holds in all this angst about everything going on and doesn't communicate.

E: Well, he doesn't know how to verbalize it, and going back to this book being not only a representation for queerness, but also for grief, it's almost like, so if Magos doesn't acknowledge her grief, if Lena compartmentalizes hers, Joseph knows it's there, but he sort of suppresses it, almost? Like, Magos just completely refuses to even think about it, but Joseph does, and he won't verbalize it. All of his actions come from a place of being like a very reactionary character. He very much will put off handling things until he's forced to handle things or even have a conversation.

B: Which I think is the complete opposite of Magos, who will just go, go, go, to the detriment of herself and kind of everyone around her, and Joseph is just such the opposite, where he's, yeah, passive, and kind of reactionary, I think, is a better word.

E: I don't even fault him necessarily, because how do you tell somebody that your son died, but actually he didn't die, and then your ex-wife carved off a piece of his body, and then it became a creature, right? That, I think, is why I felt so much for him, because it's like, yeah, how do you talk about that without every potential romantic partner running for the hills, right? I don't know.

B: I think he does feel what you're describing, that how could I ever talk about this, and I think that's part of what motivates him to try to put Monstrilio in this specific kind of box of you need to act like a person, you need to walk this way and talk this way and only express yourself in these ways, because I think he, in the same way that Magos kind of mourns this son that she can't have anymore, and so

she just kind of is obsessed with Monstrilio in a kind of unhealthy way sometimes, I think Joseph also misses the son that he can't have, but I think also he just wanted a normal life, and I think he could envision a normal life after grieving the loss of a son, and now that he's kind of couched with this other being in his life, he still just needs to have this normal life that he wasn't able to have, you know?

E: Yeah, I actually, I want to read a quote that kind of talks about what you're talking about a little bit and also, I don't know, just speaks a lot to his relationship with Monstrilio. So Joseph says, "Sometimes I hoped M's hunger would disappear. Other times I feared that if his Monstrilio-ness totally disappeared, M would be left an empty husk. People don't understand what you are, M. As my words travelled to Berlin, I hated myself. I smiled to keep myself from telling him to forget everything I had just said, and to go ahead and bite if he wanted to bite. For a second, I believed myself strong enough to take on whatever consequences came from setting him free. Instead, I told him he should go to bed and rest." Yeah, I don't know. He does just want a normal life, and he wants his son-not-son—I keep saying that—he wants Monstrilio to have a normal life. But he also recognizes that Monstrilio is not normal. And he really struggles with that more than anybody else does, I think. I mean, Lena struggles with it too, but, like we said, she's particularly analytical about the whole thing. I mean after he grows up she's got some qualms about killing him outright, right? Because she's developed an attachment and formed a relationship, but I mean she's really ready to get rid of him. I guess Joseph is too at some point.

B: Something that I think is interesting in that quote that I think comes up a few times in the book, is that word Monstrilio-ness. That's something that Magos, when she's kind of in the process of searching for... The reason, in the beginning, that she removes a piece of the lung is because she wants something that preserves, for her, Santiago's Santiago-ness, right? Doesn't she even say that word?

E: Yeah.

B: And so I think that something that the whole book kind of wants us to think about is, what really is the -ness-ness of these people?

E: Yeah, what makes them who they are? And how do the people around them perceive what they believe is what makes them who they are?

B: Yeah, and I think watching them as they kind of navigate, first, just the monstrosity of tragedy of just life happening and ending, and then, watching them move from navigating that into trying to cope with something that is, by all known definitions, a "monster"—this creature that just has fangs, and makes sounds, and eats flesh, and whatever—into coping with a person that they love, who seems to be a person (I'm talking about Monstrilio once he's kind of developed into a human-appearing thing), but who does monstrous things, almost beyond his control, things that they perceive to be monstrous, and how they each in their own way do terrible things to Monstrilio and to each other and to themselves. I think the book kind of tries to get at the heart of what makes people what they are, by showing them at their, I think in a lot of ways, this book highlights a group of people in all of their worst moments. It's certainly the biggest tragedy they've ever experienced, and then it's some really unimaginably terrible events play out, including murder, and different levels of violence and heartbreak, and a lot of the most vulnerable times that you could ever imagine.

E: No, definitely.

B: And watching these people reacting to it, I think this book is really trying to get at the heart of what makes people who they are, and why they act the way they act.

E: And maybe what happens if you don't acknowledge the truth of somebody's being, right? I think now's as good a time as ever to talk about Monstrilio himself, because we've talked a lot about how other people feel about Monstrilio, but I think Monstrilio is—

B: I loved this whole section in his perspective.

E: Yes! It's really interesting, after hearing about him from these other perspectives, and then just actually getting to step into his mind. There's a quote that I want to read that I, gave me, I don't know if it gave me chills, but it really sat with me when I read it. Monstrilio says: "Mami and I have the same cheeks, high. The same eyes, large and a tad wide-set. My nose is long like Papi's but its shape is wider, like Mami's. I surveyed my face a thousand times to make sure these traits are real, not details I invented to be their son." Like, it's so, you really, really feel for him by the time you get to his chapters, because he is fully aware he is not Santiago, and he's also fully aware that his mother is trying to make him into Santiago. And he doesn't outwardly resist that, but inwardly there's an incredibly amount of turmoil that he faces, trying to reconcile knowing what he is, and his insatiable hunger, with what his parents are telling him to be, and how to suppress all of those things. And, I don't know, it's really hard to read. I mean, it just... Monstrilio being a way for us to examine how the other characters interact with being queer, right? I think that interpretation makes a lot of sense.

B: It just challenges the idea that like, okay—let me back up a little. There were people in my life who just didn't understand what I was talking about when I would, I was coming out. And they just could not comprehend what was going on. I remember a specific conversation with someone who started the conversation by saying, okay, I think I finally understand, and then they described this whole metaphor that they had created to describe the experience of being queer. And they told it to me, and it didn't make any sense at all. And so in the end, I was like, that metaphor is not helpful. It's not helpful to try to have a metaphor. The fact is, in real life, these are feelings that exist and this is how I am, and so if you want to relate to me, you just have to relate to *me*. It can't be this other level of, like, Oh it's a *metaphor* and if I think of it *this* way I can understand. And so, in the book, as I was struggling to find a way to twist everything about Monstrilio into a metaphor so that I could just relate to everything, I think the book wants to challenge that instinct. Because I think that's how a lot of us, sometimes metaphor is the only thing we can turn to, to try to relate to people. But sometimes I think we've trained ourselves to turn too quickly to a metaphor that's based in *my* experience so I can understand *your* experience, instead of just listening to what your experience actually is. You know what I mean?

E: No definitely, and I think, especially within the context of this book too, it's like, I feel like a lot could have been avoided if they had just taken Monstrilio at face value, right?

B: totally.

E: And I wonder, too, I mean his appetites, especially by the time he's quote-unquote full-grown, he's barely able to suppress them. So, even if they had allowed him to sort of indulge in hunting and killing wildlife like he had when he was smaller, he might still have ended up with the same insatiable nature. That's kind of what this book leads us to believe a little bit, because nothing is really curbed by the time we get to him. He's like barely holding it together, right? And I wonder, had they just let Monstrilio be Monstrilio, would he still have developed into a humanoid creature? Or would he still be more like he was when he was a quote-unquote monster-child, who is, again, just kind of like a mound of flesh, for lack of a better way to put it, I mean, he's got fur, but he's not anything resembling a human. And, especially as he gets older, he feels such distance from everybody in his life, except for his Uncle Luke, who is Joseph's uncle, so it's his Great-Uncle Luke, I believe. Who, Uncle Luke doesn't speak either, which I think is really interesting. Because Uncle Luke understand Monstirlio better than anyone, without even being able to speak with him. And, like you said, I think maybe we don't have to super dig in that deep to what the author's trying to say. I think it stands alone as something that just makes you think about what happens when we try to impart our

understanding and our expectations onto something in an unreasonable way, in a very self-centered way.

B: And I think the fact that it's situated itself in the horror genre is also helpful, because there's precedent for a lot of this stuff in the genre, even in regards to queerness. In the sense that a lot of monsters in horror are theorized to be metaphorical presentations of queerness, or whatever. Vampires, speaking of blood-sucking violence, are very, traditionally, viewed as queer representations, right? And so, I think it's helpful that these things also just exist within this framework of—

E: There's precedent, yeah, there's precedent for reading horror through a queer lens.

B: And for not seeing bloody violence, and—

E: Yeah, as objectively inhumane, or—

B: Like evil, whatever, but just as a representation of something uncontrollable that is necessary for the life of the thing.

E: And to try to suppress that isn't, I mean, there's not really ever a positive outcome, like, it is the way that it is, and that's how the creature is. Yeah, I don't think that inherently means that this author is trying to say that queer people are monstrous, but I like monstrosity, especially because there are so many people who look at queer people and say, that is inhuman, right? Like, that is, you are behaving in a monstrous way, or you are a monster, right? And so, I love when queer people take that and write their own stories with queerness as a monster, and like, what does that actually look like? I don't know, it's interesting. I really liked this book.

B: Me too.

E: As complicated as it made me feel about a lot of things, I felt like I would read it again, a bunch, and I'm not really one for rereading books, but this one, I feel like, made me— especially because we don't get to hear from the other characters after their chapters, I feel like I'd gain a lot more on a second or third read, and knowing the events that end up coming to pass, I feel like—I don't know, I really liked this. I can't say it enough.

B: I loved it.

E: Yeah!

B: I loved the writing style, it was very beautiful, and just such a unique story. I think it's unlike anything I've ever read before.

E: Yeah. Me too.

B: And I love that, not to take too much time, but I love what you were just saying about monstrosity, and I kind of reclaiming that as an idea. And showing that the most human thing is sometimes monstrous. These people are all monstrous in their own ways, and what's beautiful to me about the book is, the one thing that I think is the most recognizable about these people is their queerness. I mean, everything else about these people can sometimes become a little bit unrelatable, or even alarming sometimes. But in the moments where they're expressing love to people, or talking about relationships, or just the ways that they accept each other, that's the most human, relatable part of them. Which I think is also a really cool thing for the author to present.

E: Yeah, I agree. It's almost like their being queer is like secondary to the main plot that's going on. I think that's interesting. Do you feel like there's anything in particular that we neglected to touch on?

B: I wish we could read all these quotes.

E: I know.

B: They're so good!

E: They're really good. It's always hard trying to pull quotes for these, because, especially with a book like this, when there's so many things that I feel like are just fantastic blurbs to talk about the character, and to showcase the writing. You're just going to have to read it yourself!

B: Exactly.

E: That wraps up our discussion of *Monstrilio* by Gerardo Sámano Córdova. Join us next episode as we discuss another queer book available in our collection here at the Dauphin County Library System.



This has been Reading the Rainbow, a Dauphin County Library System podcast for books by and about the LGBTQ+ community. If you enjoyed this podcast, please follow us for new book discussions. And if you're interested in this episode's selection, consider borrowing from your local library. Thanks for listening!