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# Serpentine Imagery in Nineteenth-Century Prints

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SERPENTINE IMAGERY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PRINTS

By

Paula A. Rotschafer

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: Art History

Under the Supervision of Professor Wendy Katz

Lincoln, Nebraska

April, 2014

# SERPENTINE IMAGERY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PRINTS

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University of Nebraska, 2014

Adviser: Wendy Katz

This thesis explores images of sea serpents in nineteenth-century print culture that reflect an ongoing effort throughout the century to locate, capture, catalogue, and eventually poeticize the sea serpent. My research centers primarily on the sea serpent craze that occurred within the New England and Mid-Atlantic states between 1845 and 1880 and examines the following three prints: Albert Koch's *Hydrarchos*, a fossil skeleton hoax, printed in an 1845 advertisement by Benjamin Owen, a book and job printer; an 1868 *Harper's Weekly* illustration titled *The Wonderful Fish*; and Stephen Alonzo Schoff's etching, *The Sea Serpent* from 1880, based on an 1864 painting by Elihu Vedder. By examining the illustrations and eyewitness accounts of sea serpent sightings, it is possible to show how art infused historically specific meaning into the schematized and persistent form of the sea serpent. It is not only that people saw serpents that looked like the ones they had seen in pictures, but that the pictures offered a kind of template on which viewers could inscribe particular historical fears.

I catalogue the evolution of serpent imagery during a time of political upheaval, including serious threats to national unity as well as threats to the racial, gender, and social hierarchy that had underpinned the republic's early order. The sea serpent motif could be adapted to different threats to social stability. I argue that the search to locate a physical or "actual" sea serpent body, founded in such anxieties, shaped the design and meaning of serpent images, all the more so because artists and viewers began with certain

schemas, which are reflected in the illustrations that often accompanied sea serpent sightings. Taking into account the booming mass media of the era, changing practices in natural history and science, a burgeoning culture of hoax and publicity stunts, attitudes about war and violence, and concepts of human beauty and sexuality, this thesis explores how the monstrous body of the sea serpent thrived in the nineteenth-century United States.



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On October 24, 1868, *Harper's Weekly*, a New York-based magazine with Republican politics, published a short but exciting story about a “wonderful fish” recently landed near Eastport, Maine. The gigantic fish was spotted near the shore, attacked, and eventually “destroyed” with musketry. It was then exhibited, attracting the attention and imagination of naturalists and civilians alike. Throughout the preceding fifteen years, a similar creature had been seen off the coast of Maine, but until this moment, no specimen had been procured. Prior accounts of the animal had been based on eyewitness testimony, but now there were actual remains. Borrowing text from the Bangor *Daily Whig*, *Harper's* accordingly described the beast in detail, documenting its odd shape, enormous size, teeth, gills, and skin. The text states:

There is no record of his species, and to none is it a greater wonder than to naturalists, whose attention is being drawn to it. Among others who have had the opportunity of seeing it is Professor Baird, of the Smithsonian Institution at Washington, who is as yet unable to place it in the known lists of the animal kingdom. It is indeed a veritable wonder calculated to excite popular curiosity, and to invite the researches of the scientific.<sup>1</sup>

This quote highlights a key element of the mid-century sea serpent craze: the strength of the desire for the serpent to be real, so much so that even scientists and editors were persuaded to believe in an, as of yet, unclassified serpent of the oceans. Three months later, in the January 23rd issue, *Harper's Weekly* issued a retraction. The “wonderful fish,” as it turned out, was nothing more than a basking shark, a common and docile species, frequently hunted for its oil.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “A Wonderful Fish,” *Harper's Weekly* (Oct. 24, 1868): 684.

<sup>2</sup> “A Wonderful Fish—Again,” *Harper's Weekly* (Jan. 23, 1869): 55. This error has occurred as recently as 1977 when a mutilated carcass was brought aboard a Japanese fishing boat near New Zealand, Richard Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1994), 69.

*Harper's* accompanied its wishful thinking with a woodcut of the fantastical creature, complete with monstrous, dog-like hind legs (Figure 1). This pairing of sea serpent illustration and eyewitness testimony was only one episode in an ongoing effort throughout the nineteenth century to locate, capture, catalogue and eventually poeticize the sea serpent. The role of printed illustrations in this phenomenon is crucial to understanding how sea serpents—a motif that had appeared in art and maps for centuries—accrued particular meanings despite, or even because, they were paired with and explained by seemingly scientific models. Though the publishers and editors who printed and commissioned the illustrations suggested that these designs reflected specific sightings and actual, immediate accounts, as did *Harper's* in the example above, the designs, and indeed the eyewitness sightings, reflected preconceived notions assembled from previously viewed images. It is not only that people saw serpents that looked like serpents they had seen in pictures, but that the pictures offered a kind of template on which viewers could inscribe particular historical fears.

In this thesis, I analyze three prints that demonstrate how art infused meaning into the sea serpent. First, a hoax and a debunking: Albert Koch's *Hydrarchos* (Figure 2), a fossil skeleton hoax with an engraving of it appearing in an 1845 advertisement by Benjamin Owen, a book and job printer in New York, and second, the aforementioned 1868 *Harper's Weekly* woodcut *The Wonderful Fish*. I also consider Stephen Alonzo Schoff's etching, *The Sea Serpent*, from 1880, (Figure 3) based on an 1864 oil painting by Elihu Vedder. These three images are just a small subset of the serpent prints produced in this era based on reported sightings off the coasts of the United States and

Great Britain. The majority of these sightings came in the early to mid nineteenth century and gradually trickled to a halt in the early 20th century. While I will briefly discuss the history of sea serpent imagery and the general characteristics of the genre in Anglo-American art, the examples I selected for in-depth study are valuable both because they represent less well-known incidents and because they highlight how these pictures respond to social anxieties that crossed class boundaries.

Certain famous sea serpent sightings, like the many reports of a Gloucester, Massachusetts serpent in 1817-19, or the one reported by the captain of the frigate *Daedalus* in 1848, have been richly explored in previous scholarship. These two incidents are considered to be very important in the sea serpent craze. Even though no actual sea serpent body was collected or examined, taxonomists bestowed the title *Scoliophis atlanticus* (Atlantic humped snake) on creatures such as the Gloucester Sea Serpent, based on observations and personal accounts. The frequent sightings and the excitement that the Gloucester Sea Serpents presence (and news coverage) garnered prompted the Linnaean Society of New England to form a committee to research the existence and appearance of the monster (Figure 4). The committee created a template to be used in documenting official sea serpent sighting reports, including a set of standards that must be adhered to in formulating reliable reports (i.e. the report must be from an actual eyewitness, written testimonies must be signed by the witness, etc.). They also formulated a questionnaire for use in examining the eyewitness, including questions regarding the location of the sighting, the time of day, the appearance and behavior of the

animal, the number of people who saw it, and any other remarkable facts.<sup>3</sup> The actions of the Linnaean Society regarding the Gloucester Sea Serpent set a precedent for all future sea serpent sightings and their reception and cataloging. Furthermore, it effectively raised sea serpents from the annals of myth and lore to a contemporary spectacle and threat, one that was never resolved and so was continuously presented as a reality in news publications and literature.<sup>4</sup> The *Daedalus* sighting, some twenty-five years later, gained its prestige due to two factors—first, the fact that it was reported by a highly esteemed naval officer, and second, that the sighting was never recorded in the ship’s log (Figure 5). This failure in record keeping aroused a great deal of skepticism and mystery. However, due to the high rank of the eyewitnesses involved, it seemed highly unlikely that this could be a hoax.<sup>5</sup> The ensuing investigations, reports, and arguments that followed the sighting further supported the legitimacy of the “modern” sea serpent.

Other incidents, like the example of the basking shark above, have received less attention. But in all of these instances, very little research has been done on the role of the illustrations that accompanied or responded to the news of a sighting. In selecting sea serpent prints that date from 1845 to 1880, I catalogue the evolution of serpent imagery during a time of political upheaval, including serious threats to national unity (the annexation of Texas and the Mexican War, the Fugitive Slave Act, and ultimately the Civil War and Reconstruction) as well as threats to the racial, gender and social hierarchy that had underpinned the republic’s earlier order. The sea serpent motif could be adapted

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<sup>3</sup> A. C. Oudemans, *The Great Sea-Serpent: An Historical and Critical Treatise* (Landisville: Coachwhip Publications, 2007), 130-3. First published, Leiden, E. J. Brill; London, Luzac & Co., 1892.

<sup>4</sup> Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea*, 53.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Loxton and Donald R. Prothero, *Abominable Science! Origins of the Yeti, Nessie, and other Famous Cryptids* (New York: Columbia University Publishers, 2013), 220-1.

to different threats to social stability, whether those threats came from scientific theories about evolution or from secessionists. I argue that the search to locate a physical or “actual” sea serpent body, founded in such anxieties, shaped the design and meaning of serpent images, all the more so because artists and viewers began with certain schemas.

E. H. Gombrich describes this use of schematic forms, particularly the borrowing of favorite motifs within a specific type of imagery.<sup>6</sup> As an example, Gombrich cites several instances in which a topographical artist depicts an architectural structure, such as a cathedral. The picture, at first, seems to be a correct representation of the cathedral in question. However, when the artistic rendering is compared to the actual structure, it is obvious that the artist has merely relied on standardized elements (those frequently associated with cathedral design) that serve as recognizable cues for a church for the viewer. Gombrich states:

[...] portrayal means for [the artist] the adaptation or adjustment of his formula or scheme for churches to a particular building through the addition of a number of distinctive features—enough to make it recognizable and even acceptable to those who are not in search of architectural information.<sup>7</sup>

Though Gombrich cites several similar instances, he emphasizes that the resulting representations are not unreliable or inaccurate. Rather, this procedure of adapting existing types is a fundamental step in creating an accurate depiction of a form.

Gombrich says, “[the artist] begins not with his visual impression but with his idea or concept...the individual visual information, those distinctive features I have mentioned,

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<sup>6</sup> E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon Press, 1959), 155-8.

<sup>7</sup> Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 62.

are entered, as it were, upon a pre-existing blank or formulary.”<sup>8</sup> It seems very likely that artists hired to depict eyewitness testimonies of sea serpent sightings worked in much the same way—details of the account were added to a formulaic and typical schematic understanding of the sea serpent in order to make the image recognizable, using a template that will be addressed later in greater detail.

European Medieval and Renaissance world maps, especially those produced before Mercator’s rationalization of the globe, sometimes depicted sea monsters in the water. These images ranged from the whimsical to the frightening, borrowing anatomical elements from dogs, pigs, horses, dragons, birds, and, of course, serpents. There are two primary reasons suggested for the occasional appearance of sea monsters on these maps. First, as many of the illustrations are borrowed from older literary sources, they serve as warnings to sailors while notating geographical locations for marvelous sightings. Secondly, they may exist to decoratively portray a general understanding of the immense array of marine life (some of which were found to be quite dangerous to encounter) that exists within the ocean, while also highlighting the artistic ability of the cartographer.<sup>9</sup>

For consideration of how sea serpent illustrations developed in the nineteenth century, a serpent from Olaus Magnus’s 1539 *Carta marina et descriptio septemtrionalium terrarum ac mirabilium* (Nautical Chart and Description of the Northern Lands and Wonders), an early map of northwestern Europe, is especially relevant. This map features a massive sea serpent violently attacking a ship (Figure 6). Included on the map is Latin text that describes the monsters. Olaus also provided more

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<sup>8</sup> Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 62-3.

<sup>9</sup> Chet Van Duzer, *Sea Monsters on Medieval and Renaissance Maps* (London: British Library, 2013), 11.



detailed accounts of the monsters in his *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (History of the Northern Peoples). He states:

Those who do their work aboard ship off the shores of Norway, either in trading or fishing, give unanimous testimony to something utterly astounding: a serpent of gigantic bulk, at least two hundred feet long, and twenty feet thick, frequents the cliffs and hollows of the sea coast near Bergen. It leaves its caves in order to devour calves, sheep, and pigs, though only during the bright summer nights, or swims through the sea to batten on octopus, lobsters, and other crustaceans. It has hairs eighteen inches long hanging from its neck, sharp, black scales, and flaming-red eyes. It assaults ships, rearing itself on high like a pillar, seizes men, and devours them.<sup>10</sup>

The illustration of this sea serpent and its written narrative are very similar to the methods of description that would be seen later in the ship logs of captains and the drawings of the nineteenth century. This developing structure—a ferocious face with rows of pointy teeth, a grimacing snarl, and large round eyes, followed by a long, coiling serpentine tail—became the pattern for later artworks. While similarly constructed serpents can be seen on other early maps, such as Gerard Mercator’s world map of 1569 (Figure 7), popular independent painted and printed illustrations have a longer life. Henry Fuseli’s 1790 *Thor Battling the Midgard Serpent* is an example of how later artists may have been influenced by the schema set forth by earlier centuries. Here, Fuseli presents the colossal beast with a plumed brow and great, twisted, coiling body, thrusting out of the water (Figure 8). This representation seems to borrow certain design elements, like the bearded appearance of the head, from very early images (such as the fourth century Piazza Armerina mosaic, to be discussed later on in further detail). The body and behavior of the sea serpent, however, have a much more striking resemblance to the sea

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<sup>10</sup> Van Duzer, *Sea Monsters on Medieval and Renaissance Maps*, 81-4.

serpent on Olaus Magnus's *Carta marina*. In both images, the enormous beast dwarfs the vessel with its massive, coiling body. Fuseli may also have considered popular images of Perseus rescuing Andromeda, paintings of which often display the hero similarly delivering the death blow to a ferocious, snarling serpent. John Linnell, an English artist with an interest in natural history and the Northern European Renaissance, also makes use of the trope with his 1827 *Behemoth and Leviathan*. These two examples (along with a large set of artworks depicting the same stories, painted before and after) demonstrate the widespread existence of a schema in European and Anglo-American representations of sea serpents. Is it any coincidence that illustrations of sea serpents supposedly drawn from eyewitness testimony in the nineteenth century are nearly identical to those drawn from mythological stories? These artists continued to borrow from previous depictions, setting a style in sea serpent portrayal that would eventually, as I will explain later, draw into question the very legitimacy of reported sea serpent sightings.

New England and New York play an important role in this discussion of prints because of the proximity of their ports to sea serpent sightings, but also because these two cities were centers for book and periodical publishing and their attendant corps of illustrators and printers. From 1850 to 1880 (approximately the time period considered here) the United States generally saw an increase in the number of printers and publishers from 673 to 3,467.<sup>11</sup> Individually, New York saw a rise from 428 newspaper and periodicals in 1850 to 1,411 in 1880. Massachusetts saw a smaller, but still significant

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<sup>11</sup> Scott E. Casper, et al., *A History of the Book in America, Vol. 3, The Industrial Book: 1840-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007), 7-9.

rise from 209 in 1850 to 427 in 1880.<sup>12</sup> Largely thanks to industrial mechanization and steam power, the printing industry began to multiply cheaper forms of information, including illustrations sold as stand-alone prints or as part of pamphlets, or in new mass-market publications. During the Civil War, periodical publication slowed significantly before skyrocketing again in the 1870s, despite an economic depression. Publishing spread and grew throughout the Midwest and the West, too, but the states with the most prolific presses—supporting nationwide distribution—between 1840 and 1880 were Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and New York, with New York dwarfing the others by the end of the period.<sup>13</sup>

As a related industry, the concentration of etchers, engravers, and lithographers in the New England and Mid-Atlantic areas facilitated the spike of sea serpent imagery. According to Elliot Bostwick Davis, “Illustrated newspapers thrived as editors realized that stories were more titillating when accompanied by spectacular pictures of people and current events.”<sup>14</sup> Printmaking of all kinds flourished in New York City between 1825 and 1861 with newspapers featuring more and more illustrations by the 1850’s.<sup>15</sup> The same was true for periodicals such as *Harper’s Weekly*. In a guide published by Harper & Brothers in 1880, the author advises that illustrations (the majority of which are woodcuts—copperplate engravings or lithographs would have made printing too costly, whereas, the author notes, the difference in cost between printing a publication with woodcuts, as opposed to a publication without them, is comparable) are a very important

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<sup>12</sup> Casper, et al., *A History of the Book in America*, 226.

<sup>13</sup> Casper, et al., *A History of the Book in America*, 224-7.

<sup>14</sup> Elliot Bostwick Davis, “The Currency of Culture: Prints in New York City,” in *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825-1861*, ed. Catherine Voorsanger et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 202.

<sup>15</sup> Davis, “The Currency of Culture,” 189.

part of the publication.<sup>16</sup> The *Harper's Weekly* prospectus includes a goal to provide the best illustrations attainable from any source available.<sup>17</sup> The periodical especially prided itself on its contributions from several famous artists, particularly Thomas Nast, the editorial cartoonist, and painter Winslow Homer, who provided illustrations early in his career.<sup>18</sup> The notable attention that *Harper's Weekly* gave to insuring that their issues had some of the best illustrations available likely imparted these images with a certain believability. The nineteenth century also experienced a revival in the art of etching as a popular way to illustrate scenes from nature.<sup>19</sup> The revival prompted a change in their connotations, as etchings were no longer just for book illustrations or reproductions of other artworks, but original works of art created firsthand from nature, thus inextricably linking etching to such activities as angling, botany, geology, and boating.<sup>20</sup>

The prints I have chosen to study are further evidence of the New England and Mid-Atlantic regions' involvement in print culture. Koch's *Hydrarchos*, a skeleton supposedly unearthed in Clarksville, Alabama (found in a layer of limestone exposed through volcanic action), was first displayed at the Apollo Saloon—a venue known for its

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<sup>16</sup> *Harper & Brothers' Descriptive List of their Publications, with Trade-List Prices* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1880), xv-xvi.

<sup>17</sup> *Harper & Brothers' Descriptive List of their Publications*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> The artist who designed the illustration for the basking shark woodcut was, per the image's caption, Charles A. Barry. The Library of Congress associates him with three designs: the aforementioned woodcut, "Wonderful Fish, Caught Near Eastport, Maine, Aug. 3, 1868;" a woodcut that also appeared in *Harper's Weekly*, "Charles Dickens as he appears when reading, 1867;" and a lithograph created for J. H. Bufford's Lith. in Boston, "Abraham Lincoln from a portrait taken from life by Charles A. Barry, Springfield, Illinois, June 1860." Source: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/related?fi=name&q=Barry%2C%20Charles%20A.%2C%201830-1892>.

<sup>19</sup> Emma Chambers, *An Indolent and Blundering Art? The Etching Revival and the Redefinition of Etching in England 1838-1892* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999), 23.

<sup>20</sup> Chambers, *An Indolent and Blundering Art?*, 127.

concerts, balls, and soirées--on Broadway in New York City.<sup>21</sup> It was not uncommon for art and other curious objects to be displayed in such locations. Auctions were held at dispensaries and saloons and art was exhibited in hospitals, parlors, and store windows before more formal criteria were established for such displays.<sup>22</sup> During the 1850s, Broadway was alive with innumerable exhibition spaces offering every sort of amusement imaginable, including Barnum's American Museum.<sup>23</sup> Between 1850 and 1900, urban elites in New England and the Mid-Atlantic were engrossed in defining and institutionalizing high and popular cultures, working out two distinct groups—the private, non-profit culture and the industry of popular culture. Before the 1850s, Boston, New York and Philadelphia were marked by commercialism in the arts—the lotteries of the Art Unions were in full swing in the 1840s (later to be replaced by private galleries). Museums were set up to display fine art amongst carnivalesque spectacles, curiosities, theater, and freak shows. Magazines published accounts of great painters and fashion plates. However, by the end of the century, high culture and popular entertainments were increasingly kept separate and knowledge of style and genre in art was a prestigious attribute associated with the privileged.<sup>24</sup> The appearance of sea serpents seems to have partially bridged this gap between high and low culture—while certainly having a place

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<sup>21</sup> Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea*, 55.

<sup>22</sup> Carrie Rebora Barratt, "Mapping the Venues: New York City Art Exhibitions," in *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825-1861*, ed. Catherine Voorsanger et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 47.

<sup>23</sup> Barratt, "Mapping the Venues: New York City Art Exhibitions," 60-1.

<sup>24</sup> Paul DiMaggio, "Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston: The Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture in America," *Media, Culture, and Society* 4, (1982): 33-5.

in the world of hoax culture and sideshows, the sea serpent also belonged to the realm of gentlemen and educated natural historians.<sup>25</sup>

Entrepreneurs like Albert Koch, who was born in Roitzsch (in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany) and moved to America at age 22, took advantage of this realm of mixed high and low culture, underwritten as it was by expensive and cheap prints of European old masters, political scandals, celebrities and wonders of nature. Koch like P.T. Barnum paid for newspaper advertisements that appeared in multiple regional publications. Figure 2 is an example of one such advertisement, first printed by Benjamin Owen, Book and Job Printer, in a print shop located on Ann Street, part of New York's "Newspaper Row." *Harper's Weekly*, the magazine that published the first images of the legged basking shark discovered in Maine, was widely circulated regionally and nationally, though many of the artists who worked there came from New York, Boston, or Baltimore. Schoff, who was born in Vermont but grew up in Massachusetts, designed his print for the *American Art Review*, a Boston-based journal, and Vedder, born in New York City, created his painting while living there.

This region had a history of actively producing serpentine images before and during the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, as well as later in the nineteenth century. But especially during the mid-nineteenth century and continuing into the Colonial Revival of the 1870s, New England artists and intellectuals vigorously promoted the coastal region (rather than the south or the west) as the site of the nation's origins, with its landscape and economy of small farms, ships and active manufacturing presented as an ideal model

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<sup>25</sup> Davis, "The Currency of Culture: Prints in New York City," 207-12.

for the country. Tastemakers sanctioned as most truthful those images of New England, the mid-Atlantic and New York that pictured calm pastoral scenes of grazing cows, graceful trees, farmhouses, coves by the sea, and sweetly undulating domesticated land. These were then promoted as stand-ins for the ideal image of national American life. These images, found in paintings, Currier & Ives prints, and even banknote engravings were produced in the New England and Mid-Atlantic's cultural centers and were sold to people living in these areas as well as farther afield. Art historian Sarah Burns observes "it is not surprising, then, that an eastern bias should persist in defining and shaping the American agrarian pastoral."<sup>26</sup> This area conveyed an idyllic, even self-righteous concept of an American identity in implicit opposition to southern slavery or western industrial agriculture.<sup>27</sup> The rise and recurrence of sea serpent imagery interrupted this peaceful and seemingly plausible conception of a rustic, contented yeoman existence with a mythic if ambiguous external threat—but one equally tied to New England nature.

However, writers in the nineteenth century and the more skeptical scholars who have followed them, have typically understood the sea serpent and its sightings more as a product of the professionalization of the natural sciences and their shift toward evolutionary theory. This is evident in the popularity of the *Hydrarchos* fossil skeleton of 1845, which Koch built from whalebones and claimed to have excavated in Alabama. Previously, though sightings by sailors, sea captains, and others had been very common,

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<sup>26</sup> Sarah Burns, *Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 12-15.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 27.

an actual specimen had never been produced. Koch's attempt to convince the country that he had unearthed a sea serpent skeleton was meant to silence scientific skepticism, "prove" the validity of the experience of ordinary observers, and collect a profit.<sup>28</sup> The advertisement printed for the exhibition of the skeleton featured an illustration captioned, "Greatest Wonder of the World," a title that evokes an early modern world of wonders and signs as much as science. Similarly, with *Harper's* "Wonderful Fish," enthusiastic viewers who remained on the margins of science thought they had finally procured a sea serpent specimen. Sea serpent illustrations, which both followed and departed from scientific and aesthetic conventions, had a similar function: to question the boundaries of science in the name of eyewitness experience and a popular culture of wonders.

Natural history up to and during the nineteenth century addressed "wonders" and curiosities of nature, occurrences that seemed unnatural as well as natural, and so might be interpreted as manifestations of divine providence. Almanacs, ministers, and scientists in New England continued to be preoccupied by tales of monstrous births, heavenly apparitions, natural disasters, and other portents of God's wrath.<sup>29</sup> Though now typically consigned to folk belief, a tendency to read nature (rainbows, eclipses, et al) for symbols of the supernatural was shared by the educated and middle classes.<sup>30</sup> Historian David D. Hall explores how these "wonder stories" interacted with fears about violence and security. The very confusion and uncertainty regarding the cause or reason behind the

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<sup>28</sup> Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea*, 54-57.

<sup>29</sup> David D Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989): 77-81

<sup>30</sup> Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment*, 85.



occurrence of a natural wonder like a sea serpent sighting opened up political interpretations, as did the spread of inexpensive prints.<sup>31</sup> Hall states:

The contradictions that engulfed the wonder were sustained, not resolved, by the printers and booksellers who manufactured newssheets, chapbooks, and broadside ballads that conveyed the lore of wonders to so many people...the repertory of these writers was limited only by their powers of imagination and the constraints of the literary form at hand. When imagination failed, they plagiarized competitors or borrowed wholesale from the past.<sup>32</sup>

In the nineteenth century, Koch and other hoaxers, and the print sellers who publicized their discoveries, found a ready market for descriptions of natural wonders even among the literate and as in *Harper's*, among the well-educated. As in earlier periods, people hungered for political omens, signs, and symbols promising disaster, judgment, or success; thus, there was a heightened interest in serpent sightings and other natural or unnatural manifestations in the wild.

The corresponding role of sea serpents as a wonder that might be triumphantly explained by modern science first became apparent in Dutch zoologist A. C. Oudemans' 1892 treatise, *The Great Sea-Serpent*. Though a legitimate scientist himself, in the introduction, Oudemans engages the amateur: "voyagers and sportsmen conversant with photography are requested to take the instantaneous photograph of the animal: this alone will convince zoologists, while all their reports and pencil-drawings will be received with a shrug of the shoulders."<sup>33</sup> Oudemans describes the best methods for approaching and killing sea serpents, including a short list addressed to those unfamiliar with the scientific method on how to document and measure the specimen, as well as which parts of the

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<sup>31</sup> Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment*, 93-5.

<sup>32</sup> Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment*, 111.

<sup>33</sup> Oudemans, *The Great Sea-Serpent*, 7.

body to preserve. Written over half a century after the Linnaean Society formulated their questionnaire for sea serpent reporting, Oudemans' guide leaves out the sections on authoritative testimony. While the Linnaean Society put more emphasis on the actual sighting (time of day, location, and behavior), Oudemans prioritizes capture and study of an actual specimen or skeleton—implicitly discrediting secondhand testimony as of no scientific value—by providing a list of important anatomical measurements—circumference of the head, length of the trunk from shoulders to tail root, length of the neck from occiput (the back part of the skull) to shoulders, etc. Oudemans does, however, encourage creating a sketch.<sup>34</sup> Still, in both cases, the list and questionnaire encourage a schematic approach to sea serpent documentation, by asking specific questions already derived from presumptions or traditional ideas about sea serpent form or behavior.

As these two guides suggest, one of the greatest desires in the nineteenth century was to definitively classify the elusive creature—classifying the sea serpent as a separate species according to approved systems would, in effect, underwrite its existence.<sup>35</sup> For much of the century, the authoritative canon of natural history for determining a species' existence included the Bible, Pliny the Elder, the Comte de Buffon, and various travel narratives. Jeffrey Bolster notes that, accordingly, it was difficult to argue with the reality of sea serpents because of their lengthy “paper degree.” Despite Francis Bacon's emphasis on creating vast collections of natural specimens in order to acquire knowledge from direct observation, Bolster states, “...questioning their existence on the basis of

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<sup>34</sup> Oudemans, *The Great Sea Serpent*, 7. Despite having pooh-poohed the value of sketches as scientific evidence mere sentences before, Oudemans likely believed a sketch of greater relevance when accompanied with exact measurements or actual remains.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 126.

mere observation, much less mere skepticism, continued to be considered slightly unscientific.”<sup>36</sup> Naturalists accordingly focused on taxonomy and eyewitness description as a seemingly objective method for comparing species.<sup>37</sup>

Oudemans thus also provides a history of observations dating back to Olaus Magnus’s sixteenth-century works, specifically the *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*. But Oudemans’s most numerous citations come from the nineteenth century and reference Professor Benjamin Silliman of Yale University and Sir Richard Owen, an English naturalist interested in fossils, as well as numerous articles from a mix of scientific and lay journals, including the *Proceedings of the Boston Society of Natural History*, *The Times*, *The Zoologist*, and *The Illustrated London News*. Other chapters include a description of “Cheats and Hoaxes” in contemporary sea serpent sightings, including Koch’s *Hydrarchos*, all complete with illustrations where available, despite his expressed doubts about the inability of drawings to convince his fellow scientists.

Oudemans acknowledges that sea serpents are part of an oral culture of wonders that makes them suspect to science. He says:

Home from their first voyage, sailor-lads, as Mr. Gosse [Philip Henry Gosse’s *The Romance of Natural History*, published in 1860] says, are commonly eagerly beset for wonders. And what tales do they palm upon their credulous listeners? If they do not draw on their own invention, they tell the old stories they have heard when on fine evenings they were together with the old tars talking and chatting on the fore-deck. Of the latter many have no other origin than the imagination of a sailor’s brain; they are merely hoaxes; others again are exaggerated and garbled reports of what they have seen with their own eyes, or of what their comrades or their captain saw! There are the tales of the Unicorn, of the White Whale, that

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<sup>36</sup> Jeffrey W. Bolster, *The Mortal Sea: Fishing the Atlantic In the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 2012), 90

<sup>37</sup> Asma, *On Monsters*, 126-8.

terrible “Moby Dick” of the Polar Regions, there are the fables of the Mermaids and Mermen, there are the exaggerations of the Kraken and the Sea Serpent!<sup>38</sup>

Oudemans refers in the passage above to Gosse’s chapter, “The Great Unknown,” in which Gosse discusses issues of fact, presumption, and eyewitness testimony.<sup>39</sup> Gosse recognizes (though seeing it as proof of serpents’ reality rather than a sign of implausibility) that even respectable sources in their accounts repeat elements used over the ages (undulating movement, elevated head, great length, large eyes, etc.) to describe sea serpents, and himself relies on many of the same references as Oudemans, including articles from *The Times* and *The Zoologist*, and the *Daedalus* and Gloucester sightings—sources that continue to be cited in modern studies.

Gosse, an English naturalist who took great interest in marine biology, directly addresses the value of pictures. In the case of the *Daedalus*, Gosse points out that the original drawing was not created by a zoologist, but by a ship officer. While recognizing its intrinsic value as coming from an eyewitness, along with the sketch’s connotations of immediacy and so greater realism, Gosse advises that the drawing is “a tolerably faithful representation of the *general appearance* of the object seen, but nothing more.”<sup>40</sup> Without scientific observations of the beast’s bodily form, preferably itemized while actually looking at the specimen, the officer’s drawing (which was reproduced by other artists for publication) does not hold for him a great deal of legitimacy as proof of either the existence of sea serpents or what a sea serpent might actually look like. The illustration in question is particularly curious as it does not subscribe to the typical sea serpent template

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<sup>38</sup> Oudemans, *The Great Sea Serpent*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> Philip Henry Gosse, *The Romance of Natural History* (London: James Nisbet, 1861), 297-8.

<sup>40</sup> Gosse, *The Romance of Natural History*, 349.

I have been characterizing (Figure 5). Rather than featuring undulating curves, serpentine coils, frightful teeth, or any other attribute generally associated with the monstrous beasts, this serpent seems much more canoe-like in form. The straight, flat, marine disturbance floats low in the water, barely holding its head above the waves. The only way in which the illustration resembles those previously discussed is in the subtle appearance of a row of hair or spines going down its back—a common detail in many sea serpent descriptions. Perhaps the absence of the more common tropes was a partial factor in contributing to the controversy surrounding the account and Gosse’s reluctance to credit it.

Bernard Heuvelmans (1916-2001), a well-regarded Belgian-French zoologist, follows Oudemans in carefully and encyclopedically documenting sightings, hoaxes, and misunderstandings of species, from 1639 to 1966. For example, in 1854, the captain of the brig *Albeona* provided a very thorough description of a monster. This account, which was rich in detail including size, coloration, and physical features, was easily deciphered by Heuvelmans as a Common Rorqual, an oddly colored whale.<sup>41</sup> Though he was often skeptical, as in this instance, Heuvelmans’ *In the Wake of the Sea-Serpent* supplies plentiful illustrations drawn specifically for his book, which work to clarify his points—and perhaps cast a certain legitimacy on, or at least continuity with, the nineteenth-century efforts at description.

Reinforcement of the tendency for repetition of schema, even among scientists, also derives from followers of Linnaeus’s system for classifying animals, who often used

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<sup>41</sup> Bernard Heuvelmans, *In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents*, trans. Richard Garnett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965), 237-8.

a pictorial tradition of employing woodcuts, etchings, illuminations, and pencil illustrations to establish the form and shape of otherwise unknown creatures. For example, creatures that had always been represented in the canon of natural history (such as unicorns, mermaids, and sea serpents) but which hadn't actually been seen by any contemporary scientist, were still understood in accordance with the available illustrations. Philosopher Stephen T. Asma states, "if multiple drawings done by different sources of an exotic creature all conveyed a similar shape and comportment, one could feel more confident about those data."<sup>42</sup> However, a problem with this sort of corroboration occurred when an illustration relied solely on a reproduction of a previously created illustration.<sup>43</sup> Michael Bright discusses this dilemma, quoting testimony from the 1850s in which a young man walking along the beach claimed to have seen a sea serpent. The young man stated, "It was swimming on the surface, at the rate of from twenty-five to thirty miles an hour, and had exactly the appearance represented in one of the illustrated newspapers a few months since."<sup>44</sup> This statement suggesting that whatever he had seen had "exactly the appearance" of a recent illustration demonstrates how the dissemination of sea serpent imagery in the media conditioned those living in New England and the Mid-Atlantic to see any marine disturbance that seemed to fit the pattern as a sea serpent.

As these scientists and people in the nineteenth century generally understood, sea serpent lore could be traced back to ancient Roman and Greek texts, as well as the Bible, where they were often chimeras, fantastic creatures composed of body parts from

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<sup>42</sup> Asma, *On Monsters*, 128.

<sup>43</sup> Asma, *On Monsters*, 128.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Bright, *There are Giants in the Sea* (London: Robson, 1989), 168.

multiple species, including whales, snakes and fish. The interchangeable nature of these creatures, often collapsed into the basic concept of a “big fish,” is evident in the Greek word *ketos*, which refers to both whales and sea monsters. The *ketos* was depicted by classical Greek artists on vases and in sculptures, and the “mix-and-match” nature of the concept led to a corresponding freedom in their portrayal. One popular form for the *ketos*, and a precursor to the imagery of “vertical undulation” so popular in nineteenth-century descriptions and illustrations, was a giant, serpentine creature.<sup>45</sup> The representation of this unusual body movement was traditionally used to illustrate any creature possessing a “long, snaky, vertically undulating tail.” However, there are no known species of fish or serpent that actually moves or propels itself in this manner. Loxton and Prothero state, “A wavy or an arched body is extremely handy for indicating sinuousness in profile images on vases or shallow relief sculptures.” Using these arched squiggly lines to represent a serpent’s movement is simply a somewhat primitive method of articulating the side-to-side undulation representative of how a snake, eel, or fish would actually move.<sup>46</sup> These early depictions likely shaped modern concepts, especially in the representation of sea serpents as having vertical undulation or rows of humps while swimming. In the nineteenth century, those who claimed to have seen sea serpents and the artists who sketched them likely included vertical undulation in their descriptions as a means to connect their account to pre-existing sea serpent lore, despite the fact that such movement was, scientifically, very unlikely.

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<sup>45</sup> Loxton and Prothero, *Abominable Science!*, 178-82.

<sup>46</sup> Loxton and Prothero, *Abominable Science!*, 182-3.

Historian and mathematician Richard B. Stothers argues that the ancients simply lacked the scientific and mental tools to perceive ocean animals correctly, thus producing mythical animals. Stothers states:

...it has been possible to discern the main factors that turned observations of ordinary (albeit large) snakes and sea creatures into images of frightful monsters [...] The chief factors responsible include mismeasurement of sizes, with a tendency to overestimate; relatively poor views of rare animals, with misunderstanding of what had been seen; ignorant conflation of different kinds of animals; willful exaggeration, either to entertain or to frighten; and misreading of earlier textual descriptions.<sup>47</sup>

Stothers claims sea serpent sightings and descriptions remained riddled with these errors well into the nineteenth century, and certainly the difficulty of seeing and accessing ocean animals is one reason why schematic designs for sea serpents had such a long life as documents of eyewitness sightings. But until the 17th or 18th century, and arguably until the 20th, scientific proof did not demand anything like the naturalism and precision Stothers expects and Oudemans hopes for, especially when balanced against the overwhelming number of serpent witnesses. As with the editors and artist at *Harper's Weekly*, descriptions of sea serpents depended on witnesses who, in turn, depended on previously published descriptions of sea serpents to describe what one "should" look like and to make believable what they saw, or thought they saw, thus using these templates to gain credence and recognition for their findings. However, artists did try to adhere to objective or 'seen' features. Ellis notes that, despite the fact that *Harper's* basking shark

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<sup>47</sup> Richard B. Stothers, "Ancient Scientific Basis of the 'Great Serpent' from Historical Evidence, *Isis* 95, no. 2 (June 2004): 237.



did not actually have feet, the artist faithfully followed the eyewitness's portrayal to create the illustration, enabling it to then be quickly debunked.<sup>48</sup>

Because sea serpents had a long history in descriptions of the natural world and in fantasy, their ties to print culture meant that they became part of a uniquely American nineteenth-century phenomenon: the hoax. Museum entrepreneurs like P.T. Barnum relied on illustrated advertisements for artificially constructed but supposedly "found" objects like the Fiji Mermaid, but the general press also relied on reports of strange or unusual events to simply sell papers. Those who were suspicious of the fictions offered by Barnum's exhibits or by the remarkable incidents (life on the Moon, etc.) described in the newspapers, and even those who knew for a fact that they were being deceived, still gladly flocked to see the spectacles or to read about them. Historian Neil Harris identifies New York City as a haven for such hoaxes during the nineteenth century. Propelled by cheap dailies like the *Sun* looking for copy in a world where facts were often difficult for editors to verify even for local occurrences, American hoaxers proliferated. Harris suggests that:

The practical joke survived in a skeptical society because it was a way of reducing a hostile and threatening environment to human scale by manipulating its elements and so demonstrating control over them. The tall tale, the put-on, the travel lie, were social conveniences, and even the most hardheaded Yankee peddler could participate in their creation or enjoyment.<sup>49</sup>

Harris further argues that rather than gullibility, American scientific progress and deep-rooted skepticism actually worked to perpetuate the hoax phenomenon, as incredulous men came to accept pseudoscientific explanations or mechanical operations as fact as

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<sup>48</sup> Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea*, 48.

<sup>49</sup> Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 71-2.

long as their description made rational sense.<sup>50</sup> For Harris, then, by preying upon fears of the unknown beyond the “frontier” and the thirst for greater scientific clarity, crafty businessmen like Koch were able to generate profit from well-advertised, sensationalist exhibitions. Koch’s *Hydarchos* spectacle cropped up towards the end of what is considered the most active period in nineteenth-century sea serpent sightings. His “discovery” fit nicely with a renewed string of sightings that occurred during the 1840s.<sup>51</sup> Yet, despite the enormous excitement and actions taken by the natural history community, no specimen had ever been recovered. By providing the public with an image of a body and a seemingly accredited scientific explanation, Koch appeared to have placed a cap on a half-century long investigation.

Art historian Michael Leja expands on the concept of hoaxing in the nineteenth century with particular attention to viewing art. Leja suggests that art critics were on the lookout for “humbugs” in art—those works that were “inauthentic” or “hackwork masquerading as art.” Leja states:

Distinguishing truth from humbug—however paradoxical it might be to apply either of these terms to art—became a principal responsibility of art viewing and a preoccupation of art criticism. American viewers, whose cultural insecurity had long made them suspicious of art, could now, in encountering it, cultivate skills essential to coping with modernity and its myriad deceptions.<sup>52</sup>

The pervasiveness of hoax culture during the nineteenth century is inseparable from the documentary function of prints generally, including the illustrations created for sea

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<sup>50</sup> Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum*, 67-73.

<sup>51</sup> Sherrie Lyons, “Swimming at the Edges of Scientific Responsibility: Sea Serpents in the Victorian Era,” in *Repositioning Victorian Sciences: Shifting Centres in Nineteenth-Century Scientific Thinking*, ed. David Clifford et al. (London: Anthem Press, 2006), 35.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 14-5.

serpent sightings and discoveries. In the case of Koch's *Hydrarchos*, the pseudoscientist's ability to create an advertising schema that suggested scientific legitimacy was crucial to attracting an audience.

Koch's *Hydrarchos* marketing succeeded in drawing crowds and revenue. In the advertisement (Figure 9) published by Benjamin Owen, the image is surrounded with text: "Greatest Wonder of the World," and "Hydrarchos!! Or Great Sea Serpent. 114 FEET in length, and weighs 7500 Pounds!!" The ad exclaims that this is the most complete sea serpent skeleton ever found and, in bold, capital letters, that it was discovered by Dr. Koch. To further suggest the fossil's legitimacy, a letter from Professor Benjamin Silliman of New Haven (quoted to gain credibility; Silliman had accepted sea serpent existence in 1827) is included in the ad, stating, "The Skeleton having been found entire inclosed[sic] in limestone, evidently belonged to one individual, and there is the fullest ground for its genuineness."<sup>53</sup> Silliman's testimony, of course, is to the existence of the fossil, not the existence of sea serpents.

The illustration itself, located above the body of the text, is the most convincing element of the advertisement. Drawn with scientific exactness, the serpent's body stretches the length of a gallery space. Great, floor-length windows—shutters drawn—help to demonstrate the height of the skeleton, which rests with its neck extended upward and its massive, open jaw jutting forward. The bulk of the serpent is supported by several two-legged stands, but the long neck and head, equaling nearly half of the entire beast, seem to stand freely of their own volition, giving the fossil an uncanny, life-like

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<sup>53</sup> Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea*, 54-5.

appearance. Three figures stand beneath the threatening jaw--a man and a woman grasping arms, and another man acting as a tour guide. The placement of these figures shows the size of the sea serpent, whose head hovers over six feet above their own, and the proper awestruck response to it. The figures here resemble the visitors standing in Charles Wilson Peale's 1822 painting, *The Artist in His Museum* (Figure 10). By drawing visual parallels between his own exhibit and Peale's Museum, Koch's advertisement aligned him and his fossil with a well-regarded natural historian who had found and exhibited a mammoth fossil.<sup>54</sup> Peale's autobiographic self-portrait hints at a degree of showmanship and deception (or at least artistic reconstruction) involved in representing nature. Where he leaves obscured the giant mastodon skeleton, Koch's artist exposes it, and though seemingly less coy than Peale, in doing so the print also elides the staged quality of the fossil's presentation.<sup>55</sup>

Koch exhibited his creation under the title *Hydrarchos Sillimani* (or, Silliman's Master-of-the-Seas) and described it in great detail, including its size, shape, and similarity to eyewitness reports of sea serpents. He even described its behavior, based on scientific deductions from the fossil:

The supposition that *Hydrarchos* frequently skimmed the surface of the water, with its neck and head elevated, is not only taken from the fact that it was compelled to rise for the purpose of breathing, but more so from the great strength and size of its cervical or neck vertebra; and the comparatively small size of its head, which could, with the greatest ease, be maintained in an elevated position...<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Lillian B. Miller, "Charles Willson Peale as History Painter: The Exhumation of the Mastadon," *American Art Journal* 13, no. 1 (Winter, 1981): 50.

<sup>55</sup> Roger B Stein, "Charles Willson Peale's Expressive Design: The Artist in His Museum," *Prospects* 6 (1981): 154.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea*, 55-6.

Loxton and Prothero note that the bodily form and arrangement of the serpentine fossil utilized the new subcategory of “plesiosaur-like sea monsters [sea monsters resembling the finned marine reptiles of the Mesozoic era]” while also recalling the “traditional hippocamp-style sea serpent [a serpent recalling the horse-like structure seen on medieval maps and earlier Roman artwork].” He states, “Reconstructed in a hippocamp-like posture—massive head rearing high above fore-flippers, body arching, and tail curling—it could hardly be anything else. Or could it?”<sup>57</sup> Koch was using the typical templates of sea serpent imagery to gain credence for his creation.

The exhibition and illustration were discussed in an issue of *Dwight’s American Magazine*, a New York publication. The author states that even having viewed the illustration first, the actual skeleton’s enormity was overwhelming. Nevertheless, the author states that the print is accurately and neatly executed and that it “will give our readers as correct an idea of the wonderful object as they could expect without paying a visit to the exhibition room.” Demonstrating how illustrations prepared spectators to believe, the article continues, “The animal must have born a very striking likeness to the descriptions given of the sea serpent so often said to have been seen a few years since on the coast of Massachusetts.”<sup>58</sup> This less than coincidental likeness, combined with Koch’s statement that the structure of the vertebrae “seemed formed for vertical motion (a form of movement that is not likely to occur in nature)” is enough to convince the journalist of the genuineness of the *Hydrarchos*.

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<sup>57</sup> Loxton and Prothero, *Abominable Science!*, 227.

<sup>58</sup> Anon., “The Great Fossil Sea Serpent, or Hydrargos: [Length 114 feet.--Weight, 7500 pounds],” *Dwights American Magazine, and Family Newspaper, for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and Moral and Religious Principles* 1, no. 33 (Sep. 20, 1845).

Koch also provided quotations lauding his skills as a paleontologist, including this passage from the New York *Evangelist*:

And Dr. Koch deserves the thanks of the whole country, and of all men of science of the world, for the persevering sagacity and industry with which he has brought this prodigious skeleton to light and produced it in public. He is himself a man of true science, most unassuming and affable, far from all trickery and ostentation, a German with true German simplicity and thoroughness.<sup>59</sup>

Praise like this identifies Koch as a gentleman (albeit a German one)—one who speaks truthfully and who should be taken seriously. As a gentleman, Koch had guaranteed (at least for the time being) that his testimony and descriptions of the *Hydrarchos* fossil would be considered credible. He bolstered this credibility by borrowing from the tropes of sea serpent lore to further prove his findings. Even educated persons were swayed by Koch's exhibition, pamphlet, and advertising scheme.

Upon examination from Harvard anatomist Jeffries Wyman, Koch's *Hydrarchos* skeleton was revealed to be an assemblage of bones collected from at least five other fossilized specimens of a massive ancestral whale, the zeuglodon.<sup>60</sup> Regarding Koch's creation, the religious journal the *New York Observer and Chronicle* reported Wyman's determination that the remains had not come from a single specimen but from multiple animals and that the teeth were from a warm-blooded mammal, not a reptilian serpent. Further, the article reveals that the "so called paddles" of the skeleton were created by making casts of a nautilus shell.<sup>61</sup> Despite Koch's attempts to brand himself as a true and honest scientist, his trickery was quickly dismantled by empirical evidence.

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea*, 56.

<sup>60</sup> Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea*, 56.

<sup>61</sup> Anon., "The Famous Hydrarchos, from Silliman's Journal," *New York Observer and Chronicle* 24, no. 33 (Aug. 15, 1846): 132.

Discovery of fossils of otherwise unknown species raised great philosophical questions regarding nature and God, as the interest of religious newspapers and magazines in Koch's account indicates. Christians believed that even though it was impossible to understand the whole of God's plan, God's plan was complete, wisely regulated, and perfect. Historian Jeffrey Bolster states, "Put another way, early nineteenth-century people worked within a cosmos in which nature was imagined as fixed, even if it was not entirely comprehended. The concept that nature's dispensations could fluctuate radically seemed offensive to the idea of the harmony of God's handiwork."<sup>62</sup> Thus, the appearance of sea serpents and other unclassified marine creatures, along with fossil records of possibly extinct animals, was problematic because it implied a changing creation. As a natural wonder, something outside of natural law, there was room for the sea serpent; less so as an actual but now missing species.

Both the image of the *Hydrarchos* in Koch's advertisements and the woodcut of the "wonderful fish" in *Harper's Weekly* are notable for their use of shared conventions when considered within the culture of scientific illustration during the nineteenth century. The two images have several similarities—they both use a landscape and profile view to fully demonstrate the beasts' gigantic size and frightening form. Both include figures of upper-class citizens alongside to demonstrate scale as well as suggest legitimacy through the presence of gentlemen. Both images rely on popular and longstanding sea serpent tropes—elongated bodies, curving tails, and hideous gaping mouths. Dramatized and sensationalized depictions of objects of natural history were not unique to these two

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<sup>62</sup> Bolster, *The Mortal Sea*, 90.

illustrations. The celebrated naturalist John James Audubon himself often exaggerated his pictures of birds and animals in order to heighten their interest—he was selling expensive color prints to the very same merchants and buyers who would become subscribers to *Harper's*. Indicative of Audubon's "wavering scientific veracity" or perhaps just a demonstration of how close scientific illustration still was to popular print culture was his sending hoax illustrations for inclusion in fellow naturalist's Constantine Samuel Rafinesque's work.<sup>63</sup>

The visual imagery for representing scientific understanding of the natural world changed considerably during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>64</sup> Even in the eighteenth century, scientific illustrators were included on scientific voyages, as their visual descriptions were considered more direct than texts in determining classifications.<sup>65</sup> However, according to art historian Diana Donald, many efforts at rendering illustrations of species were superficial and clumsy, lacking in conceptual meaning and accuracy.<sup>66</sup> Scientific illustration though it increasingly depended on precise detail, for that reason, Donald notes, was "at odds with the prevailing aesthetic of the period" which was fixated on "grand generalization."<sup>67</sup> An illustrator of natural history had to, by necessity, ignore contemporary theatrics and illusion in art in order to clarify the minutest details of nature, often producing a single figure on a white background.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Frank N. Egerton, *Roots of Ecology: Antiquity to Haeckel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 147.

<sup>64</sup> Diana Donald, *Picturing Animals in Britain: 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 30.

<sup>65</sup> Brian J. Ford, *Images of Science: A History of Scientific Illustration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 71.

<sup>66</sup> Donald, *Picturing Animals in Britain*, 31.

<sup>67</sup> Donald, *Picturing Animals in Britain*, 39-40.

<sup>68</sup> Donald, *Picturing Animals in Britain*, 45.



However, the next generation of illustrators, working in the nationalist nineteenth century, tried to restore an environment to specimens, showing landscape, food sources, and other local elements, and in doing so tended towards a more stylized and even spectacular depiction of flora and fauna, often at the cost of accuracy about the specimen.<sup>69</sup> Art historian Alexander Nemerov accordingly can compare one Audubon illustration of four mockingbirds defending their nest from a rattlesnake to the Peter Paul Rubens painting *Hippopotamus and Crocodile Hunt* (1615), due to similarities in composition, imagery, and cyclone-like energy.<sup>70</sup> The illustrations of sea serpents considered here borrow conventions both from earlier practices of simple, detailed line drawings as well as aspects of contemporary dramatization. While Schoff's rendition of *Lair of the Sea Serpent* is of course a reproduction of a fine art painting, like Vedder's the design and chiarascuro suggests the theatrical anthropomorphism used in earlier scientific illustration. The serpent is in its apparent natural habitat, but its positioning and cryptically staring eye suggest elements of the dramatic. *Harper's* basking shark and Koch's *Hydrarchos*, though they too include references to environment more directly depict spectacles, evident by the presence of people (eyewitnesses a reminder of their authenticity as well, perhaps) observing the creatures.

*Harper's Wonderful Fish*, though not intentionally deceptive like Koch's, demonstrates how sea serpents were nevertheless represented or misrepresented by the media in exaggerated or speculative forms in order to create a sensation, though part of

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<sup>69</sup> Donald, *Picturing Animals in Britain*, 60-1.

<sup>70</sup> Alexander Nemerov, "A World Too Much: Democracy and Natural History in Godman and Audubon," in *Knowing Nature: Art and Science in Philadelphia, 1740-1840*, ed. Amy R. W. Meyers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 364-6.

this dynamic meant that they were often later easily debunked as misidentifications or outright lies. As *Harper's* did, periodicals often took accounts from other newspapers and publications, sources thought to be reliable—often because they shared the same politics—which they could profit from and then blamelessly correct as necessary. Behind this circulation-boosting maneuver though was the same desire Koch satisfied, to prove that sea serpents could exist within a modern scientific framework of classification and illustration. In order to do so, ordinary readers and observers needed to adopt new modes of viewing more akin to those of the professional or trained scientist.

The 1868 *Harper's Weekly* illustration of the “wonderful fish” is a perfect example of how a decayed, mangled fish was transformed by art and eyewitness testimony into a more shocking and monstrous sea serpent. On the magazine page, the monster, displayed in profile, stretches the length of the composition, with a sandy dune at the rear and a large rock beneath its head. One large eye stares vacantly upward as the mouth hangs open in an unsettling grimace, exposing a long row of sharp, spiny teeth. Three enormous gills cut through its side and an enormous dorsal fin stands rigidly on its back. The most striking feature of the illustration, and the feature that caused the greatest stir, is the two dog-like, pawed legs extending from the hind section. The legs curl under and the claws are extended, as if ready to pounce. After the legs, the beast's body ends with a large fish-like tail. To demonstrate its massive size, the artist has included three men in coats and hats (evidence of upper-class respectability) standing nearby, one in the foreground, and two behind the body of the “wonderful fish.” The men are dwarfed in

size, barely able to see over the top of the beast's back. Behind the tableau, a gentle ocean extends to the horizon with soft clouds and seagulls accenting the sky.

The creator of the “wonderful fish” illustration is not really falsifying this representation. The basking shark, assigned the scientific name *Cetorhinus maximus* (with etymology stemming from the Greek “ketos”) in 1765, is an extremely large species (reaching up to 40 feet), often observed swimming near the surface of the water. Biologist Michael Bright suggests basking sharks are “most likely to be mistaken for a sea monster” due to frequent human encounters with the creature at sea and on land. Bright states, “At the surface, the animal swims in leisurely fashion, often with the longish snout, dorsal fins and enormous tail protruding. It might easily be mistaken for something more unusual, particularly when it leaps clear of the water.”<sup>71</sup> This, along with their tendency to swim in large, linear groups (replicating the appearance of vertical undulation), may lead to them satisfying nineteenth-century desires for enormous wonders—for monsters as great and sublime as American nature. But despite its extraordinary size, the basking shark is a harmless, filter-feeding species, swimming with its mouth wide open to consume plankton and small crustaceans.<sup>72</sup> The *Harper's* artist has placed the encircling gills correctly and has captured an accurate shape and placement for the fins. The image only becomes problematic as a shark when considering the hind legs. What—besides perhaps the difficulty of drawing a decaying shark--caused the artist to include them?

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<sup>71</sup> Bright, *There are Giants in the Sea*, 179-80.

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/gallery/descript/baskingshark/baskingshark.html>.

Adding legs to decomposing basking sharks was not a new occurrence in 1868.

For the 1808 Stronsa Beast (located off the coast of Scotland), the artist hired to illustrate the body had to work from a chalk-drawn outline of the corpse, along with eyewitness testimony. The resulting image featured six legs and a body-length, hairy mane. Shortly afterwards, the recovered skull and vertebrae were identified as parts of a shark skeleton, making the presence of legs most unlikely. The basking shark's pectoral and pelvic fins might have suggested legs, and the male of the species possesses a set of "claspers," cartilage tubes that may appear leg-like in a decomposed shark. Richard Ellis explains the serpentine appearance of a dead basking shark by the fact that the gill rakers and the lower lobe of the shark's body are the first to decompose, "thus giving the skeleton the appearance of having a long, serpentine tail. The skin of a shark often decomposes into stringy filaments, which would explain the appearance of 'hair.'"<sup>73</sup> Likewise, the lower jaw often detaches entirely from a basking shark carcass, leaving behind a snakelike form.<sup>74</sup>

Daniel Loxton, however, argues that rather than mistakes caused by decomposition, the perception of sea serpents as having certain distinguishing features is based largely on how they have always been depicted. Nineteenth-century sea serpents tended to draw from two different forms—the horse-like anatomy of the classical hippocamp (a horse and fish chimera) and the more common snake-like form (resembling an enormous python or anaconda, often embellished with sharp teeth, hair, or a pointed spine). In explaining legged depictions of serpents, Loxton states, "Why would sea

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<sup>73</sup> Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea*, 48.

<sup>74</sup> Bright, *There are Giants in the Sea*, 182-3.

serpents look so much like horses? It turns out that the answer is simplicity itself. Like Jessica Rabbit in the film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, sea serpents have their shape because they were, literally, ‘drawn this way.’”<sup>75</sup>

An early example of a hippocamp style sea serpent is found in a Roman mosaic at the Piazza Armerina in Sicily (possibly a hunting lodge for the emperor), created in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (Figure 11). The mosaic, featuring the transport and capture of various exotic animals, depicts a winged putti riding on the back of a horse-like sea creature, which is swimming through the water with head held up and out, a characteristic that would be recalled in eyewitness accounts of sea serpent sightings much later in the nineteenth century. Similarly, a horse-like sea creature is illustrated in Pierre Belon’s *De aquatilibus libri duo* (The Aquatic Book) of 1553, possessing the body and forelegs of a horse and the tail end of a serpent or fish. A unicorn sea horse is seen on Cornelius de Jode’s map *Speculum Orbis Terrae* (Mirror of the World) of 1593, which features the same attributes. These images themselves are often based on earlier works and literary descriptions illustrating mythological tales, such as Perseus rescuing Andromeda from a sea serpent, or natural histories from exotic lands. The styles, shapes, and attributes of these sea creatures, head held up and out in a graceful curve, continued to be repeated into the nineteenth century, and, arguably, even in modernity with such horse-like water cryptids as Scotland’s Loch Ness Monster or Caddy (an alleged sea monster inhabiting the waters of the Pacific Coast of North America). This repetition in design must point to one of two things: either sea serpents are real and thus naturally share a similar

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<sup>75</sup> Loxton and Prothero, *Abominable Science!*, 188.

appearance as a species or a sea serpent has never actually been observed and these “eyewitnesses” are merely applying ancient tropes, forever mimicked and memorialized in art, to otherwise unexplainable maritime illusions.

But this type of argument seemingly discounts the testimony of the many eyewitnesses who contributed to the pictorial and textual descriptions. Because a sea serpent specimen was never captured alive or photographed, illustrations were drawn from what one or more persons claimed to have seen when the animal was in the water. Many of these eyewitness accounts came from sailors or other working-class observers who were assumed to be gullible, but others came from those regarded as credible or gentlemanly sources—experienced fishermen, sea captains, and male passengers.

The culture of “gentlemanly truthfulness” is a very important aspect in these accounts, as it differed in some respects from the expectations of the scientific method, with which it competed in the nineteenth century. Historian and sociologist Steven Shapin states, “the social practices mobilized around the recognition of truthfulness, the injunction to truth-telling, and the interpretation of why gentlemen were, and ought to be, truthful were central to the very notions of both honor and gentility.”<sup>76</sup> These notions of honor and gentility required that the truthfulness of a gentleman must be recognized by others within his social group. These firmly placed societal norms were what made believable the eyewitness testimonies (textual and visual, as in a sketch) of respected men, even when the wonders they observed contradicted the growing authority of scientifically constructed nature—equally understood to be the terrain of educated

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<sup>76</sup> Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 67.

gentlemen. Rules of gentlemanly trust played such a large part in maintaining order and civility in a society that the very notion of distrust was considered an act of hostility. Those who could not be trusted (non-white, usually uneducated, and working class, as in this case common sailors) were not allowed to participate in gentlemanly discourse.<sup>77</sup> Natural history texts still earned integrity based on “credible persons” as much as the evidence or experiments that they cited. Since the majority of “trustworthy” sea serpent descriptions during the nineteenth century identified very similar features, for artists as well as for other witnesses, this must have strengthened a preconceived concept of a sea serpent. As Shapin writes, the dependability and authority of such accounts reflected less the inherent knowledge of the person than the person’s status:

The power of the ‘credible person’ as a resource to end ‘wrangling’ and to close the interpretive circle resided in local understandings and local practices. Cultural silence about the identification of the credible person was not a sign of ignorance but of immense knowledgeability. Participants ‘just knew’ who a credible person was. They belonged to a culture that pointed to gentlemen as among their society’s most reliable truth-tellers, a culture that associated gentility, integrity, and credibility.<sup>78</sup>

Evidence of this attitude towards gentleman is found in an 1845 newspaper report in Boston that uses as its primary source a letter “written by a gentleman of caution and veracity” describing a possible sea serpent sighting.<sup>79</sup> In this case, the reporter does not find it necessary to even mention the name of the “reliable” source. Simply proclaiming the gentlemanly attributes of the witness is proof enough. This cultural respect for known truth-tellers within a society certainly aided the influence of eyewitness testimony even in new and impersonal environments where authority increasingly resided more in

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<sup>77</sup> Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, 35-6.

<sup>78</sup> Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, 238-42.

<sup>79</sup> Anon, “The Sea Serpent,” *The North American and Daily Advertiser* (April 17, 1845).

professional credentials than social rank; milieus such as magazines like *Harper's* with articles written by experts for mass audiences.

Another example of a gentleman's eyewitness report comes from an 1869 issue of the *Boston Daily Advertiser*. Captain Allen of the barque *Scottish Pride* was interviewed regarding a recent sea serpent sighting off the coast of Delaware. The report claims to be the captain's personal account of the incident but is narrated as a secondhand report by the article's author. It states that Captain Allen was summoned by a crewmember to view the monster from the side of the ship. A detailed description is provided of the serpent's size, eyes (considered to look "dangerous and wicked"), scaly armor, "hideous" yellow underside, and accompanying offspring. Notably, the author comments on the problem of the lower class crew's dependability, stating, "With the usual superstition that always takes hold of this class, they regarded the serpent with a sort of religious horror, and all the efforts of the captain to have them make some attempt to capture it were abortive. They looked upon it as something supernatural, and were not disposed to meddle with it."<sup>80</sup> The author adds that the noble captain was supposed to have laughed at the poor, frightened crewmembers when they came to him in his cabin for further explanation. The article concludes with the captain's description: "...it went head downward, and its body described a circle like a hook, its tail rising out of the water, which, the captain says, tapered off in a sharp point."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Anon., "The Sea Serpent," *Boston Daily Advertiser* (Dec., 1, 1869)

<sup>81</sup> Anon., "The Sea Serpent," *Boston Daily Advertiser* (Dec., 1, 1869). Another similar account comes from Captain Richard Buan of the brig *Long Island*, as reported by the *National Intelligencer* of Washington D.C. In this report, a large sea serpent approached the ship (while in passage from the Isle of Sal, Cape Verde, to the Rio Grande) accompanied by several of her young. The captain managed to spear one of the young, but, upon pulling it onboard, the head separated from the body. The head was preserved and given



This account demonstrates the difference in accountability between classes.

Captain Allen's careful outlining of the serpent's body, behavior, and movement is recorded by the article's author as though it is absolute truth, free of exaggeration, guesswork, or error. By contrast, the crew's religious understanding of the animal as a supernatural creature (rather than one who could be captured as a specimen) renders their vision a delusion, and so entirely worthless. Captain Allen's illustrative description of the sea serpent disappearing below the waves was poetically re-quoted the next day in the *Daily Citizen & News* of Lowell, Massachusetts, further strengthening the legitimacy of the testimony.<sup>82</sup>

In contrast both with the popular newspaper and the more elite magazine, the science journal *Nature* (an English academic journal) in 1878 published a letter to the editor, in which a reader writes about his experience with a sea serpent, sighted off the deck of a steamer. He writes:

One of the party suddenly pointed out an object on the port bow, perhaps half a mile off, and drew from us the simultaneous exclamation of "The Sea Serpent!" And there it was, to the naked eye, a genuine serpent, speeding through the sea, with its head raised on a slender curved neck, now almost buried in the water, and

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over to the Marine Surveyors. The head is described as being snakelike with no teeth or tongue. It was reported to have strong gills and it was speculated that it caught prey through suction. Because of the strength of the fish's exterior, it is imagined that, full grown, it would likely be bullet proof. The report is then qualified, stating, "These, gentle reader, are the facts as they are given to us. Capt. Buan is said to be a man of excellent character. Whether what he saw was a family of sea-serpents or not, the reader can judge as well as we." Here again the ship captain's reputation is good enough to establish truthfulness in his testimony. Anon., "Capture of a Sea Serpent, from the *Journal of Commerce*," *National Intelligencer* 11, no. 958 (June 27, 1851).

<sup>82</sup> The news brief (from the *Daily Citizen & News*, Lowell, Thursday, Dec. 2, 1869) states, "It seems a pity that Josh Billings [the pen-name of the nineteenth-century American humorist Henry Wheeler Shaw] or some such graphic writer had not been there to see, for the subject demands something of the highly imaginative style of description. We are told that the big serpent, in disappearing, went head downward, its body describing a circle, its tail rising out of the water and tapering off in a sharp point—realizing, almost, the idea of the poet: 'I could a tail unfold.'"

anon reared just above its surface. There was the mane, and there were the well-known undulating coils stretching yards behind.<sup>83</sup>

The writer however then goes on to describe debunking the serpent by the simple use of an opera glass (it turned out to be nothing more than some bobbing vegetation). The scientific community had increasing interest in demolishing the authority of the gentlemanly witness in favor of its greater precision of observation.

If established science had largely given up on the sea serpent, consigning it to myth and “mistakes” by 1880, the sea serpent found a new life in art influenced by Symbolism. The founding editor of the Boston-based *American Art Review*, Sylvester Rosa Koehler, contacted commercial engraver and etcher Stephen Alonzo Schoff with a job offer. Koehler, a well-known and skilled art promoter, who was also a supporter of the American etching revival, planned to run a feature on American painter Elihu Vedder. Schoff was commissioned to complete one of the nine illustrations for the article, Vedder’s most famous painting, *Lair of the Sea Serpent*.<sup>84</sup>

The resurrection of *Lair of the Sea Serpent* twenty years after the original painting appeared may have been symptomatic of the growing influence of Symbolism, a reaction against the dominance of realism and the general authority of scientific positivism, particularly in art and literature.<sup>85</sup> While the previously discussed illustrations are marked by an early preoccupation with empirical documentation, *The Sea Serpent* (Schoff’s print) represents a more subjective conception. The Symbolist movement was distinguished by its connection of allegory with personal feelings and emotions, thus

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<sup>83</sup> E. H. Pringle, “The Sea-Serpent Explained,” *Nature* 18, no. 463 (1878): 519.

<sup>84</sup> David Tatham, “Elihu Vedder’s ‘Lair of the Sea Serpent,’” *American Art Journal* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 40-1.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979), 1.

creating a new lens through which to view old motifs.<sup>86</sup> The concept of symbolist line is evident in Schoff's reproduction. Art historian Robert Goldwater describes this line as revealing "the impulse of its creator." It seems to "bear traces of the creator's hand" while suggesting "an awareness of form and an awareness of emotion."<sup>87</sup> The thick, unbroken, curving outline of the serpent's body—nearly indistinguishable from the dune that it rests on—is indicative of Schoff's ability to represent the earlier painting in a way that was relevant to the times.

In the painting, a sea serpent sunbathes languidly on a sand dune on a beach. The dune is dotted with patches of grass and little else. The head of the serpent features a noticeable eye (wide open and staring), nose, and nostril, and the length and size of the monster is indicated by its great, curving, piled form. The horizontal composition is very simple. The area from horizon to sky takes up half of the image and, other than a few indications of clouds, is featureless. The bottom half of the composition holds a strip of ocean and a deeper strip of beach. It is here that the sea serpent rests. Its freckled, slightly hairy body does not extend above the horizon line, thus giving the viewer the sensation of standing slightly above the beast. The serpent is contained in the lower right quadrant of the composition and is not cropped at any point. The majority of the grassy patches are also located in this area, extending somewhat to the left of the subject. At lower left, the beginning of another dune extends up and beyond the frame. In the lowest plane of the image, situated directly in the center, a small shrub of some sort grows out of a flattened area.

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<sup>86</sup> Goldwater, *Symbolism*, 5-7.

<sup>87</sup> Goldwater, *Symbolism*, 24.

Schoff uses a sketch-like approach to replicate this. Etchings, which were associated with amateurs, retained some of the same connotations of direct vision as the sketch. The entire upper half of the etching, the sky, is marked with quick, thin, horizontal lines (about ½ inch long), interspersed with a few sketchy cloud forms. The effect gives the image a somewhat unfinished appearance and places the image within the new tonalist tastes of the 1870s and 80s. The parallel lines are momentarily abandoned on the horizon where a row of fluffy clouds extends the length of the image. Below this is the sea, which is also composed of long, horizontal lines. These lines are placed closer together than those in the sky to create darker tone. The areas of sand also make use of parallel lines, situated to form the ups and downs of the small dunes. These lines, like the lines of the sky, are thin and sketchy. Schoff used a stronger line to create the grass, which, at some points, is too thick to make out individual blades. The body of the sea serpent contains the thickest lines, which make up its outline and ridged back. Dark shading composed of parallel hatching is used to create a dramatic effect of shadow and light on the creature's body. The greatest concentration of marks occur within the sea serpent's body and the grass around it.

The serpentine line evokes primal and inherent predispositions of sexuality, pleasure, violence, and repulsion. Its endless humps and undulations repeated in the waves and dunes in these illustrations is an intrinsic part of the sea serpent. In her exposition of serpentine imagery, Lura Pedrini describes its extensive range: "the serpent is used, for example, in depiction of the infinite, the future coiled in sleep, avenging Fury misguiding a cannon ball, Vice as a hydra surrounded by gaping youth, a victim under

the rich man's foot, and the Spirit of Good.”<sup>88</sup> In modern Anglo-American culture, the incident in the Garden of Eden cast an ominous darkness on the body of the snake, relegating its form to descriptions of the untrustworthy and gutter dwelling. However, a broader examination of the serpentine indicates that a multitude of interpretations survived well into the nineteenth century, particularly for artists like Vedder, who were interested in ancient symbolism. These symbols included serpents twining around a central rod, where the form functions as an evocation of spiritual power and healing that apparently possesses a benevolent, and possibly sensual, identity; Platonic linkage of the serpentine body to the phallus and both appropriation and denial of pleasure in human sexuality; and perhaps most significantly for nineteenth-century artists, William Hogarth's definition of beauty as delayed desire.

Originally published in 1753, William Hogarth's *The Analysis of Beauty* describes the serpent form as the “line of beauty.” Hogarth examines the “serpentine line” and its advantage over the straight line in terms of arousing desire in that it makes the object of desire more distant, or difficult to perceive in entirety. Hogarth pinpoints the specific type of curvature of line that possesses the ideal form of beauty, labeled as line four in this diagram (Figure 12). This is the line most recognizable in the female body, which is of course best suited to convey this particular beauty.<sup>89</sup> Hogarth notes that there are very few perfectly straight lines in the human body, and the component fibers of the attached muscles also use the serpentine line, especially in the arms and legs. Hogarth's alignment

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<sup>88</sup> Lura Nancy Pedrini and Duilio T. Pedrini, *Serpent Imagery and Symbolism: A Study of the Major English Romantic Poets* (New Haven: College & University Press, 1966), 58.

<sup>89</sup> William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955), 65-7. See also Carol Ockman, *Ingres's Eroticized Bodies: Retracing the Serpentine Line* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 2.

of the serpentine line and feminine beauty further promotes connections to sexuality and the role of artifice in controlling (feminine) nature. Considerable bodily manipulation was necessary to achieve the serpentine “S.” In 1770, aristocratic women began lacing their corsets tighter than ever before, leading to prints caricaturing these women as hideous old hags, a trend reinforced during the height of neo-classical fashion at the end of the century, which favored straighter lines.<sup>90</sup> Rather than maintaining youth and grace, this desire to maintain the line of beauty among the aristocracy was associated not just with women but with the grotesque.

Hogarth in effect put Renaissance contrapposto into a new context. Art historian David Summers quotes Quintalin, an orator born in 35 AD, who stated, “the body when held bolt upright has but little grace, for the face looks straight forward, the arms hang side by side, the feet are joined and the whole figure is stiff from top to toe. But that curve, I might almost call it motion, with which we are so familiar gives an impression of action and animation [...]”<sup>91</sup> Renaissance artists adopted this shape or stance, and the *figura serpentinata* came to be described as contrapposto. While these curves were considered a physical imitation of nature, contrapposto also gave the artist an opportunity to present multiple sides of a figure at once. Like Hogarth, who preferred his beautiful fourth line over the grotesquely twisted lines five, six, and seven, and the overly straight three, two, and one lines, Renaissance art theorists imposed limits on acceptable amounts of contrapposto. Renaissance humanist Leon Battista Alberti wrote that, in art, the waist

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<sup>90</sup> David Kunzle, “The Corset as Erotic Alchemy: From Rococo Galanterie to Montaut’s Physiologies” in *Woman as Sex Object: Studies in Erotic Art, 1730-1970*, ed. Thomas B. Hess et al. (New York: Newsweek, 1972), 104-5.

<sup>91</sup> David Summers, “Style and Meaning in Renaissance Art,” *The Art Bulletin* 59, no. 3 (September 1977): 337.

should never be twisted to the point of the shoulder being perpendicular with the navel, because such a movement is naturally impossible. Movements exhibiting too much curve were considered excessive and violent.<sup>92</sup> Again, the serpentine form is identified as one capable of outstanding beauty, but also conjures feelings of vulgarity and repugnance when used in excess—when nature becomes overtly artifice instead.

The vulgarity associated with Hogarth's overly curved lines manifests itself in Schoff's etching. The dark, coiling body of the serpent transcends even line 7 with its gross, exaggerated form. These qualities are endemic to the symbolist adaptation of obscure and mystical emblems as vehicles for cryptic ideas. Schoff's transformation of Vedder's original painting indicates how the new taste privileged ideas over objects. Recognizable objects merely facilitated the desired access to universal truths.<sup>93</sup> The Symbolist movement also encouraged greater interest in the supernatural and the dangers of nature, highlighting nature's "sensuality, suggestion, incomprehensibility, and nature as a hieroglyph," all of which was to be decoded and interpreted by the sensitive artist.<sup>94</sup> Despite its mythic subject matter, Schoff adapted Vedder's realist painting to fit emotional concerns of the new age, particularly the aftermath of war.<sup>95</sup>

America's fascination with the serpent and war dated to pre-Revolutionary times. In the early 1600s, militia commanders in America displayed flags of their own design, generally based on the Union Jack and other British infantry emblems. By around 1732, tensions between the American colonies and British rule were mounting and a series of

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<sup>92</sup> Summers, "Style and Meaning in Renaissance Art," 337-343.

<sup>93</sup> Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 39.

<sup>94</sup> Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, 46.

<sup>95</sup> Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, 61.

anti-British flags were created. Without exception, these flags featured an illustration of a snake. The “Don’t Tread on Me” flag, or the Gasden flag, was named for Christopher Gasden, who was thought to be the first to place the snake on a flag. Benjamin Franklin originally envisaged the Gasden flag. Franklin first coined the idea in 1751 when he suggested sending rattlesnakes to England in response to the British practice of sending convicted criminals to America. During the French and Indian War of 1754, Franklin created his cartoon, “Join or Die,” to encourage colonists to unite. Colonel John Proctor’s Independent Battalion flew a similar flag in 1775 with a coiled rattlesnake hissing at the British crown.<sup>96</sup> The use of the rattlesnake as an American emblem is thoroughly described in a December 1775 issue of *Bradford’s Pennsylvania Journal*. The article states:

[...] it occurred to me that the rattlesnake is found in no other quarter of the globe than American, and it may therefore have been chosen on that account to represent her[...]I recollected that her eyes exceeded in brightness that of any other animal, and that she had no eyelids. She may therefore be esteemed an emblem of vigilance. She never begins an attack, nor, when once engaged, ever surrenders. She is therefore an emblem of magnanimity and true courage. As if anxious to prevent all pretensions of quarreling with the weapons with which nature favored her, she conceals them in the roof of her mouth, so that, to those who are unacquainted with her, she appears most defenseless; and even when those weapons are shown and extended for defense, they appear weak and contemptible; but their wounds, however small, are decisive and fatal. Conscious of this, she never wounds until she has generously given notice even to her enemy, and cautioned him against the danger of treading on her. Was I wrong, sirs, in thinking this a strong picture of the temper and conduct of America?<sup>97</sup>

The author goes on to describe the snake’s rattle, made up of thirteen sections, closely united, like the American colonies. Without each other, the individual rattles are

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<sup>96</sup> Marc Leepson, *Flag: An American Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005), 12-13.

<sup>97</sup> John H Fow, *The True Story of the American Flag* (Philadelphia: J. Campbell, 1908), *Project Gutenberg*, 2009, accessed December 4, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/27745-h/27745-h.htm>.



meaningless, but together they have the effect of alarming the enemy. Such imagery and comparisons represented the unity of the colonies until such flags were replaced with the Stars and Stripes in 1777.

Vedder painted *Lair of the Sea Serpent* in the midst of the raging Civil War when unity and unrest would be on the minds of his Union audience. Not only did the painting recall the century-old images of the original colonies, but the Union General-in-Chief, Winfield Scott, had recycled the concept in 1861 with his “Anaconda Plan.” The “Anaconda Plan,” or “Scott’s Great Snake,” took advantage of the Mississippi River’s economic importance in the south (Figure 13). The river offered easy transportation between the states and offered an excellent means of invasion for the north. Scott’s plan was to blockade the southern seaports and take control of the Mississippi River in order to slowly asphyxiate the Confederate states economically. Historians William Shea and Terrence Winschel state, “critics derisively dubbed Scott’s proposal the ‘Anaconda Plan,’ after its pythonlike approach to squeezing the rebellious states into submission.”<sup>98</sup>

Illustrations of the “Anaconda Plan” were published numerous times in the press and would have been familiar and recognizable. Other similar snake images in political cartoons and wartime propaganda is evidence that Vedder’s selection of subject may have drawn from the violence and tension of the 1860s.<sup>99</sup> A self-proclaimed, peace-desiring Copperhead himself (a Union Democrat in opposition to the Civil War), Vedder included a reproduction of a different snake drawing in his autobiographical *Digressions* with a

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<sup>98</sup> William L. Shea and Terrence J. Winschel, *Vicksburg Is the Key: The Struggle for the Mississippi River* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>99</sup> Moffitt, “The Historical Significance of Elihu Vedder’s ‘The Lair of the Sea Serpent,’” 41-43.

hand-written caption, “War-Time.”<sup>100</sup> In the book’s illustrations index, the image is titled *The Nightmare (Sketch made at 48 Beekman Street)*. The rough illustration depicts a pot-bellied, thin-armed being, perhaps a baby or maybe a nude man, haggard and defeated in appearance. A long snake coils about the kneeling figure, its open mouth hissing towards the viewer (Figure 14).<sup>101</sup> This image undoubtedly references the Civil War (and seems to suggest a negative opinion of the conflict), but in typical fashion, Vedder fails to provide an explanation. In the same chapter, “New York in Wartime—The Struggle,” Vedder also included an illustration titled “The Fire Proof Safe,” an object frequently and fraudulently advertised in the newspapers, but here depicting an utterly destroyed city street, splayed with building debris, smoke, and scattered figures observing the wreckage. Strewn throughout the image is a long thin hose, winding in and out of the mess and coiling towards the foreground in a serpentine manner, the mouth of the hose resembling a striking snake (Figure 15). Without a date or context, it is difficult to determine what Vedder intended by this drawing. He wrote as a caption, “the four or five years of the War—now a dream—seemed a century...”<sup>102</sup>

Likewise, Vedder says little about the intended purpose of *Lair of the Sea Serpent* except to note,

I have seen it seriously stated that I painted it from a dead eel [...] I am real sorry I cannot tell how the ‘Big Eel’ wriggled in, but that is not the point anyway: the point is that then I felt what Fame was, for the first time; for part from the applause of the Boys, some five or six of them, there was a laugh of recognition from perhaps three persons in the audience. They had seen the picture,—they knew who I was,—they, the Public. This, I thought, was doing pretty well; New York

<sup>100</sup> Elihu Vedder, *The Digressions of V: Written for His Own Fun and That of His Friends* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910), 190.

<sup>101</sup> Vedder, *The Digressions of V*, 197.

<sup>102</sup> Vedder, *The Digressions of V*, 199.

was a big city even then, and what was one Eel among so many? Why—a most extraordinary Eel of course, and I was proud while this first glimmer of fame lasted.<sup>103</sup>

Do Vedder's comments allude to the public's recognition of Vedder's work itself, or to a larger recognition of a common theme? What were the many eels to which he referred? His friends' belief that the painting may be of a "Big Eel" is plausible. As a young boy, Vedder reported having caught a "great eel" while fishing in New Jersey. He wrote, "I was frightened when I got the great brute out on the grass, for he seemed to my childish eyes a veritable python, and I did not know what to do with him, or how to secure him; but some farm-hands helping me, I bore him in triumph to the house."<sup>104</sup> I argue that, upon being faced with the horrors and desolation of war, Vedder's art returned him to a memory of a childhood moment of fear, confusion, and loss of control.

Vedder's youthful eel incident evokes William Sidney Mount's 1845 painting, *Eel Spearing at Setauket* (Figure 16). Mount recalled his childhood experience with eel hunting in a letter where he described being able to see the eels and flatfish darting around under the water while his fishing instructor, "an old Negro by the name of Hector" pulled the fish in. Mount's impression of Hector as an experienced, god-like tutor is projected onto the black woman in *Eel Spearing*. Just as Vedder was aided by farm-hands who came to his assistance in a moment of terror and panic, the young white boy in the back of the boat appears to be under the protective and watchful care of the black "mammy" servant. Art historian Albert Boime argues that Mount's painting is

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<sup>103</sup> Vedder, *The Digressions of V*, 241-2.

<sup>104</sup> Vedder, *The Digressions of V*, 11.

about “human dominance over natural contingencies.”<sup>105</sup> The arid landscape in the image reflects the actual drought occurring in Long Island at the time. Boime states, “The tension of the picture must inhere partly in its associations with a period of deprivation, and the action of the woman is therefore tied to survival [...] The black woman, in her identification with the ebb and flow of nature’s cyclical and therefore ultimately changeless time, is portrayed as the key to the white man’s survival.”<sup>106</sup> In both Vedder’s written description and Mount’s pictorial narrative, the eel seems to represent an ambiguous danger and a feeling of uncertainty birthed out of pre- and post-Civil War anxieties.

In his lengthy ramblings, Vedder never truly explains what his exotic painting meant. But in his *Digressions*, he describes his state of mind when creating his fantastic images:

I am not a mystic, or very learned in occult matters. I have read much in a desultory manner and have thought much, and so it comes that I take short flights or wade out into the sea of mystery which surrounds us, but soon getting beyond my depth, return, I must confess with a sense of relief, to the solid ground of common sense; and yet it delights me to tamper and potter with the unknowable, and I have a strong tendency to see in things more than meets the eye. This tendency, which unduly cultivate might lead me into the extravagant, is held in check by my sense of humour, and has enabled me at times to tread with safety that narrow path lying between the Sublime and the Ridiculous,—the path of common sense, which in its turn is dangerously near to the broad highway of the Commonplace.<sup>107</sup>

Vedder’s work at this time of war and violence seems to apply the “unknowable”—the mysterious sea and its great, enigmatic depths—to current events. In that reading, *Lair of*

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<sup>105</sup> Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 98.

<sup>106</sup> Boime, *The Art of Exclusion*, 95-8.

<sup>107</sup> Vedder, *The Digressions of V.*, 408.

*the Sea Serpent* was indeed a response to the Civil War. However, the popularity of sea serpents in the Mid-Atlantic and New England states during this same time must also be considered as a factor in the significance of the painting not only to him but to its audience.

Upon completion of *Lair of the Sea Serpent*, the *Boston Transcript* on April 11, 1864, wrote, “we hear Vedder is painting the sea serpent. Anything very odd, if well painted, suits us here.” By calling it “the sea serpent,” it is suggested that Vedder was painting a specific sea serpent, recognizable to their audience (probably the same serpent that had plagued the coasts of New England since the early 1800s).<sup>108</sup> Subsequent instances of sea serpent sightings may even be partly responsible for the painting’s continued popularity and relevance.

Schoff’s etching of *Lair of the Sea Serpent* appeared in the June 1880 issue of the *American Art Review*. Printed on cream paper, the print is captioned “*The Sea Serpent*, from the original in the Possession of T. G. Appleton, Esq., Boston.” In the bottom left corner it is noted, “Elihu Vedder, Pinx” (short for “pinxit,” the Latin term for “painted it” to denote prints that are copies of a painting), and in the bottom right, “S. A. Schoff, SC” (an abbreviation for “sculpsit,” Latin for “engraved it” to denote the engraver). The accompanying article, written by W. H. Bishop, begins with a biography of Vedder, describing his place in the art world, noting his “deep pensiveness mingled with a feeling for the desolate, weird, and mysterious.”<sup>109</sup> Bishop goes on to consider Vedder’s use of

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<sup>108</sup> Tatham, “Elihu Vedder’s *Lair of the Sea Serpent*,” 34.

<sup>109</sup> W. H. Bishop, “Elihu Vedder. First Article,” *The American Art Review* 1, no. 8 (June 1880): 325.

symbolic imagery to create meaning out of often confusing and tragic contemporary events. Of *Lair of the Sea Serpent*, the author writes:

[...] the artist carries us out on the wings of his fancy to behold the great *Sea-Serpent*. It lies coiled upon a spit of sand. The opportunity to gaze safely into the malignant eye (compounded of that of snake and alligator) of the great, formidable lonesome creature, roved of the water fields, and lashing and lashed in its storms when sea and sky are one, is embraced with a kind of fearful pleasure. We are more than ever persuaded of its existence, however the affirmations of widely travelled sea-captains be set at naught, with such reality is it given. No melodrama, no cheap horrors, here either,--no contortions, no dragon-like splendors of hue or nostrils breathing flame. The color is dull, the sea sultry calm, the attitude inert, only the eye watchful.<sup>110</sup>

In his concluding article, Bishop states that although Vedder may not be the best painter, his attention to exotic subject matters exalts him to a level of “extreme distinction”--“a little weirdness goes a long way in an unimaginative world.”<sup>111</sup>

Bishop’s comments regarding the painting point to a way of understanding *Lair of the Sea Serpent*. Whether Vedder created this image as a reaction to the Civil War, as a response to a childhood memory, or as a nod to local sea serpent sightings (or, more likely, as a reaction to all of them), this opportunity to stare down, once and for all, the great mysterious monster of the deep, provides just the “fearful pleasure” that American viewers desired in 1864 and continued to need in 1880. Bishop acknowledges the unlikely existence of such a creature by lauding Vedder for his ability to provide an “air of plausibility and real existence.” However, the mystery of the creature remains, and the ever-watchful eye points towards an uncertain future. Schoff’s reproduction of *Lair of the Sea Serpent* was produced not long after the end of the Reconstruction Era. Coupled with

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<sup>110</sup> Bishop, “Elihu Vedder. First Article,” 327.

<sup>111</sup> W. H. Bishop, “Elihu Vedder. Second and Concluding Article,” *The American Art Review* 1, no. 9 (July 1880): 373.

the print industry's growing ability to generate and spread materials targeting middle-class fears and worries, such imagery was still useful in this post-war atmosphere of turmoil.

Though the sea serpent craze fizzled out in the twentieth century, sea serpents continue to occupy the imaginations of cryptozoologists and monster enthusiasts today. The Loch Ness Monster entered the modern imagination in the 1930s and, much like the sea serpents of the previous century, has never been proven to exist but is surrounded with hoaxes, misidentifications, and schematic descriptions.<sup>112</sup> Likewise, Caddy (the *Cadborosaurus* of the Pacific Coast) was also first sighted in 1933 by several eyewitnesses and, later, a questionable photograph of a *Cadborosaurus* appeared supposedly taken from the stomach of a sperm whale.<sup>113</sup> Loxton and Prothero argue that the manifestation of Caddy may have been birthed out of a desire to liven things up and “inject a bit of humor in the newspaper” during the Great Depression. Regarding its coinciding appearance with Nessie, Loxton and Prothero suggest that the recent opening of the film *King Kong* (released in Victoria, Canada on May 20, 1933) may have inspired the imaginations and “testimonies” of moviegoers.<sup>114</sup> In the film, King Kong encounters a variety of prehistoric monsters, including a massive serpentine creature that Kong battles to the death in order to protect the heroine. The creature has the long, dark, coiling, serpentine body of a snake as well as four paddle-like appendages, resulting in a body indisputably similar to both Nessy and Caddy.

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<sup>112</sup> Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea*, 67-8.

<sup>113</sup> Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea*, 71-1.

<sup>114</sup> Loxton and Prothero, *Abominable Science!*, 240-4.

Jeffrey Cohen states simply, “We live in a time of monsters.” Expanding on this bold statement, Cohen points out more straightforward monstrous apparitions such as weapons of mass destruction (items created by humans that will eventually destroy them—e.g. Frankenstein’s monster) and terrorism, to the omnipresence of monsters in pop culture and entertainment.<sup>115</sup> In addition to the well-known vampires, aliens, zombies and werewolves, monstrous serpents have taken center stage in recent science fiction and horror films. *Anaconda* (1997), *Python* (2000), *Rattlers* (1976), *The Snake King* (2005), *Snakes on a Plane* (2006), *Tremors* (1990), *Snake Island* (2002), *Venom* (2005), *Vipers* (2008), *Komodo vs. Cobra* (2005), *Mega Python vs. Gatoroid* (2011), and *Piranhaconda* (2012) all use a mixture of reality, the supernatural, pseudo-science, and oftentimes sexuality to target the fears and curiosities of their audiences. According to Cohen, this glut of monstrosity in contemporary popular media “embodies a commentary upon *fin de siècle* America, a society that has created and commodified ‘ambient fear.’”<sup>116</sup>

While it may be true that modern American culture is still engrossed with monsters generally, the serpentine form in particular adapts to distinct cultural fears, and the sea serpent with its origins offshore in a still underexplored realm continues to evoke concerns about threats from the natural and to the national. Though only a few of the films above associate the serpent with water, sightings of sea serpents still occur, despite increased skepticism from the abundance of readily available information about the ocean and its life forms provided by modern technology. As recently as October of 2013, for example, the body of an 18-foot oarfish was discovered off the coast of California,

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<sup>115</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), vii.

<sup>116</sup> Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, viii.



followed two weeks later by a second 14-foot oarfish (Figure 17).<sup>117</sup> The most widely circulated image of the event is a photograph of sixteen people holding the massive, serpentine body of the oarfish. Like images of *Harper's* basking shark and Koch's *Hydrarchos*, including human figures in the image provides a sense of scale demonstrating the monstrous size of the specimen. Another image features a close-up of the fish's head, which provides a somewhat grotesque view of the gaping mouth, large shimmering eye, and the peculiar hairlike bristles issuing from the spine, much like Schoff's etching. Several newspaper articles suggested that this type of fish was a primary suspect in earlier sea serpent sightings. The mysterious deep-sea oarfish, which is so rarely found intact, still managed to capture the imaginations of audiences. The woman who stumbled upon the creature reportedly stated that she decided to drag the body onto the shore so that people would believe her.<sup>118</sup> The *Daily Mail*, a British tabloid, ran with the sensationalist headline, "Are the bodies of two giant sea serpents that washed up on California beach last week a sign of a looming major natural disaster?" The corresponding article includes numerous photographs and illustrations, including an illustration of a beached oarfish from 1850.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Bill Chappell, "18-Foot Oarfish Livens Up a 'Leisurely Snorkel' in California," *NPR*, October 15, 2013, accessed December 6, 2013, [http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/10/15/234736706/18-foot-oarfish-livens-up-a-leisurely-snorkel-in-california?utm\\_context=socialflow&utm\\_campaign=nprfacebook&utm\\_source=npr&utm\\_medium=facebook](http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/10/15/234736706/18-foot-oarfish-livens-up-a-leisurely-snorkel-in-california?utm_context=socialflow&utm_campaign=nprfacebook&utm_source=npr&utm_medium=facebook).

<sup>118</sup> "18-foot, serpent-like sea creature found off California," *CBSNEWS*, October 15, 2013, accessed April 9, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/18-foot-serpent-like-sea-creature-found-off-california/>.

<sup>119</sup> Marie-Louise Olson, "Are the bodies of two giant sea serpents that washed up on California beach last week a sign of a looming major natural disaster?" *MailOnline*, October 22, 2013, accessed April 9, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2471572/Do-giant-sea-serpents-washed-Californian-beach-past-week-portend-looming-major-natural-disaster.html>.

Why do we continue to be fascinated by the monstrous, mysterious and unknowable? Historian W. Scott Poole suggests that:

Monsters occupy a central place in American social and cultural history. They sit like spiders in the center of a web of political identities, economic forces, racial fantasy, and gender dynamics. They are more than the dark side of the human personality or the dark side of popular culture. They are part of the genetic code of the American experience, ciphers that reveal disturbing truths about everything from colonial settlement to the institution of slavery, from anti-immigrant movements to the rise of religious fundamentalism in recent American politics. They are more than fantastical metaphors because they have a history coincident with a national history.<sup>120</sup>

The sea serpent phenomenon in the nineteenth century fits this model. The body of the sea serpent attracted fears and feelings about science and religion, mass media and hoax culture, civil war, and sexuality. Its “origins” in nature, especially in a nature that was being claimed as originally American—New England and the Atlantic, a tie that was carefully established in illustrations and their interpretations—let the sea serpent tap into fears about nature’s nation gone awry. At the same time, the serpentine line with its evocation of movement, desire, and an artifice removed from nature made it a pleasurable way to experience or live—and then debunk—those fears.

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<sup>120</sup> W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011): 23.

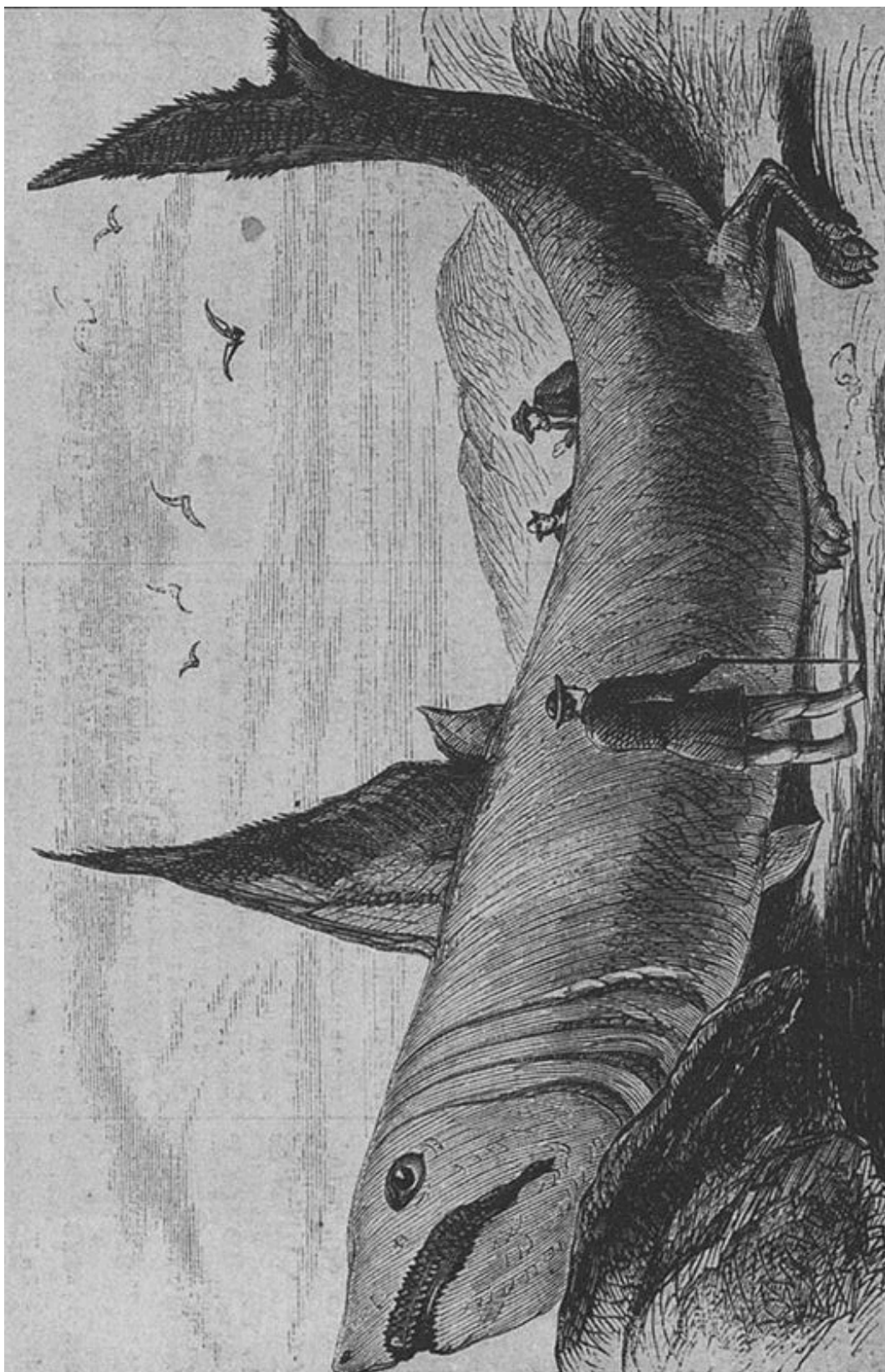


Figure 1. Charles A. Barry, "Wonderful Fish," *Harper's Weekly*, October 24, 1868, p. 684. Woodcut.

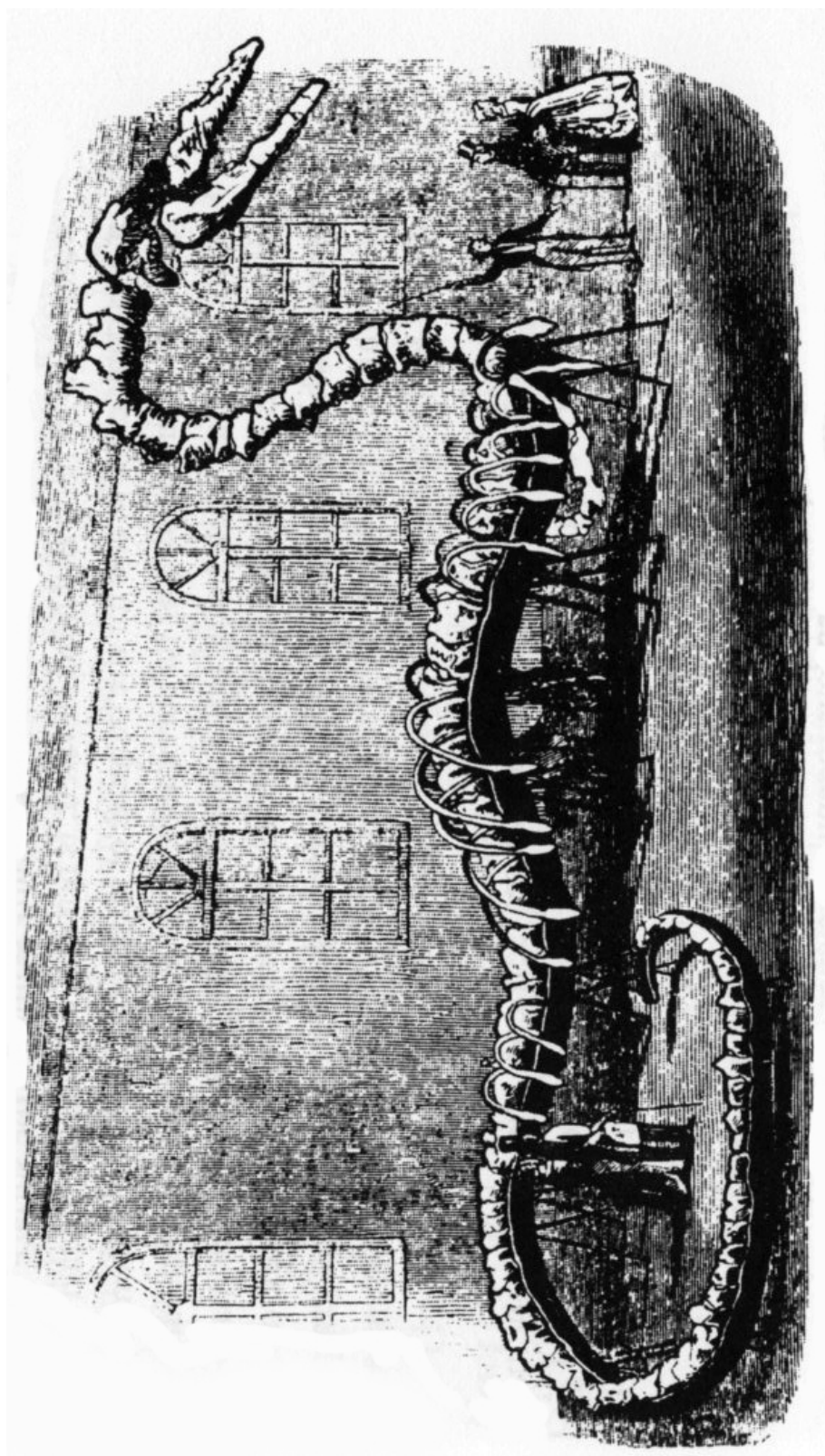


Figure 2. "Albert Koch's *Hydrarchos*," engraving, published by Benjamin Owen, New York, 1845. Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division.



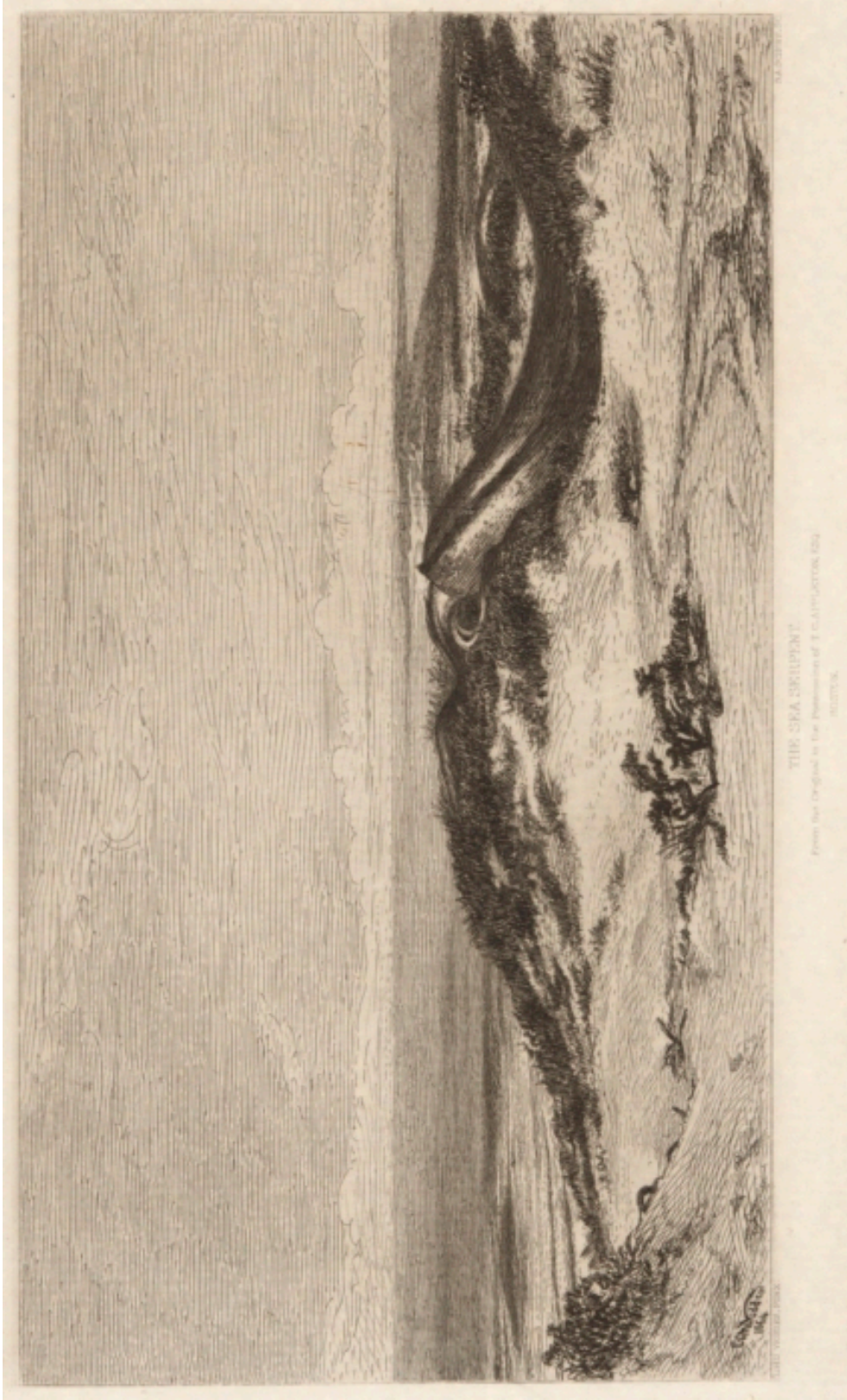


Figure 3. Stephen Alonzo Schoff, *The Sea Serpent*, etching, 1880, Sheldon Museum of Art, Lincoln, Nebraska.

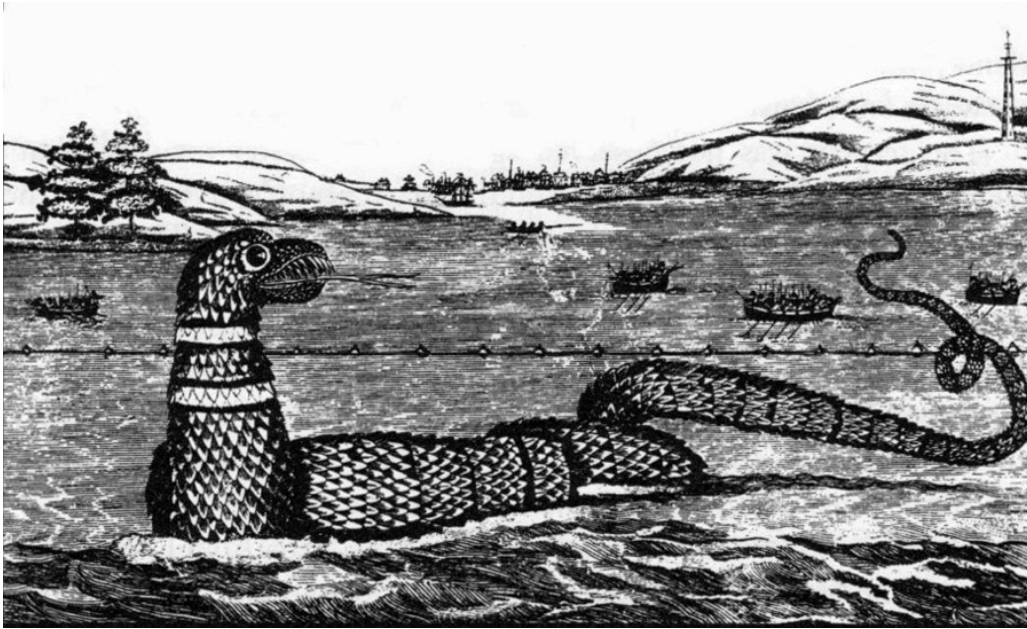


Figure 4. The Gloucester Sea Serpent, 1817, published in Richard Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 51.

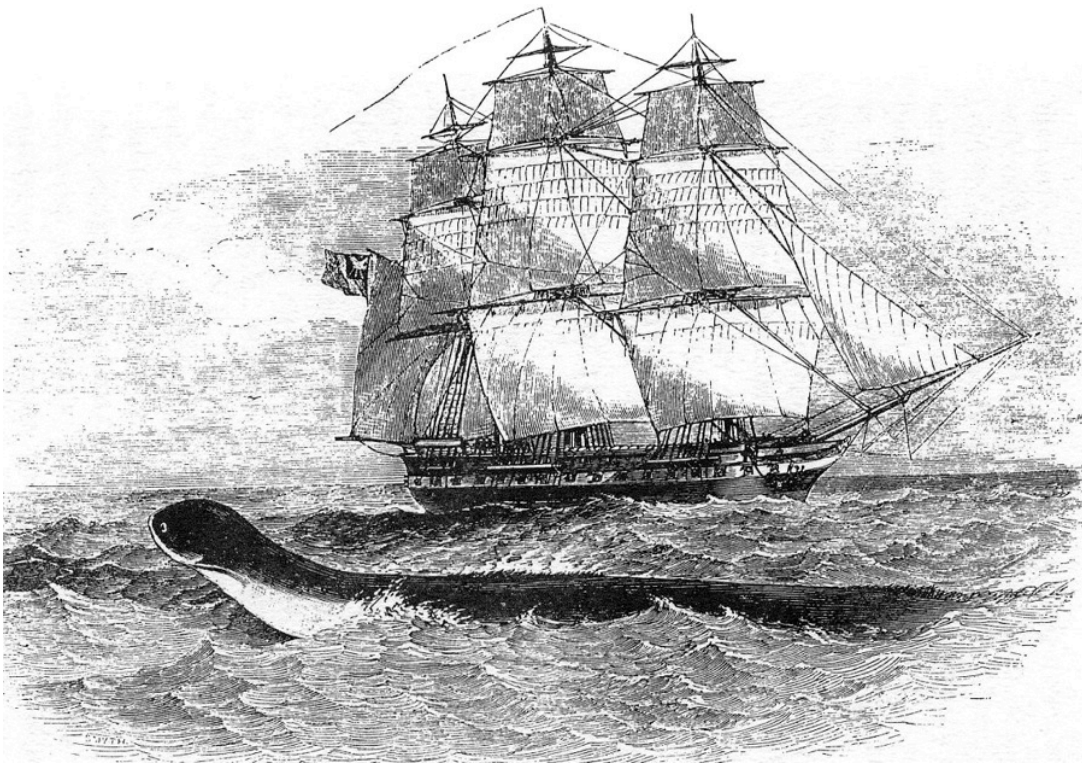


Figure 5. The Daedalus Sea Serpent, 1848, published in Richard Ellis, *Monsters of the Sea* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 58.





Figure 6. Olaus Magnus, *Carta marina et descriptio septentrionalium terrarum ac mirabilium* (1572 edition, Stockholm, Sveriges nationalbibliotek, shelfmark KoB 1 ab).



Figure 7. Gerard Mercator, World Map of 1569 (Rotterdam, Maritiem Museum "Prins Hendrik," Atlas51).



Figure 8. Henry Fuseli, *Thor Battling the Midgard Serpent*, 1790, oil on canvas, 1330 x 946 cm., Royal Academy of Arts, London.



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 "Most observers will probably be struck with the snake-like appearance of the skeleton. It differs, however, most essentially, from any existing or fossil serpent, although it may countenance the popular (and I believe well founded) impression of the existence, in our modern seas, of huge animals, to which the name of sea serpent has been attached."

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Figure 9. "Albert Koch's *Hydrarchos*," handbill. Engraving, published by Benjamin Owen, New York, 1845. Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division.



Figure 10. Charles Willson Peale, *The Artist in His Museum*, 1822, oil on canvas, 103 3/4 x 79 7/8 in., Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.





Figure 11. Mosaic at the Piazza Armerina, Sicily, 4<sup>th</sup> Century CE.



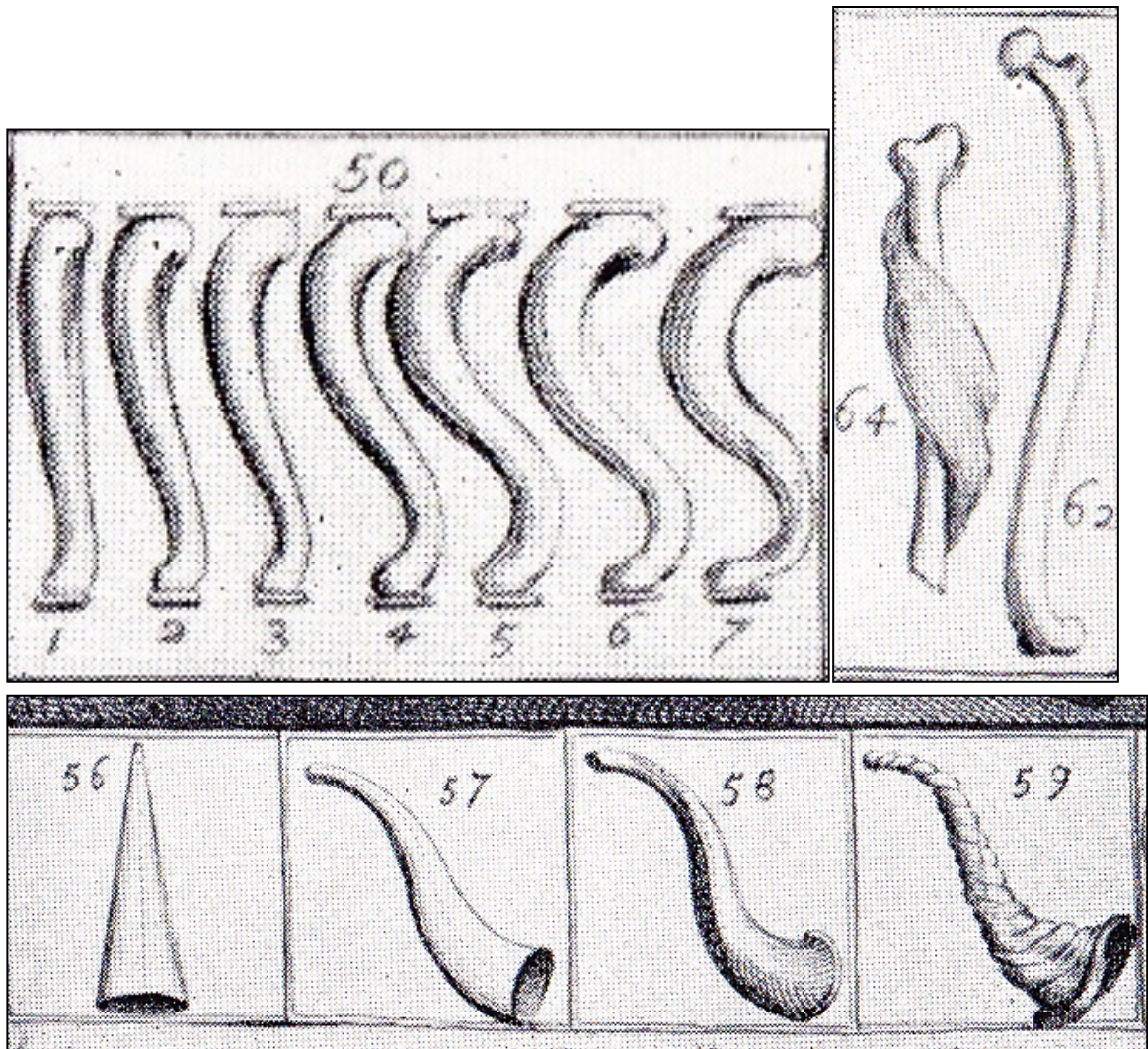


Fig 12. Plates 10 and 11, William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, ed. Joseph Burke (orig. published 1753; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955).



Figure 13. J. B. Elliot, *Scott's Great Snake*, Cincinnati, 1861. Printed color map. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.



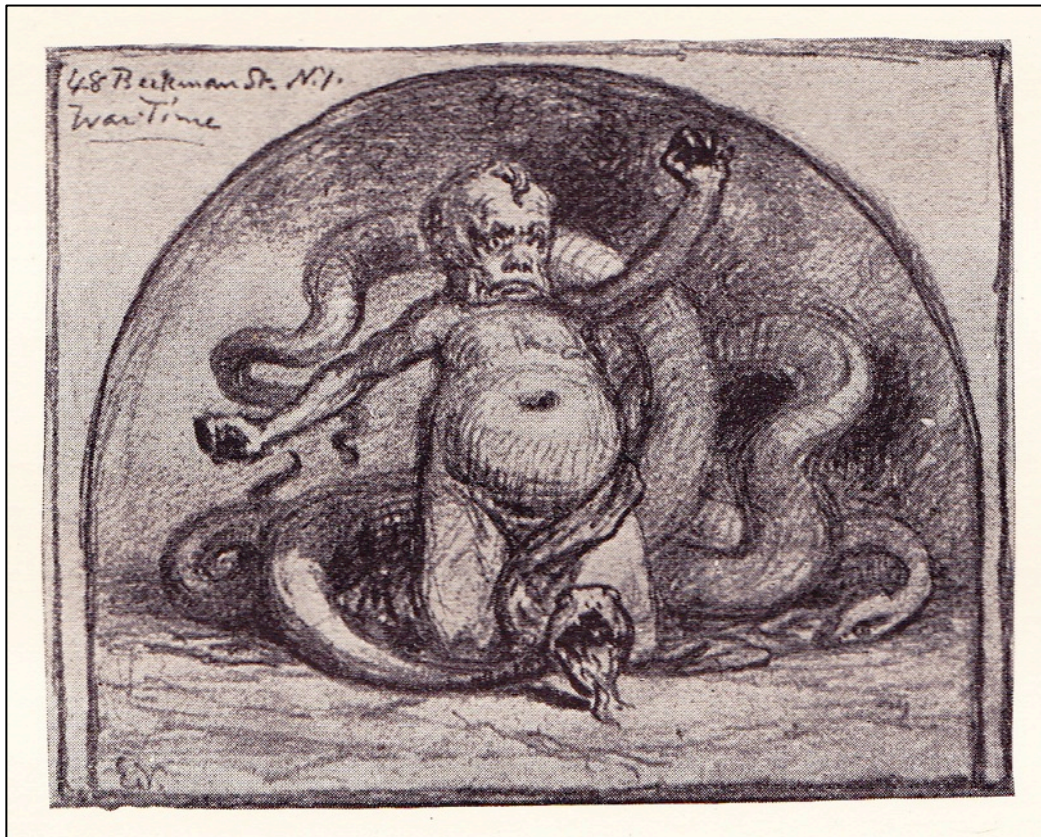


Figure 14. Elihu Vedder, *The Nightmare*, c. 1860s, *The Digressions of V.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910), 197.



Figure 15. Elihu Vedder, *The Fire-Proof Safe*, c. 1860s, *The Digressions of V.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910), 199.





Figure 16. William Sidney Mount, *Eel Spearing at Setauket*, 1845, oil on canvas, 33  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 40  $\frac{1}{2}$ , Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, NY.



Figure 17. Catalina Island Marine Institute, *The Oarfish*, photograph, *National Public Radio*, "18-Foot Oarfish Liven's Up A 'Leisurely Snorkel' in California, October 15, 2013, [http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/10/15/234736706/18-foot-oarfish-livens-up-a-leisurely-snorkel-in-california?utm\\_content=socialflow&utm\\_campaign=nprfacebook&utm\\_source=npr&utm\\_medium=facebook](http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/10/15/234736706/18-foot-oarfish-livens-up-a-leisurely-snorkel-in-california?utm_content=socialflow&utm_campaign=nprfacebook&utm_source=npr&utm_medium=facebook).



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