Dark Reflections, Monstrous Reflections:

Essays on the Monster in Culture

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Monsters and the Monstrous:
Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil

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Introduction

We live in a world inhabited by Monsters. Our monsters take human shape; dwell in our belief systems and in our culturally beloved texts, narrate the terrain of nationalism and politics, cultural idols and visual representations, surrounding us with images that are often grotesque, disturbing and revealing. What is revealed through these modern monsters leads us to a mirroring of the human self. Not only do we live in a world inhabited by monsters – we are monsters ourselves. Monstrosity appears in many guises in our culture – we often celebrate it as a defiance of bourgeois attitudes, or examine it beyond the confines of what is deemed morally acceptable. Declare your study in monsters to an unsuspecting colleague and gauge their reaction – I find it is questioned with caution, and probed with an eye of suspicion. By investigating our monsters, we reveal the complexities of our culture, past and present. We deconstruct the power that monsters are given in today’s over-saturated media, where the use of the word ‘monster’ is fluidly adapted to fit the crime or deed reported. The word itself brings both condemnation and fascination for its intended subject. The hallmark of Interdisciplinary Press lies in the breadth of studies on Monsters gained with each conference proceedings; always fascinating, enlightening and tapping into the rich cultural vein monsters offer.

The papers in this collection were presented originally in Mansfield College, Oxford, in September 2006. Our many delegates are scattered across four continents - a geographical cross section of academia - offering a wealth of cultural diversity and disciplines. Scholars of film, literature, popular culture, history, law, politics, philosophy and art came together for an intensive four days of presentation, discussion, deliberation and informal conversation, while in the historically gothic and academic environs of Oxford. As with all Interdisciplinary.net conferences, friendships were forged, and new and innovative projects were born. Not all participants at the conference submitted their papers for this collection, but those who did, a vast majority, represent an accurate account of the conference. Contributors were asked to submit their papers as presented with a view to give a ‘virtual snapshot’ of the proceedings.

When coalescing the papers into one volume, which would accurately reflect and thematically link the papers included proved to be an enormous challenge. Some of the papers included bled across many of the thematic frameworks of each section. The result intended for both authors and readers of this volume is to approach each section as its own development on the titled theme, while connecting with the over-arcing theme of the entire collection. I can only hope that readers and authors who undertake reading the entire volume will not view my selection process as dogmatic, but rather, thematically interpretative. Part 1 consists of (In)Human
Monsters seen in the media; from paedophiles to gay murderers, child abusers and the horrors of visual plasticity, to television’s portrayal of the morally ambiguous. Part 2 examines the visual monsters in our culture, from video and online games and body horror to dog-headed women and in the morphology of modern advertising. Part 3 returns to the roots of established ‘otherness’, examining the magical and female figures, the wonders of the east in Beowulf, extremes and otherness and the fearful appearance and sexuality of Japanese ghosts. In Part 4, idols are re-examined from a post/modern perspective, in fiction, film and art. Particular emphasis is placed on Shelly’s Frankenstein and his monster throughout. Section 5 casts an eye to monstrous nationalism, from the wilderness of Australia’s outback to World War I, encompassing the scientific age of the 1950s to the modern American classroom. Sections 6 and 7 question the monster as an oppositional character or force, offering different readings on pain, pleasure and celebration – how we come to regard and respect the existence of our monsters. Section 7 views the monster as a theological entity through the ages – debating monstrosity, akin to evil, being an eternal essence existing through many gods and within many religious faiths.

The vast terrain contained within these pages could not be regarded as a definitive text or framework for studies on monsters and the monstrous. The sheer volume and cultural exploration in studies on monstrosity disallows such categorisation. Like evil, the monster’s bedfellow, it is in some ways an inexhaustible field of study, a continuous narrative intertwined with human existence. I have always defended the study of monsters as an arguably (un)pleasant re-examination of human history, narrating fears, cultural translations and anxieties, desires and forbidden dialogues. It is with this belief that I cast the prognosis that our reflections are monstrous only because they reflect our true nature.

I wish to thank my fellow authors and colleagues for their papers and their patience during the time it took to bring this collection together.

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Section 1:

(In)Human Monsters
Loving the Alien: A Moral Re-Evaluation of Paedophiles

David White

Abstract: Paedophiles are widely regarded as the most morally repugnant people. But on a close examination of what basis in general we can use to determine that a person's character is morally objectionable, it appears that there is reason to question this popular assessment. This paper begins by looking at what recent scholarship tells us about the effects on children of sexual activity with adults. It then goes on to discuss some of the recent controversy in the psychological community about whether or not the sexual attraction to children should be regarded as a mental disorder. It continues with an examination of what moral philosophers have to say in general constitutes having an evil character and then goes on to show how such criteria are not met by most people who are sexually attracted to children. Then it is argued that there is in fact reason to think that in most cases those who are attracted to children are more deserving of moral praise than blame. The popular view of paedophiles, however, forces most people who have such attractions never to share voluntarily that fact about themselves with others. In the final part of the paper an argument is given for why the general population has a moral obligation to make it safe for paedophiles to be open about their sexual attractions without fear of a hostile reaction.

Key Words: paedophilia, morality, character, evil, sexuality

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The evil person is something of an alien, lying somewhere between the human and demonic. We call her, not coincidentally, a monster. The appellation 'evil' thus serves to distance its subjects from the rest of us, to emphasize the profound moral and psychological gulf between them and the rest of us.

Paedophiles are arguably more despised than any other people. It is not unusual to hear people express the view that no crime is worse than the sexual assault of a child, not even murder. According to a recent survey of Canadians paedophilia is the behaviour that is most widely regarded as immoral. Even prisoners regard child rapists as the most reprehensible among them. In general, those who commit sexual crimes are seen as worse than those who commit other crimes, and those who commit crimes against
children are seen as worse than those who have adult victims. So the paedophile represents the combination of the worst of the worst.

So strong is the hatred for those who sexually victimize children that even those people who are attracted to children, but have never committed a sex crime almost always conceal this attraction for fear of the reaction they would receive. Most people do not tend to make a distinction between paedophiles who have victimized children and those who have not. It is not uncommon for people to think of paedophiles without a criminal record as just those who have gotten away with it so far or those who have just not committed sex crimes yet.

The fact that the word “paedophile” is now typically used in the press to describe a person's actions rather than their attractions means there is not even a term paedophiles can use to describe their attraction without giving the impression that they might be sexual predators. This further blurs the distinction between a person's attractions and their actions, which in turn further contributes to the belief that paedophiles are monsters merely as a result of their sexual attraction. But just as the fact that some heterosexuals commit rape does not give us a basis for morally condemning the sexual attraction to adults of the opposite sex, the fact that some paedophiles rape children should not be taken as a legitimate basis for the general moral criticism of people who are sexually attracted to children.

Before looking at the question of whether there is a basis for saying that paedophiles have immoral characters, we should note a couple of things about the morality of sexual activity with children. Firstly, it is widely thought that paedophilia is a mental disorder. Paedophilia is listed in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, but this listing is controversial. Recently a growing number of mental health professionals have argued that it should not be considered a mental illness.

This debate is relevant to how we morally assess paedophiles, since it is generally thought that people should not be judged as immoral in virtue of the fact that they suffer from a mental illness.

Secondly, it is also widely thought that adult-child sexual activity is usually significantly harmful to the child. But, again, recent scholarship has called this belief into question. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that when children participate in sexual activity willingly they are
unlikely to suffer any direct harm at all. If this is right, then there is some question as to whether there is a basis for making a negative moral judgment of paedophiles who only engage in sexual activity with willing children. But this is a complex and controversial issue on its own, so for the remainder of this paper I will assume that there is generally enough risk of harm for us to judge all adult-child sexual activity as wrong. With these preliminary comments out of the way, we can now look more closely at the question of what moral assessment we are justified in making of paedophiles generally.

There are several different bases for what constitutes a morally evil character typically cited by philosophers. I will consider four of them. First, some argue that we should use a consequential basis to assess character. Simply put, any person who does bad things is a bad person. The implications for this view on our assessment of paedophiles should be quite clear. While paedophiles who engage in sexual activities with children can be said to have bad moral characters, those who don't cannot be similarly assessed. Thus if this view is right, there is no general basis for negatively judging paedophilia.

But is this a reasonable criterion for assessing character? It might sound uncontroversial at first glance, but it is a view that has some problems. People can (and sometimes do) unintentionally perform actions that have significantly harmful consequences. Conversely, people can try to inflict harms on others and fail in their efforts. Gilligan, from the television show Gilligan's Island, ruined the castaways' attempts to get rescued on almost a weekly basis, but always as a result of inadvertent bumbling. He was a deeply caring person who always wanted to help out in any way he could, but his ineptitude ensured that he always made a mess of things. On the other hand the Grinch from How The Grinch Stole Christmas tried his best to make the Whos of Whoville miserable, but he failed completely. Try as he might, he could not break their joyful spirits and ruin their Christmas celebration.

Now it seems strange to say that Gilligan has a bad character because of the consequences of his actions, but the Grinch does not have a bad character since he caused no real harm. If anything our strong intuition is that we should make the opposite assessment. What it seems we want to say here is that it is not what one does, but what one tries to do that counts when assessing character. Assessing people based on actual outcomes of their actions seems woefully inadequate. It might generally be true that good people do good things more often than not and bad people do bad things more often than good people do, but it does not seem that the goodness or badness of their character can be because of the good or bad things they do.

The fact that we do think what a person tries to do should count toward a judgment of their character leads us to the second possible basis for morally assessing character. This is the idea that character should be assessed based on the motives that we have when we act. This analysis gets both Gilligan and the Grinch right. Gilligan, because he was motivated by trying
to help, is judged to be a good person even though his efforts work out badly, and the Grinch is judged to be bad because he was motivated by a desire to harm the Whos.

So if the motivational analysis of moral character is right, what does this tell us about how we should judge paedophiles? On the one hand we still have no basis to negatively judge paedophiles who do not engage in sexual activity with children. One has to have acted in order for there to be a motive to assess, and for non-sexually active paedophiles there is no action, and thus no motive to judge. In fact, there might even be a basis here for making a positive moral judgement of these paedophiles. If they are sexually interested in a particular child and decide to refrain from acting on that desire because they believe that such activity would be harmful to the child, then they deserve moral credit for making a decision motivated by a concern for the child's well being.

But what about paedophiles who do engage in sexual activity with children? Does using motives as a basis of moral assessment give us grounds to negatively judge these people? In some cases it will, but in many cases it will not. Although some paedophiles are indifferent to the well-being of children with whom they engage in sex and some even wish to inflict harm, it is not typical of adult-child sexual activity that the adult desires the suffering of the child. In fact, quite often the adult wants and hopes that the child will experience pleasure as a result of the sexual activity. This false belief that sexual activity will be positive for the child might be hard to understand and greatly distressing to us, but as with the harm that Gilligan inadvertently causes the fact that they did not want to cause harm and did not believe that their actions would be anything other than positive means that they too have morally praiseworthy characters. Such a person might be deeply confused and they might be dangerous as a result, but on this criterion they cannot be said to be morally bad.

The first two criteria for morally assessing character both take it as a necessary condition that the person has acted. Surely this is too restrictive. It seems reasonable that a person can be of bad character even in the absence of acting. In the film All of Me Steve Martin tells Lily Tomlin, “...it's not that [my grandfather] didn't want to rape the environment and exploit the workers, I'm sure he did. It's just that as a barber, he didn't have that much opportunity.” The fact that his grandfather did not rape the environment and exploit the workers is not really to his credit, because that is what he wanted to do and what he would have done given the chance.

Thus a third possible basis for assessing moral character is to base it on the desires a person has. A person who wants harm to come to others counts as morally bad while a person who wants good to come to others is morally good. These people might not act on those desires due to lack of opportunity, but merely having those desires is sufficient to make a judgment. Insofar as a desire of some sort is always a part of our motives, the
desire criterion can incorporate all of the virtues of judging people based on motives and extend it to cover all cases where a person wants to do good or harm, but lacks the opportunity.

But even with this revision there is little new ground on which to base moral criticism of paedophiles. We can now add to the blameworthy category any paedophile who does not have sex with children, but would like to do so in order to harm them. But as we noted before, the desire to harm is generally not a part of a paedophile's motivations, nor is it a part of his desires. For a typical paedophile his basic desire is to be able to have a loving, mutually positive sexual relationship with a child. The fact that such a relationship might be impossible does not make the desire any more morally problematic. My wanting world peace counts morally in my favour, even if one believes that such a situation is impossible to achieve. And so, once again, if anything the paedophile's desires are at worst not morally blameworthy, and perhaps even should count as morally praiseworthy.

While the desire criterion seems to be an improvement on the consequential and motive criteria, it is still insufficient. Even when a person does not act and does not desire benefits or harms to others, we might still want to morally praise or blame them. Take, for example, the person who gleefully reads newspaper stories each day that describe the suffering of others. This person does not inflict the harm himself, nor can he even be said to desire the harm, but he does greatly enjoy hearing about it. The fourth possible basis for morally assessing character, then, would be to base it on affect. Being pleased by the pleasures of others should count as a virtue of character while enjoying the harms that come to others should count as a moral character flaw. We might wish to go even further and say that mere indifference to the suffering of others is sufficient to warrant moral blame. This, for example, typifies the sociopath's moral failing.

So what does this criterion tell us about how we should assess paedophiles? Are paedophiles typically afflicted with schadenfreude as well as a sexual desire for children? This does not seem to be the case. In fact, many paedophiles identify their sexual attraction to children as one aspect of a more general interest in children. Paedophiles are generally as outraged as other people when harms are inflicted on children. And those who do engage in sexual activity that results in harm to the child are not typically pleased by that result. In short, there is nothing about being sexually attracted to children that makes one any more likely to be indifferent or even gleeful about the suffering of anyone. So again, this criterion does not provide a basis for morally criticizing the character of paedophiles.

The four criteria for morally assessing character do not support a general negative evaluation of paedophiles. In many ways, paedophiles are no different from heterosexuals. Some heterosexuals force adults into having sex with them, some enjoy inflicting harm on sexual partners, and some don't really care one way or the other about the happiness of their sexual partners.
But there is no reason to believe that this supports a general moral criticism of heterosexuality. And while we certainly want to say that each of these people is morally blameworthy, that assessment is not because of their heterosexuality. The same story should be told about paedophiles. Those who are motivated by a desire to harm children or who delight in the harms that come to children are certainly morally blameworthy, but that blame is not because they are paedophiles, it is because of their attitudes towards harm.

Furthermore, as we examined each of the four possible criteria of assessment there were various reasons for thinking that paedophiles are, in fact, deserving of moral praise. When people forgo pursuing their own pleasure because they know that not doing so would bring negative consequences to others, we take that as perhaps a paradigm case of where moral praise is deserved. The paedophile who does not pursue sexual relationships with children for this reason, then, should be regarded positively for that decision, not negatively for his sexual attraction. Even the paedophile who was previously sexually active with children who did not expect harm to come to those children and who has now stopped because of the realization that such activity is likely to be harmful is deserving of our moral praise.

The foregoing argument gives us good reason to believe that the typical assessment of paedophiles as moral monsters is not appropriate. Using a moral assessment as a basis for treating paedophiles as social outcasts, then, is unreasonable. This alone might be reason enough to support the claim that we all have a social obligation to make paedophiles feel safe about revealing the nature of their sexual attractions without fear of a hostile reaction, but there is a further, better, more pragmatic reason for this as well.

Paedophiles who feel the need to hide their sexual attraction and who see and hear daily how hated they are merely for that fact are more likely to become socially alienated than others. Social alienation and isolation can, in turn, lead to anti-social behaviour. And such behaviour will, in at least some cases, manifest itself by paedophiles seeking to have sex with children. While it is neither a simple cause-effect relationship nor are such results inevitable, there is good reason to believe that if paedophiles felt safe disclosing the nature of their sexual attractions to others there would be fewer cases of child molestation, not more. Social integration and sympathetic support from non-paedophiles can go a long way to giving a paedophile a reason not to commit an offence even in his weakest moments. It also would make those weakest moments less likely to occur in the first place.

Most people might think that they don’t know someone who is a paedophile. But even conservative estimates say that 3% of the population is sexually attracted to children. That means that in any random group of 23 people it is more likely than not that one is a paedophile. In any group of 100 people, it is almost certain one is and very likely that he is not alone in that crowd. Paedophiles are everywhere, whether we realize it or not. Given the fact that this does not constitute a moral failing and the fact that openness can
help to protect children, we all have the responsibility to make it safe for
them to feel free to tell us who they are.

Notes

2 For an extended discussion of this point, see Corey Rayburn, “Better Dead
3 Than R(ap)ed?: The Patriarchal Rhetoric Driving Capital Rape Statutes.” St.

4 The OED still offers “An adult who is sexually attracted to children” as the
5 only definition of “paedophile,” but the use of the term to describe sexual
6 activity, as the Leger Marketing survey does, is pervasive in the media.

5 See Richard Green, “Is pedophilia a mental disorder?” Archives of Sexual
8 Presented to American Psychiatric Association’s Annual Meeting in San
6 See Bruce Rind and Philip Tromovitch, “A Meta-Analytic Review of
7 Findings from National Samples on Psychological Correlates of Child Sexual
9 Examination of Assumed Properties of Child Sexual Abuse.” Psychological
10 Bulletin, vol. 124, no. 1, 1998, pp. 22-53; and C. Dolezal and A. Carballo-
11 Diéguez, “Childhood Sexual Experiences and the Perception of Abuse
12 Among Latino Men who have Sex with Men.” Journal of Sex Research, vol.

7 I have argued in White (2006) that such a potential risk of harm does exist,
8 although it is not straightforwardly harm that results from engaging in sexual
9 activity. This, in addition to conventional wisdom saying that harm is likely,
10 makes it reasonable to assume that it is likely for the purposes of this paper.
8 For the discussion that follows, I am drawing on the work from Haybron
11 (2002a), Calder (2003), Kekes (1990), and Haybron (2002b). I will, however,
12 typically talk of bad rather than evil character. This is merely to avoid some
13 of the complexities that can arise in discussions of evil, ones that need not
14 concern us here. In this paper the question of whether or not being a
15 paedophile is even bad, let alone evil, is the central concern.
9 Claudia Card, “What's Wrong with Adult-Child Sex?” Journal of Social
12 27.
Bibliography


David White is currently a doctoral candidate in philosophy at the University of Calgary.
From Victims to Victorizors: Child Abuse and the Perpetuation of Evil

Christina Rawls

Abstract: The documented statistics report one in three girls and one in ten boys in the U.S. are sexually abused during childhood, yet most incidents of childhood abuse go unreported. If you apply these facts to your local elementary schools, the horrific realization is that childhood physical and sexual abuse is a taboo topic, a common practice, and a secret epidemic. Even the young Freud reversed his original conclusion that his first female patients were mentally ill due to childhood sexual abuse and replaced it with the idea that young children desire their parents sexually. Abused and humiliated children without a witness to their pain often go on to become victimizers, where the repetition compulsion of repressed trauma is carried out on others, including entire populations, such as was the result of abused children Mao, Stalin, and Hitler. Child psychologist Alice Miller has written extensively for over forty years on the blinding phenomenon of blaming the child instead of the adult and society’s overarching child rearing practices of “poisonous pedagogy.” I will attempt to raise awareness of these epidemics through an understanding of how repressed trauma creates the conditions for pathology and is often repeated if it is not addressed as early as possible with an enlightened witness.

Key Words: child abuse, Alice Miller, Antonio Damasio, Spinoza, Hitler, Freud, compassion

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The extended consciousness and overall awareness of one’s feelings and reasoning abilities via the body is paramount to survival. We are compelled towards compassion and cooperation with others, in fact, we are hardwired for it. According to the philosopher Baruch Spinoza, we are also compelled to yield some of our natural rights to others regularly. We are first altruistic, communal beings. We are then both individuals, with unique histories and experiences, and dependent beings who continue our motion because of others. When you stifle, harm, or steal a child’s integrity and respect through abuse, humiliation, or even strict rigidity, you impede their abilities to reason and feel throughout life in ways which are creative, life preserving, and lead one towards happiness. Adolph Hitler sustained this type of bodily and emotional damage which included: continual humiliation,
torture, and beatings in every way by his father and we are well aware of what his inability to feel compassion for others had allowed him to undertake. In her groundbreaking work, *For Your Own Good: Hidden cruelty in child-rearing and the roots of violence*, Alice Miller talks candidly about all forms of childhood humiliation paired with the repression of the anger that would accompany these experiences if that anger could not be expressed at the time of the abuse. Miller writes:

> Hitler never had a single other human being in whom he could confide his true feelings; he was not only mistreated but also prevented from experiencing and expressing his pain; he didn’t have any children who could have served as objects for abreacting his hatred; and, finally, his lack of education did not allow him to ward off his hatred by intellectualizing it. Had a single one of these factors been different, perhaps he would never have become the arch-criminal he did.\(^2\)

It is more than clear that the unconscious perpetuation of violence in society can occur resulting directly from the inhumane treatment of children. Mao and Stalin are two other examples of children who were humiliated repeatedly by someone who was close to them, leading each one to also have an utter inability for compassion and grand need to strike back due to their repressed pain.

Most acts of child abuse, physical, sexual, and emotional, are never disclosed. In several countries, including the United States, “child-rearing” still includes spanking, humiliation, and the use of guilt as ways of reprimanding and “teaching” children. What’s worse is the on-going sexual abuse and exploitation of children of all ages and backgrounds occurring in the world today. The underground market for virgins in Cambodia, for example, is in such demand that girls as young as ten years old are sold to men for pleasure and then sewn back up to be sold as a virgin again. When we stop treating children as property and with such cruelty, but allow them to become their own people, who respect others as well as themselves, we will begin to witness more world peace than ever thought possible. This socio-emotional dynamic within a culture is the direct link to how leaders of the free world rule or motivate a nation. By socio-emotional I mean the overlapping dynamics of social relations with others close to or around us and the emotional cues which we remember that allow us to then process new information towards our self-preservation and harmony, both internally and within society. Children who are treated with dignity and allowed to express their creativity spontaneously, without shame, humiliation, or feelings of guilt, will go on to treat others in the same way. Violence will not seem
natural or necessary and creativity will flourish wildly. This seems intuitive, but in truth child humiliation and abuse are rampant in the world and have a direct link to politics past, present, and future.

The available statistics in the United States report one in three girls and one in ten boys are sexually abused. Physical abuse is even more prevalent and accepted. There are general difficulties with collecting statistics as they are always shifting, but it is very possible to estimate the gravity of a problem based on continuous random samples of information collected in various disciplines, law enforcement, and community organizations, for example. One is capable of being aware of the variety of contexts in which they are gathering or learning about this type of information, as well as the problems with general statistics themselves. Statistics are never completely accurate at any one given time, but do we really need to know the differences in percentage points in order to understand the connection between Hitler being beaten daily and the 11 million innocent people who he then tortured and killed? Hitler is not an anomaly. I was once told, at a training program on serial killer and paedophilia behaviours by one of the leading experts in the United States in this area, that the average paedophile harms about 100 children before they are caught.

The laws in the U.S. as it pertains to in-home family social workers prohibit many Bachelor and Master level therapists who work with children to assess for any signs of abuse in the care giver’s home or merely educate children on child abuse, unless that therapist works for its state’s child protective services agency or there is a child protective services agency already involved with the family. If a child discloses information regarding current abuse, a “child line” call is made to the state’s child abuse office in its capital. From there it is immediately assessed and transferred to the county child protective service agency where the child resides. An on-call worker is dispatched to the home and interviews the child for risk of harm usually within 24-72 hours of the call. If there are “red flags” or disclosures of abuse, the child protective services agency opens the case with the family, regardless of their willingness, and an investigation and monitoring of the family situation is set underway. In many cases, if abuse is present, the child is removed from the home and placed in emergency foster care. As the social consequences of abused children become more and more clear, we can understand how these incidents of abuse are crimes against humanity as a whole and how humanity itself is slipping away.

It is my opinion that a child is more likely to disclose abuse to someone they trust and feel comfortable with, such as an in-home family therapist, then to a complete stranger who they have just met, such as an on-call social worker sent to their home unexpectedly. The child protective services workers are continually trained in these areas and are, at times, very
good at their jobs, but the children do not talk with them as easily as they would an in-home family therapist who they have known for months and who they have, in most cases, developed a trusting relationship with.

The average U.S. state employs hundreds to thousands of in-home family therapists. This is coming from my own experience as a therapist and social worker for several years. The in-home therapists are required to attend some training in topics related to mental health diagnoses and therapeutic treatment, but are often not required to attend trainings on the assessment of child abuse, and even less on the assessment of child sexual abuse. This sends a message that perpetuates abuse as a taboo topic for general discussion and continues to hide the amount of it that is going on as well.

The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare’s 2005 annual report on child abuse documented the following: 22,854 cases of child abuse were reported to child protective services agencies, 8,419 reports to the police, leaving us with a combined 31, 237 reported incidents or suspicions of child abuse in one of fifty states. Out of this total number, only 56 people were convicted of sexual abuse. How is it that we know 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 10 boys are sexually abused and yet out of 31, 237 reports only 56 people were convicted of any type of abuse? Where does the loophole or problem in the system fall? Is it in the statistics? Is it that our culture does not want to talk about this particular problem? How can we work alongside the federal child protective services agencies to ensure that our behavioural health organizations can assess for abuse in the beginning of treatment and, at the least, incorporate abuse education into their treatment plans for all children (an element left out of many, if not all, initial FBMH treatment plans)? How do we get others to see a horrific problem that is never clearly visible at any one given time?

Children who are shown compassion and respect carry these characteristics on into adult life. Children allowed to express their anger when something or someone harms them or makes them uncomfortable, including emotionally, will also go on to allow others to do so and will not have the desire to release this anger later in life through some other medium or on another person. Freud deemed this act of reliving repressed trauma the repetition compulsion of the unconscious. It is when one has retained past abuses within the mind and body, repressed their anger of this abuse most often forcefully, and then relive the trauma in adult life in some way, either as harm to themselves again or harm inflicted on others, especially their own children or, in some cases, entire populations of people or animals. Alice Miller writes, “…even when a spanking is a gentler form of physical violence, the psychic pain and humiliation and the need to repress these feelings are the same as in the case of more severe punishment.” Miller terms “poisonous pedagogy” those practices which allow generations of child rearing to occur which include corporal punishment as early as infancy,
blaming the child instead of the adult, and the use of guilt and humiliation which continues the repetition compulsion of release and re-victimization. Miller writes:

...for even if we are survivors of severe childhood humiliations we all too readily make light of...we can still function as dangerous carriers of infections. We will continue to infect the next generation with the virus of 'poisonous pedagogy' as long as we claim that this kind of upbringing is harmless. It is here that we experience the harmful after-effects of our survival, because we can protect ourselves from a poison only if it is clearly labelled as such, not if it is mixed, as it were, with ice cream advertised as being 'For Your Own Good'.

What Miller is conveying are the ideas we have passed on throughout generations that the child is a menace with uncontrollable behaviours that need to be sanctioned, that the child is already born guilty and not innocent, and who’s “exuberance” and vitality should be stripped of the child for their own good. The literature on child rearing in 19th century German encyclopaedias, for example, includes these strategies and many others in an attempt to control and punish children for what are normal and healthy behaviours. This type of ongoing cruelty teaches a child violence and to suppress their natural emotions. This type of trauma and repression of anger can leave a person in an ongoing freeze response where various reasoning processes and abilities to feel compassion, for example, will get stuck and create bodily and psychological anxiety. These practices humiliate the child, creating a lack of self-worth, confidence, and trust in the world around them and creates the compulsion to inflict the same types of humiliation on others, not only because they have been taught that it is permitted, but more importantly because they were harmed without the possibility or permission to defend themselves and express their pain, thus needing at some point in their lives to release the pain and regain a sense of power and control. This is ultimately to become the one in control of the pain, therefore overriding the identity of being the one who had no control and was harmed in the past without the ability to stop that harm. Alice Miller stresses that it is most harmful when a child cannot express their anger and frustration about a hurtful situation. Miller believes expressing one’s anger is a natural human action. It is the same as the necessary and natural need for us to express any emotion for survival. “However, if it is verbally or nonverbally forbidden or even stamped out by force and by beatings, as it is in ‘poisonous pedagogy,’ then natural development is impeded and the conditions for pathological development are created.” What Miller draws
attention to is the natural curiosity, spontaneity, and sensitivity of every child, as well as every child that remains within all of us.

The malleability of a sensitive child is nearly boundless, permitting all these paternal demands to be absorbed by the psyche. The child can adapt perfectly to them, and yet something remains, which we might call body knowledge, that allows the truth to manifest itself in physical illnesses or sensations, and sometimes also in dreams. If a psychosis or neurosis develops, this is yet another way of letting the soul speak, albeit in a form that no one can understand and that becomes as much of a burden to the affected person and to society—as his or her childhood reactions to the traumata suffered had been to the parents.¹

When Miller writes that the child’s natural development is impeded if abused, both mentally and physically, she is not too far from the current ideas and conclusions drawn by neuropsychologist and philosopher Antonio Damasio, as well as much of the work of Oliver Sacks and others. In the work Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain, Damasio goes to great lengths to explain the processes of the development of human emotions and feelings, distinguishing between the two. He writes that we could not possibly live without an overall, conscious awareness of our own feelings at any given moment or we would perish. We are always in the process of self-preservation and working towards homeostasis. Not only are we naturally hardwired to cooperate with and show compassion for others, but we also know and feel that we are doing so and can reflect on this emotion. The awareness of feelings, not C-fibres firing, is crucial for survival and harmony. Damasio writes:

Feelings are the mental manifestations of balance and harmony, of disharmony and discord... The study of social emotions is in its infancy. If the cognitive and neurobiological investigations of emotions and feelings can join forces with, for example, anthropology and evolutionary psychology, it is likely that some of [my] suggestions contained [here] can be tested.²

One consequence we can draw from these conclusions would also be that questions and methods concerning the ways in which we think about how it is we obtain knowledge to begin with. The consequence will include these epistemological and, at times, ontological questions. They will not be able to be examined without the social context intimately bound together with
them. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour points our attention to the authors Steven Shapin & Simon Schaffer and their work *History of Science and its Sociological Reconstruction*. Latour cites this work repeatedly concluding, “‘questions of epistemology are also questions of social order.’ It is impossible to do justice to either question if the two are separated…” In other words, we cannot know anything at all about human knowledge, reason, and emotion without the world itself and without reflecting on one’s own actions with others. Also, questions concerning knowledge and how we obtain and retain knowledge will have to include the socio-emotional dynamic. One will have to take into account that we are aware of our body’s interactions with the environment constantly and that this directly affects reasoning abilities. One cannot avoid the other along with the objects of reality or your continual motion would cease. We are compelled to yield to the world around and within us at all times.

Damasio goes on to show, following the Early Modern Philosopher Baruch Spinoza, that emotion and feeling play a crucial role in decision-making abilities as a person develops. This would seem intuitive, but it is hardly accepted throughout professional circles and less so when the implications of this claim are drawn out. For example, if a child is physically or sexually abused and not allowed to talk with someone about it, escape the perpetrator, and express their rage and sadness about the experience, they will ultimately freeze emotionally on some level and, at times, physically, or worse, their bodies and brains will become familiar with this sort of trauma, enabling them to be re-traumatized repeatedly later in life much more easily or need to repeat the trauma on others releasing the repressed tensions of the past.

Some of the internal bodily areas that can be damaged by abuse, for example, are in the prefrontal cortex, where emotions and feelings actively participate with memory and reasoning abilities continually, including decision making and the awareness of emotions such as embarrassment, contempt, sympathy or compassion, awe or wonder. But the prefrontal cortex, like every other part or system of the body, needs absolutely every other system of the body, and its memory dimensions, in order to work properly towards the balance of the organism.

There is little question that the integrity of emotion and feeling is necessary for normal human social behaviour…One shudders to think what the world would be like, socially speaking, if anything but a small minority of the population suffered from the condition visited upon humans with adult onset frontal lobe damage. The shudder is even greater when we imagine a large population of
patients who sustained damage to the frontal lobe early in their lives.\textsuperscript{12}

When one is abused the probability of early onset frontal lobe damage is incredibly high. If there is this type of trauma in processing and feeling, and not only to the frontal lobe of the brain, but throughout the entire body itself, how can the abused child go on to develop reasoning skills and various ranges of emotions and actions, such as cooperation and compassion that promote their own and other’s self-preservation? How can they learn to think clearly and show compassion to their neighbour? In an even larger consequence of this type of brain and body damage to a person, the Spinzoistic Damasio continues:

If social emotions and feelings are not properly deployed, and if the relation between social situations and joy and sorrow breaks down, the individual cannot categorize the experience of events in his autobiographical memory record according to the emotion/feeling mark that confers ‘goodness’ or ‘badness’ upon those experiences.\textsuperscript{13}

The child’s mind may not be able to realize what is occurring is not good for them, but their body will remember. Our bodies remember. This is also one way to consider how it is possible for someone who was abused as a child to grow up and fall into situations where their lack of decision making abilities and conscious feelings for their own well being allowed them to be easily abused again as an adult.\textsuperscript{14} An even further crucial conclusion is drawn out by Damasio when he claims, “Our life must be regulated not only by our own desires and feelings but also by our concern for the desires and feelings of others...Conscious humans know of appetites and emotions as feelings, and those feelings deepen their knowledge of the fragility of life and turn it into a concern. ...The concern overflows form the self to the other.”\textsuperscript{15} This is why he was pleased to report his findings of the same conclusions made by the philosopher Spinoza back in the 17\textsuperscript{th} Century in his infamous work the \textit{Ethics}. Spinoza, without the use of computer imaging and modern day social experiments, wrote:

The human body stands in need for its preservation of a number of other bodies, by which it is continually…regenerated.\textsuperscript{16}
Notes

1 Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (New York: Harcourt, 2003), p.174-176. Citation from Spinoza’s *Theological Political Treatise*. By “extended consciousness” I also intend to refer to Damasio and the fields of neuro-psychology and neurobiology where they define extended consciousness as “…the sense of personal past and anticipated future…the state of feeling prompts the brain to process emotion-related objects and situations saliently.” Ibid. p. 177.


4 Miller, p. xii.

5 Miller, pp. xii-xiii and all of *For Your Own Good*, as well as her work from 2005 *The Body Never Lies*, discusses the implications of “poisonous pedagogy.”

6 In *For Your Own Good* Miller cites German encyclopedias and parenting manuals on child rearing at length, which included “exuberance” in a child as a type of disease that needed to be controlled.

7 Miller, p. 259, italics added.

8 Miller, p. 258-259.

9 Damasio, 139 & 169.


12 Damasio, p. 155.

13 Damasio, p. 159. This work and its conclusions seem crucial in the struggle against something as ignored as child abuse and its larger social-political and socio-emotional consequences.


15 Damasio, p. 166 & 174.

Bibliography


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Monstrous Makeovers:
Transforming ‘Monsters’ into Beauty Queens.

Peri Bradley

Abstract: Each culture and each era creates its own monsters that embody and express the fears and anxieties specific to the environment of that particular generation. Contemporary culture has produced the phenomenon of ‘Transformation TV’, including Extreme Makeover (Living TV), The Swan (Living TV), Ten Years Younger (Channel 4) and Change My Life (Channel Five). This new form of Reality TV deals with notions of everyday ‘monsters’ whose physical appearance transgresses the ‘normal’ boundaries that are established and maintained by the power of the media. This paper proposes to examine and analyse the process by which contemporary culture initially creates and eventually mutates these monstrous ‘marks’ of difference. These programmes employ signifiers that have accumulated meaning from the horror genre, in order to construct monsters within the domestic sphere. In a transformation process reminiscent of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde in reverse, transgressive bodies are sculpted into culturally acceptable clones. This process is long and arduous, resembling a rites of passage journey into the hierarchy of the glamorous and the beautiful, and it is utilised in various ways to construct various meanings. Employing and updating the theories of Foucault and the body as structure of power, Jason Jacob’s theory of the ‘morbid gaze’, looking at the juxtaposition of morbidity and glamour in depictions of the medical world, and Mulvey’s theory of ‘the look’ and woman as site of spectacle, these ‘Monstrous Makeovers’ will be deconstructed so as to reveal the nature and meaning of these present-day monsters.

Key Words: Transforming Body, Body Modification, Plastic Surgery, Reality TV, Body Horror.

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Each era creates its own horror stories, inhabited by its own monsters, who are moulded and mutated in order to graphically express the fears and anxieties of that specific time and generation. Drawing on a rich and ancient history of myth and fairy tales the 20th century spewed forth a multitude of visual representations of monsters and creatures from various cultures that previously could only be imagined or presented in a static form. With the advent of Film and then TV these monsters moved, breathed, and proceeded to terrify their audiences to a new and unknown level. Emerging
into the 21st Century monsters have had to metamorphose yet again so as to articulate the concerns of a contemporary society in the era of Reality TV.

One such Reality TV text that particularly engages with the concept of monsters and the monstrous is The Swan (Living TV). This programme is a complex hybrid of several Reality TV formats, that takes two ‘monsters’ or contestants each week and after a three-month process of ‘extreme makeover’ surgery chooses who is worthy to go forward to the ultimate Beauty Pageant. We as viewers, or even voyeurs, are invited on this journey of almost magical or supernatural transformation, and are rapidly absorbed into the text through an intricate procedure that weaves together the conventions of the Horror and Melodrama filmic genres, and the characteristics of the Reality TV sub-genre, Trauma TV.

1. Film and TV Genres: Intertextuality, Hybridity and Spectacle.

Whilst revisiting the source of many theoretical and academic debates over the concept of ‘the look’ and the site of spectacle, Laura Mulvey’s Visual and Other Pleasures, I read a short account ‘The Spectacle is Vulnerable: Miss World 1970’ describing how she and other Women’s Lib members staged a demonstration at the Miss World Pageant at the Albert Hall. A quote from this account, states of the contestants,

Their condition is the condition of all women, born to be defined by their physical attributes, born to give birth, or if born pretty, born lucky: a condition which makes it acceptable, within the bourgeois ethic, for girls to parade, silent and smiling, to be judged on the merits of their figures and faces.¹

The Swan takes this statement and neutralises it or even reverses it, as the chosen contestants are not ‘born pretty’ but are rather selected as raw materials with the potential for being ‘recreated’ pretty. Mulvey’s spectacle of ‘the look’ is no longer the woman it is now the transformation. How The Swan employs this spectacle through its structure and psychological manipulation as a Reality TV programme is important and therefore some historical and cultural context is required.

Reality TV actually first emerged in the US in the early 1990’s partly as a response to economic pressure. It initially adopted the address of factual news magazine programmes, typically based around crime, accident and health stories; what Jason Jacobs calls ‘Trauma TV’. These programmes attempted to combine what he states is ‘a moral or public service safety address with an explicitly tabloid voyeurism’² As a result of the saturation of Reality TV during this brief and intense period, at the end of the industry recession in 1993 there was a resurgence of drama programming that made
use of the stylistic rhetoric and aesthetics of reality programming as well as their voyeuristic impulse. These programmes worked with the concept that televisual space was no longer necessarily narrativised. The framing of ‘dead’ space actually contributed to the contingent reality, making it appear that events were being discovered rather than staged. This can be seen in programmes like ER. The knock on effect of this new genre of drama programming on Reality TV is what we now see in The Swan. There has been a further hybridisation resulting in the dramatic narrativisation of the ‘real’.

This can be easily traced throughout each episode of The Swan, as not only TV generic conventions are employed, but, as is suitable for an audience demographic consisting largely of women, also the filmic genre of melodrama but, most relevantly to this paper, a suppressed and sanitised horror genre. I have dubbed this new sub-genre of reality TV ‘Transformation TV’, which includes other programmes that transform your car and your house as well as your body, and I want to spend a moment looking at its pleasures and its consequences.

2. Transformation TV: Its Pleasures and its Consequences

Transformation TV is closely aligned with the transformation of body horror movies, such as The Thing (1982) and An American Werewolf in London (1982). To demonstrate the visceral pleasures of the voyeurism involved in viewing these transformations, I want to analyse the close visual link between the monsters in the horror films and the women who are prepared to take part in their own horrific scenario as they undergo extreme plastic surgery.

In the body horror genre the spectacle employed is one of the hidden and forbidden being allowed to surface with terrifying consequences and a loss of bodily cohesion. As previously stated, the horror genre often expresses the social and cultural anxieties of its era and when located within the body these anxieties can demonstrate a quest for a stable identity, a fear of the ‘self’ being swallowed up in the chaos of an uncertain universe. In this way the body becomes the narrative as various depictions of its boundaries being invaded, wounded, injured and bleeding reveal its fragility and instability as well as being the reward of spectacle for the voyeur for managing to survive the terrifying experience of viewing its dissolution.

Closely related to the concept of ‘beast flesh’ these horror films reveal a loss of bodily stability that Virginia Blum, in her book Flesh Wounds: The Culture of Cosmetic Surgery, identifies as being due to ‘a multitude of appetites that surge through and wreck the internal unity’ She postulates that as in H.G. Welles’ novel The Island of Dr Moreau, once the hand of the creator is lifted from the creatures recreated as humans, the beast flesh creeps back, and this leaves plastic surgery recipients wondering if their
‘creator’, the plastic surgeon, can rescue them from what the beast flesh represents for them, “aging, ugliness, becoming unlovable.”

The melodrama genre conventions employed in the programme also express the body as unstable and therefore malleable or plastic as we see the ‘true’ identity of the women emerge, after careful, largely male nurturing and a good stylist. The difference between the generic transformations is in their eventual expression of the body. In horror it is the loss of cohesion, the body becomes so brutalised it is no longer capable of signification, it is merely ‘meat’. In melodrama we are aware from the beginning that it is essential for the transformation to transpire in order for a healing process to take place, a healthy/beautiful body equals a healthy/beautiful mind. The split or lack of cohesion between the two, the beautiful mind trapped in the monstrous body, occurs at the start of the programme and the body narrative moves us forward to a apparently stable identity. However the darker nature of the horror genre creates critical discourses of the cultural environment that spawns it, whilst the melodrama genre tends to be viewed as a positive, suturing text that leaves its audience soothed and satisfied with the world. For this reason The Swan’s use of the two genres’ visual conventions is effective but disturbingly at odds with one another. The Swan as the hybrid sub-genre of Transformation TV is a fusion of melodrama, horror and Trauma TV that plays with the conventions of each genre and ultimately disturbs our perceptions of the body, and therefore identity, as ever being capable of stability.

3. ‘Reading’ The Swan

Reading or deconstructing The Swan reveals a heart-rending search for a stable cultural identity, by women with low self-esteem and an almost dysmorphic self body image. These ‘monstrous’ women who exist on the periphery of normality, seek to physically transform, as Kathy Davis states in Dubious Equalities & Embodied Differences, as a way of ‘renegotiating one’s identity and “paradoxically, for becoming an embodied subject rather than ‘just a body.”’ Their investment in their body can be analysed further in light of this quote from Foucault,

Historians long ago began to write the history of the body… the body is…directly involved in the political field: power relations have a direct hold upon it; they…force it…to emit signs. The political investment of the body is bound up,…with its economic use;,…there may be a ‘knowledge’ of the body that is not exactly the science of its functioning, and a mastery of its forces, more… the ability to conquer them; this knowledge and this mastery
constitute what might be called the political technology of the body.5

To mentally overcome the physical nature and responses of the body is to gain power, not just over the body, but over that body’s place within culture. The ‘monster women’ who inhabit the domestic sphere are viewed as they reveal the abnormal bodies they wish to transform and thereby control. We see them shaving their faces, exposing drooping flesh, crooked noses and rotting teeth. They name themselves as ‘monster’, as they are filmed fragmenting their bodies, by displaying their defects and offering them up for surgery. Their bodies possess no cultural capital and therefore possess no power. They believe plastic surgery will transform them and empower them simultaneously.

The structure of the programme engages with filmic genres in order to access the desired audience response. For example, to elicit an emotional and tearful release, the mise-en-scene and the narrative arrangement are recognizably those of the movie melodrama. To inspire fear and trepidation these are transferred to the generic conventions of the Horror movie as the women’s bodies are represented as transgressive and monstrous and we are privy to the processes they have to endure to subdue the beast-flesh.

Engaging with this concept of the generic hybridity of Transformation TV it is necessary to look at how The Swan uses the conventions of the horror movie. Preoccupations with the darker side of looking are most apparent in horror movies, which tend to move the audience through a range of emotional responses, from anticipation, to fear through to outright terror. The Swan uses the women’s bodies as spectacle in a similar way particularly immediately before and after surgery.

The first port of call for most Contestants who have ‘dental issues’ (as the Team of Experts puts it) is the dentist, before any other surgery can be performed. For the majority of people the Dental Surgery is a site of terror, with its many tools capable of inflicting intense pain, and it has been featured as a place of torture and horror in films like Marathon Man (1976). In The Swan we are presented with close ups of the contestant’s face as she trembles with trepidation, and again when a large plastic brace is placed in the mouth, forcing the lips away from the gums in an unnatural and terrifying grimace. Many contestants have ‘dental issues’ and with their mouth in this position we are privileged to a view of the bodily decay and corruption that is often the subject of horror movies. The parallel between their appearance at this stage and the depiction of a classic horror movie monster is undeniable and the contestant in the clip even identifies herself as a monster. Rotten teeth are a signifier of a rotten nature; bodily decay is equated with moral decay. Identification at this point is important, as the audience needs to directly experience the horror of looking this way. This extreme is necessary so as to
fully appreciate the ‘perfection’ of the end result. Unlike Extreme Makeover, another programme that uses plastic surgery to transform people’s bodies and lives, The Swan does not show the gory detail of its surgery as part of its Spectacle. Instead of the body remaining the focus throughout, Spectacle shifts between the body and agents of transformation. When we first see the women before surgery, they are in the unflattering blue hospital gowns. Their bodies have literally been ‘mapped out’, where the surgeon has drawn dotted guidelines on the skin to be cut and altered. These guidelines have many connotations but are particularly reminiscent of the scene in Silence of The Lambs (1990) where Clarice discovers that Buffalo Bill is constructing his feminine identity from the skins of his victims.

It is with this concept in mind that the women’s bodies in The Swan take on the presence of plasticity, of malleable material that can become anything. Suddenly birth and life do not ‘write’ the human body, it is now a matter of choice. We now have the power to narrate our own corporeal presence. There is also an echo of cut-out paper dolls and their outfits, equating the body with clothing, giving the impression that the process required for the desired body/outfit is a simple, quick and painless cut and stitch. This impression is sustained by the filming of the actual surgery. The Spectacle is shifted away from the body to the site of surgery. The operating room, the instruments, the medical technology, the gowned and masked surgeons and nurses become the focus of Spectacle. Here we return to the conventions of the Melodrama. These brave and fearless men and women are using their skills and experience to save these women’s (spiritual) lives. Unlike Extreme Makeover, where surgery is displayed in detail, The Swan contracts time and the operations disappear in a blur of accelerated time. One of the reasons for this formal device is the close identification between the viewer and the viewed sought for by the programme creators. The surgery therefore must be perceived as quick and non-invasive, in order to maintain the fiction of the body as plastic. So in a surreal moment before surgery commences, the spectator is confronted with the sight of a huge anaesthetic mask descending towards them as they are directly placed in the contestant’s position on the operating table.

Identification of the audience with the protagonist is therefore enforced, enabling a deeper absorption into the fiction. Although The Swan is Reality TV it is constructed and edited to create a fiction of Spectacle that becomes even more complex as we approach the final reveal with its plethora of audiences/spectators and its multi-narrative function.

Post-op, we behold the women in a transitional state, swathed in bandages, where the visual images link to those horror films and film-noir of the 1930’s: The Invisible Man, The Mummy, The Bride of Frankenstein and Eyes without a Face. The women are still maintained as ‘Monstrous’, but there is now a pleasurable anticipation as the voyeuristic audience begin to
imagine the complete transformation. As Jason Jacob states, ‘…there are parallels between the cultural fascination with the body as either sick or perfected and the attractions of a genre that seems to revel in the juxtaposition of morbidity and glamour.’ In The Swan the women maintain their post surgery paraphernalia of bandages and plasters up until the last minute in order to prolong the time before the final transformation is revealed. This has created ‘makeover chic’ with the dressings, bruisings and swellings having taken on a borrowed sense of glamour, to have become a signifier of veiled and potential beauty, in some ways more alluring than the final standardised version we are offered. It could also be as Jason Jacobs states, when speaking of the operation scenes in ER and Chicago Hope, that ‘…such scenes become routinised and, to a certain extent, glamorised while maintaining an underlying aesthetic “kick” of the visceral.’ Our voyeuristic tendencies lead us to a heightened state of anticipation; we have made it through the masochistic and vicariously shared pain of the dental surgery and the operating theatre, and we now long for the final transformation, to experience the monstrous woman’s joyful emotions as we share with her the first sight of her body, finally stripped bare of the ‘beast-flesh’.

The pleasures experienced by the contestant as her own voyeur, whilst contemplating a body that is known but unknown, familiar but unfamiliar, are complex and many. The body has become a successful project completed; the body now conforms to the ideal image; the body has been contained and disciplined; the body is power; the body is plastic. For the other voyeurs – the experts and the TV audience, what pleasures are received? The spectacle has taken its audience through a journey of vicarious and heightened emotional narratives contained in and expressed by transgressive bodies. This narrative reaches a satisfying and suturing conclusion as the body finally overcomes the physical and psychological barriers presented by nature and birth to be fully realised as the ‘ideal’ body. The monster is overcome and banished; but is the beast-flesh vanquished or merely suppressed? Has the monstrous woman simply been turned inside out, so that her transgressive nature now dwells inside instead of out? Without the hand of her own personal ‘Dr Moreau’ upon her, will her ‘beast-flesh’, her insecurities, her true ‘ugliness’, assert themselves once more?

4. The Real Monsters

These questions lead to the conclusion that all is not as perfect and ideal as it seems. After experiencing the entire series and reaching the final Beauty Pageant it becomes apparent that the ideal body and face reproduced twelve times creates an unnerving sense of repetition and cloning. Another sci-fi horror springs to mind; The Stepford Wives (1978 and 2003), which was incidentally written by Ira Levin as a ‘savage comment on a media driven society which values the pursuit of youth and beauty above all else’.
Evidently perfection can also be monstrous, so the question begs to be asked, who are the real monsters?

Are they the transgressive and imperfect bodies we observe at the beginning of the programmes, or are they the cloned and terrifyingly perfect Beauty Queens revealed at the end. Or, as in Mary Shelley’s timeless *Frankenstein*, is it the human facilitators, the surgeons, who caught up in an omniscient fervour create/recreate, ultimately for their own satisfaction (and lots of money!) and then abandon their ‘children’, is it they who become the true monsters?

**Notes**

6 Jacobs, p65

**Bibliography**


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To Be or Not to Be a Monster

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Abstract: Hermaphroditism is a category of a bodily “meaning” that has been perceived differently through time. For instance, in the Middle Ages, Teratology, the science of monsters, regarded “monstrous births”; hermaphroditism included, as omens, predictions or divine warnings. Later, in the early modern period, it was possible to explain anomalous beings in terms of variations of normal development. By transferring hermaphroditism and other “monstrosities” from mythology into the category of pathology, the medical discourse and medical practice became the source of judgement and a social ambiguous bodily condition was altered into a pathological threat that could be classified, categorised and therefore banned through medicalisation.

In my paper I plan to focus on two different representations of hermaphrodites as they appear in Herculine Barbin (1980), edited by Foucault, and Eugenides’s Middlesex (2002) and to also question the significance of associating the word “monster” with the hermaphrodite? On the one hand, hermaphroditism is mainly defined through “deformed” anatomy and clearly connected to transgression of sex/gender boundaries. On the other, it links critically the representations of hermaphrodites with the clinical gaze of the medical establishment. This institution creates “monsters” from all those who do not fit the pattern. Thus, the hermaphrodite body with its simultaneous lack (small penis) and excess (big clitoris) overspills the boundaries and becomes monstrous.

Key Words: hermaphrodite, monster, difference, choice, body, truth, sex

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My paper investigates two different portrayals of the hermaphrodite body as sites for the confrontation of medical, cultural and personal discourses of sexuality. It will therefore show how differences of the bodily kind are dealt with within both personal and scientific discourse. Herculine Barbin and Middlesex are both books about pseudo-hermaphrodites that had female childhoods and male adulthood. Alexina’s and Calliope’s body serves as a surface on which various cultural meanings are negotiated between doctors, relatives and the protagonist him/herself. This cultural contest over the ultimate interpretation of hermaphroditism eventually demonstrates the futility of the nature/nurture binary, as neither those perceiving gender as
culturally constructed nor those viewing gender as biologically determined succeed in explaining the ambivalent nature of hermaphroditism. I will show how this “interpretative trouble” undermines the meaningfulness of the sex binary itself while also leaving space for more personal choices. Also, by translating “hermaphroditism” into a question of genetic deviance rather than difference, modern scientific discourse continues the historical fascination with the sexual status of the “hermaphrodite”. Thus, my paper also plans to answer the following question: how to liberate sexual positionalities, one of which is hermaphroditism itself, which are unthinkable because, no longer mastered by opposition and representation, they function as pure difference? As Foucault puts it,

To liberate difference we need a thought without contradiction, without dialectic, without negation: a thought that says yes to divergence; affirmative thought whose instrument is disjunction; a thought of the multiple-of the nomadic and dispersed multiplicity that is not limited or confined by the constraints of self-similarity.¹

The label “monster” (from Latin: monstrum: horrifying character, beast, prodigy) is commonly used to designate the different others, the enemies. The monster exists as a category of “Other” on to which the anxieties of the “normal” are displaced. Further, it exists as a category of abjection in order to “properly” discipline the “normal”. The objectification of “others” into monsters is also the effect of the hybrid qualities within monsters: one never knows where to situate oneself. As Rosi Braidotti asserts in Nomadic Subjects,

by MONSTERS I mean a third kind of discourse: the history and philosophy of the biological sciences, and their relation to difference and to different bodies. Monsters are human beings who are born with congenital malformations of their bodily organism. They also represent the in between, the mixed, the ambivalent as implied in the ancient Greek root of the word monsters, teras, which means both horrible and wonderful, object of aberration and adoration. Since the nineteenth century, following the classification system of monstrosity by Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, bodily malformations have been defined in terms of excess, lack, or displacement of organs... The monster is the bodily incarnation of difference from the basic human norm; it is a deviant, an a-nomaly; it is abnormal.²
Due to the presence of ambiguous genitals, hermaphrodites have always been perceived as monsters. Hybrids of nature and technology, as well as of culture and social reality, they transgress and put into question normal measurements and classifications, as well as issues of gender and reproduction. The concept of monster involves a certain engagement with borders and boundaries. Hermaphrodites occupy a space that is neither quite male/masculine nor quite female/feminine; this in-between-ness is in a space that is not easily classified or categorized, and it is therefore rendered unintelligible and monstrous, since hermaphrodites are beings without sex or beings with too much sex. They might be perceived as creatures who dominate and threaten. As persons who fall outside the sexual dimorphism, outside the terms “male” and “female”, or “man” and “woman”, around which the world is organized as a symbolic scheme, hermaphrodites are seen as “deviants”, “marginal”. Thus, they are rather considered to be temporary stopping points along an axis of pathology in which one is being made to rectify the situation of “having the wrong body”, a body unfinished, which has to be ‘corrected’. According to Herdt,

the hermaphrodite, for instance, may become a symbol of boundary blurring: of the anomalous, the unclean, the tainted, the morally inept or corrupt, indeed, the ‘monsters’ of the cultural imagination of modern Americans.³

The aim of reiterating subjectivity as fixed, reliable, finished and easily defined through frequently binarised established subject positions such as male, female, straight, gay, black and white allows only for either/or options. Since society accepts only a stratified sex/gender system, a binary system of classification and an unambiguously binary character of gender, those things residing outside the accepted and central terms will continue to be perceived as impure states, residing at symbolic interstices between male and female, being both or neither (“proper” masculinity or femininity). Hermaphrodites as monsters belong to a tradition in which “excessive” gender/sex categories are interpreted as confused or impure states. Yet, by locating monstrosity primarily within monstrous gender and monstrous sexuality, Judith Halberstam writes that

the monster always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities and so we need monsters and we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities.⁴

How then did the hermaphrodite, who currently occupies a position which is nowhere, which is neither a man, nor a woman, and which is outside
the binary oppositions of gendered discourse, come to generate a true, effective and representational counter-discourse in order to speak from outside the boundaries of gender? How can the hermaphrodite speak? And if s/he were to speak, what would s/he say?

Trying to answer the question “Do we truly need a true sex?”, addressed in the introduction to the book itself, Herculine Barbin. Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite and in setting the context of Barbin’s memoirs, Foucault describes the period of the 1860’s to 1870’s negatively as

[...]one of those periods when investigations of sexual identity were carried out with the most intensity, in an attempt not only to establish the true sex of hermaphrodites but also to identify, classify and characterise the different types of perversions.

The case of Alexina Herculine Barbin (1838-1868) is probably the most famous case of hermaphroditism in the nineteenth century. Raised as a girl she became a female teacher in her early twenties. Her medical discovery as truly male actually only happened after her suicide, but medical attention was devoted earlier. This medical attention was caused by her search for support concerning her desire for her virginal girl friend Sara. Foucault contrasts the French Department of Public Hygiene’s graphic medical descriptions of Herculine’s body before and after her death, with the confused diary entries of the young person growing up in an orphanage, trying to sort out the nature of her feminine or masculine sex. In his introduction to the autobiography of the nineteenth-century hermaphrodite, Michel Foucault addresses the question of the truth of sexuality, especially the truth as sought and defined by the legal and medical-psychiatric authorities of the period. Foucault argues that for centuries “it was quite simply agreed that hermaphrodites had two sexes”. In the middle ages it was up to the father or the godfather to determine which sex was going to be retained at the time of baptism. Foucault goes on to say,

But later on the threshold of adulthood, when the time came for them to marry, hermaphrodites were free to decide for themselves if they wished to go on being of the sex which had been assigned to them, or if they preferred the other. The only imperative was that they should not change it again but keep the sex they had then declared until the end of their lives, under pain of being labelled sodomites. Changes of option, not the anatomical mixture
of the sexes, were what gave rise to most of the condemnations of hermaphrodites in the records that survive in France for the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.7

What Foucault was trying to say through his publication was that quite suddenly, in the modern age, everybody was to have one and only one sex and he thus probed the policing function of medical discourses that attempted to fix “true” sexual identities. The scientific establishment insisted that every human subject must be biologically grounded in one and only one sex. Everybody was to have his or her primary, profound, determined and determining sexual identity; as for the elements of the other sex that might appear, they could only be accidental, superficial, or even quite simply elusive.

From the legal point of view, this obviously implied the disappearance of free choice. It was no longer up to the individual to decide which sex he wished to belong to, juridically or socially. Rather, it was up to the expert to say which sex nature had chosen for him and to which society must consequently ask him to adhere.8

The hermaphrodite upset the insistence of the medico-juridical discourse that there was an essential relation between sex and truth: one sex and just one truth. Hermaphrodites were thus always dismissed as “pseudo-hermaphrodites”, beneath whose false or duplicitous claims to sexual doubleness lurked the monosexual truth discoverable only by licensed “experts”. So how to deal with the hermaphrodite like Herculine Barbin or the fictional hermaphrodite that inhabits Eugenides’s fiction?

Contemporaries assumed that it was Barbin’s testes that made her desire Sara, and they also revealed the inappropriate social role that enabled Barbin to get access to female spaces, one of which was the monastery. So, it was not her anatomy, her “enlarged clitoris”, later redefined as a “small penis”, that was of interest for the medical establishment. It was not the size of an organ but the use of it that was the problem. It was more Barbin’s crossing of gender boundaries and the consequential deviant behaviour that was the object of medical scrutiny and reprobation. Since the signifier of the true sex/gender in Alexina’s case was having testes, specialists viewed her as the possessor of the phallus and consequently she could only be accepted through a reassignment as an appropriate possessor of such power, as a man. Thus, with the growing acknowledgement of the definition of true hermaphroditism, Barbin came to be “legally” redefined as a true male. But did she truly feel like a man? Her narrative goes like this:
According to my civil status, I was henceforth to belong to that half of the human species which is called the stronger sex. I, who had been raised until the age of twenty-one in religious houses, among shy female companions, was going to leave that whole delightful past far behind me, like Achilles, and enter the lists, armed with my weakness alone and my deep inexperience of men and things.9

Alexina fell on the side of the medical system that declared her to have had a sex that was at least more masculine, and unmistakably so, if not truly and solely male. At the very least, it appears that Alexina felt herself radically unprepared to live in the world of men, as a man. And indeed, within a few years of having her civil status changed, Alexina did kill herself, though not without first leaving a record of her life behind. My assumption is Barbin began to feel herself monstrous the very moment the others chose “his true” identity for her. From this point on, Alexina can be perceived as a tragic and pitiful creature who suffered terribly, precisely because she could not have an identity of choice, an option for her true identity, which finally led her to suicide. By adopting a male identity and living as a man, since this was a choice imposed on her by the medical establishment, Alexina became the victim of her own “monster-isation”, adopting the immanent discourse that threatened to define and other her: the discourse of a “true” sex. What really makes Alexina look monstrous is her own misery induced by her fear of a morbid sexuality, a sexuality defined by others as being wrong. The monster that she consequently became is the very creation of the Western culture.

… I was instinctively ashamed of the enormous distance that separated me from them, physically speaking. At that age, when all a woman’s graces unfold, I had neither that free and easy bearing nor the well-rounded limbs that reveal youth in full bloom.10

Yet, the limitations our cultural and biological body represents, the so-called already perfect subject body, or scientifically described and hence ‘finished’ body, is a body that is experienced or lived through being discursively situated. Weiss emphasizes, for instance, the intensification of the term monster through the passions of fascination and horror. By intensification she means some form of other-ing, the thing we call monster and the desire for it. This intensification is not of visibility or equality but precisely of discourse. Monsters “appear” only when discourse about them appears, which is why discourse and speech are as urgent issues as the bodies and acts of those addressed. Her point is an important one which comes from
the anxiety that becoming monster is fraught with the threat of being named monster by someone else in the wrong terms, as the wrong kind of monster within the wrong discursive episteme. We are only monsters in reference to those who call us monsters. The political nature of monsters seems to come directly from the acts of naming and defining, not the nature of the object named. There is no essential non-contingent thing named monster. All acts of naming, metaphoric or not, have the capacity to compel the corporeal performance of the name given, so even metaphor is not incapable of material effect. Was Alexina trapped in a name?

*Middlesex* is the story of Cal/Callie’s transformation explored through the roots of her Greek American family, their passage to America, their successes and failure and their genetic choices.

I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974.

At the age of thirteen, Callie is like every teenage girl going through puberty; trying to fit in, questioning all the feelings she is having, and trying to understand the changes her body is going through. Yet, in the spring of 1974, Calliope Stephanides, a student at a girls’ school, Grosse Pointe, MI, finds herself drawn to a classmate with a gift for acting. The passion that furtively develops between them - along with Callie’s failure to develop - leads Callie to suspect that she is not like other girls. This tall, broad-shouldered and non-menstruating girl knows she is not quite normal. The tall Calliope begins to question her gender and sexuality and she eventually turns out to realize that she “suffers” from 5-alpha-reductase deficiency, which turns her into a being both mythical and perfectly real: a hermaphrodite. After being confronted with the truth about their child, Callie’s parents, Tessie and Milton, take Callie to New York, where at 14, Callie finally thuds down at the Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic. The charismatic Dr. Peter Luce, the genetics specialist, offers a treatment recommendation to Callie’s stunned parents, a treatment similar to the one made by the real sex doctor, John Money. He concludes that hormone injections and cosmetics surgery will complete Callie’s “female gender identity”. The narrative goes like this,

Callie is a girl who has a little too much male hormone. We want to correct that… The treatment I’d recommend for your daughter is twofold. First, hormone injections. Second, cosmetic surgery. The hormone treatments will initiate breast development and enhance her female secondary characteristics. The surgery will make Callie
look exactly like the girl she feels herself to be. In fact, she will be that girl. Her outside and inside will conform. She will look like a normal girl. Nobody will be able to tell a thing. And then Callie can go on and enjoy her life.¹²

At this point, Cal also discovers what a hermaphrodite is and who the others think s/he is: a monster.

Hermaphrodite – 1. One having the sex organs and many of the secondary sex characteristics of both male and female. 2. Anything comprised of a combination of diverse or contradictory elements. See synonyms at Monster…

The synonym was official, authoritative; it was the verdict that the culture gave on a person like her. Monster. That was what she was.¹³

Nevertheless, Cal is not the faithful adherent of either the nature or the nurture camp; s/he eventually runs away to avoid undergoing surgery and hormone treatments at the hands of a doctor who thinks that fourteen years of living as a girl must count more than the male identity Cal feels to be more willing to embrace. Cal reclaims h/er “body narrative” from the medical establishment and the biomedical, academic discussion is interrupted by the newly emerged possibility of h/er choice. Cal runs away, never to be “Callie” again. S/he gets the long locks of hair cut off, buys a suit at Goodwill, and hitchhikes across the country, ending up in San Francisco. Cal decides to live as both and neither as a man and a woman. S/he decides that s/he will live between the genders and be “Middlesex”.

I never felt out of place being a girl. I still don’t feel entirely at home among men… And so a strange new possibility is arising. Compromised, indefinite, sketchy, but not entirely obliterated: free will is making a comeback. Biology gives you a brain. Life turns it into a mind.¹⁴

Choosing brings the liberation of one’s sexual desire and it is a form that protest takes against the elimination of various forms of experience. Cal eventually chooses to choose, to have both h/er body and options open. S/he is not both man and woman, “throbbing”, like Eliot’s Tiresias, “between two lives”. S/he is the absence of either, a body which inhabits a liminal realm. Cal’s self-comparisons to Tiresias, the seer who also changed genders, and to the Minotaur, which was also half one thing and half another, is best
understood literally rather than literally. Cal does not believe that genetics, which he calls the scientific version of the ancient Greek notion of fate, can explain his life. By choosing to be an unstable and metamorphic subject, Cal has the ability to move between the genders, to see not with the monovision of one sex but in the stereoscope of both. By doing this, s/he affirms a force of becoming within the sexual relation itself so that it is no longer a sexual or gendered identification, but becomes, rather, a question of nomad identity open to new constructions of subjectivity. H/er case belies society’s insistence that sexuality must have as its truth an exclusive either/or, for she is like Hermaphroditus in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* both “am” and “am not” at once. While, as we have already seen, Herculine Barbin looks upon h/er transformation as a source of anxiety and pain, Eugenides gives his character strength that reflects the entirety and variety of life’s different experiences. After all, Cal says, “my change from girl to boy was far less dramatic than the distance anybody travels from infancy to adulthood.” When Callie finds out that she is biologically a boy, she does not indulge in self-pity and instead chooses to avoid the operation that will supposedly restore her social gender identity. She writes in her note to her parents that

I am not a girl. I’m a boy. That’s what I found out today. So I’m going where no one knows me...Please don’t worry about me. I will be all right.

Theorising the body as existing not purely as a spatial subject, but in time as a series of open reconfigurations and constant change suggests other ways of understanding the self and the subject as being in permanent flux. What we learn from Cal is that all subjects are open to the potential of perverting themselves and each other through act, the force of relation, and affect, but none are pervert or monstrous in an ontologically static sense. Cal comes to realize that “Shame over having a body unlike other bodies was passing away. The monster feeling was fading.” Eventually, Cal/lie is both a body to look at and a verbal creation. Yet, the latter seems to define his being far more accurately and wholly than the former. By his power to rename and re-value the “monster”, Cal proves the potential for resistance through changing the meaning and hence value of this term. As a verbal creature, Peter Brooks argues, the Monster is the very opposite of monstrosity, “he is a sympathetic and persuasive participant in Western culture.” Also, Braidotti emphasizes,

We need to learn to think of the anomalous, the monstrously different not as a sign of pejoration but as the
unfolding of virtual possibilities that point to positive alternatives for us all.¹⁹

Notes

9 M Foucault, *Herculine Barbin*, p.89.
Bibliography


**Moral Pluralism in David Milch’s *Deadwood***

*Diane Cook*

**Abstract:** One of the most fascinating aspects of contemporary American television drama is the popularity garnered by various series that have taken latter-day moral absolutism to task. Many have raised crucial ethical questions by exploring moral dilemmas, and even posited them as insoluble. Eg *The Sopranos, The Shield, Oz*, the *Law and Order* franchise, and *Deadwood* have utilised the arena of crime and punishment to explore moral issues with candour and sophistication.

Within these works, evil is not manifest in external agencies but solely in the human psyche; it cannot be vanquished readily, and moral absolutism offers only a panacea. Such identification of a human locus for the phenomenon of evil has made for numerous engaging ethical perspectives, but *Deadwood* is an especially interesting case in point because of creator/producer David Milch’s stated views on morality, and the thematic points he has intended *Deadwood* to make.

Arguably, the series’ most rewarding aspects are the profound humanism beneath *Deadwood’s* viscerally disturbing surface, and Milch’s brand of moral relativism - what he offers in *Deadwood* is a definition of evil partly as a failure to recognise our interdependence.

**Key Words:** Deadwood, David Milch, moral relativism, television, drama

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In their essay *TV as a Cultural Form*, Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch make a celebratory or at least optimistic pronouncement about the function of television [drama]. Building on Victor Turner’s assertions about the role of art in contemporary societies taking up the role of ritual in traditional societies, they state:

The skewed democracy of the world of television is not quite so bizarre and repressive once we admit that it is the realm in which we allow our monsters to come out and play, our dreams to be wrought into pictures, our fantasies transformed into plot structures. Cowboys, detectives, bionic men and great green hulks; fatherly physicians, glamorous female detectives; all these become part of the dramatic logic of public thought.¹ … The conflicts we see in television
Moral pluralism in David Milch’s *Deadwood*

Drama, embedded in familiar and nonthreatening frames, are conflicts ongoing in American social experience and cultural history. In a few cases we might see strong perspectives that argue for the absolute correctness of one point of view or another. But for the most part the rhetoric of television drama is a rhetoric of discussion.  

In essence, Newcomb and Hirsch see American television in part as a reflection of a vibrant (albeit limited) pluralism. They discourage us from focusing on any specific series when considering the cultural function of television per se; however, this essay does not focus on the broader functions of the medium so much as the impassioned philosophical enquiry evident in David Milch’s work, which accords precisely with Newcomb and Hirsch’s comments. It is in a similarly celebratory attitude this paper turns to *Deadwood*.

At first glance, *Deadwood* abounds with malevolence and atrocity - it spews a constant stream of aggression, gore, filth and invective. But at its core lies a profound empathy and respect for humanity in all its nobility and reprehensibility. Put simply, Milch offers scenarios rife with distress in order to posit a trenchant humanism, and a measure of moral relativism - or perhaps more correctly pluralism, in keeping with Newcomb and Hirsch’s view - as the remedy for some of what has historically ailed American culture and society, and the human condition generally. As Joseph Millichap notes in his essay *Robert Penn Warren, David Milch, and the Literary Contexts of Deadwood*, in his finest work but especially in *Deadwood*, Milch delineates “a harshly naturalistic vision of the dark and divided depths within the American national character, an identity simultaneously and paradoxically both innocent and corrupted.”

As Milch presents it, by dint of origin and circumstance Deadwood embodies a unique secular culture, one that has lost touch conventional socio-political frameworks and with spiritual/divine wisdom and authority. For many, this signals freedom from the constraints of a stifling moral code, and complements neatly the fact of Deadwood’s official non-existence. The result, at least initially, is laissez-faire society in gut-wrenching high relief. And because there is no official authority to maintain propriety or order, slights, betrayals and disappointments are avenged however the affected see fit. The strong prey on the weak with relish and abandon - extreme violence is a given - they also prosper heartily. For those who have come to the camp at least nominally in search of enterprise, adventure and progress, all this denotes a cultural/moral nadir they hardly expected; but they are a beleaguered minority.

Following from this, the agents of evil in *Deadwood* are entirely human and their evil actions are usually volitional, certainly free of...
supernatural or metaphysical influence. But this paper is not aimed at exploring definitions of evil per se - suffice to say the actions at play in Deadwood exemplify human behaviour at its most abominable, and it is not unreasonable to label this behaviour “evil.” Milch’s main points in terms of attributing blame for evil, as such, are that there is no evading individual and collective human responsibility for evil, and that will and wisdom might provide redemption – if only they were utilised.

The manifestation of evil in Deadwood begins with its backstory and narrative backdrop - white appropriation of native lands on grounds of cultural superiority, and concomitant slaughter of Native Americans, is a terrible, resonating given. So from the start, we are aware of evil perpetrated on a national/ cultural scale as an intrinsic aspect of American nationhood. The Civil War has recently ended, and the traumas it too has wrought are amply evident.

For individual antagonists, Milch first gives us Al Swearengen, proprietor of the Gem saloon. We are introduced to him by way of the beating he metes out to Trixie, his lover and “senior” whore, when she shoots a man in self-defence. Yet this is but a trivial outburst for Swearengen. He kills without hesitation or remorse if he deems it beneficial to his interests, which means he kills frequently; to add to his savage pragmatism, the dead are fed to the pigs belonging to Wu, his Chinese associate. (In a ghoulis and highly symbolic recycling, they are inevitably consumed at the township’s restaurants and domestic tables – Deadwood literally lives on the resonances of violent conflict.)

But Cy Tolliver, Swearengen’s business competitor, surpasses even Swearengen’s transgressions. Tolliver is a mix of hubris, seemingly invincible will and stealthy but extreme malevolence. Among other acts, we see Tolliver execute an adolescent huckster over a minor slight and then force his madam, Joanie, to kill the boy’s female partner. We also see him express vehement racism and misogyny as a matter of course: “Don’t believe there’s no good woman, till you seen one with maggots in her eyes.” His intense guile would be almost vaudevillian, were it not for his sophistication and eloquence. Along with other lesser antagonists, these men evoke a mood of constant fear and menace.

As suggested by these descriptions, violence is frequent and graphic, occasionally proffered in comedic or casual boys-will-be-boys mode but more often rendered as brutal and often downright horrific. Overall, Milch’s attitude to violence seems to be much in line with Jonathan Rosenbaum’s comments on on Jim Jarmusch’s western Dead Man: “For me, at least one part of the moral force of Dead Man is tied to … refusal of grace in relation to violence.” This summation describes almost perfectly the sense Milch conveys of the repugnance and futility of violence, even as he thoroughly acknowledges its presence and the catharsis it offers men, particularly.
Many lesser aspects of moral laxity and more insipid malice are also recorded in detail. Including the flaws/weaknesses/wrongful actions of those who initially appear beyond any serious moral transgression. For example, reluctant sheriff Seth Bullock wrestles with his propensity if not penchant for violence. As much as he tries to suppress it or at least confine it to the application of justice, there are points at which he loses control, such as when he beats Swearengen nearly to death, not over any actual crime but over a personal affront.\(^7\)

In summary, all characters are conflicted at some point and to some extent by moral dilemma and the triumph of their weaknesses over best intentions and better judgement.

This lawlessness is surrounded by a dominant culture that purveys a highly disingenuous moral absolutism in the form of late 19\(^{th}\)-century social mores and platitudes. Milch emphasises several times over that these have more to do with superficial notions of respectability than any deeply-felt concern for human welfare. For example, as Deadwood’s annexation becomes imminent, several well-heeled emissaries from “civilised” society enact various hypocrisies. A magistrate from nearby Yankton blackmails Swearengen into supporting him (foolishly, he does this twice and winds up pig fodder). Later, the newly-appointed Commissioner Jarry is no sooner in Deadwood than he’s braying like an adolescent over one of Tolliver’s whores; we soon learn the purpose of his visit is to work with Tolliver to cheat prospectors out of viable gold claims. Jarry’s duplicity and hypocrisy are no surprise to anyone, and several times we are witness to derision of the idea of law and government.\(^8\) In short, these and other similar events suggest that moral absolutism is a poor means of discouraging or obscuring greed and malevolence, and no reliable vessel for the propriety or moral goodness it purports to advocate.

Not surprisingly, the program’s aesthetic emphasises darkness, containment, shadow, and effects an especially discomfiting sense of struggle, despair, and regularly, foreboding. Natural light is noticeably limited in interiors, exteriors are few, and panorama almost absent. This version of the West is not a place where Nature provides any significant compensation via for isolation and risk. And few interiors offer nurturance or succour - they’re mainly squalid, tense, dangerous. Bullock’s shop and home are the exceptions, along with Alma’s rooms, but even then interpersonal tensions often overwhelm any intended refuge. Joanie’s brothel, where she tries to forge independence from Tolliver, is an extreme case in point. Blood-red curtains seal the interiors from external view but also prevent any sense of an exterior life, and encase the inhabitants in ghastly chiaroscuro rather than the lush eroticism Joanie ostensibly intended. In a particularly chilling scene, Joanie sits alone in the centre of the drawing room, near-paralysed by her fear of becoming the next victim of the client who has slaughtered her
business partner and two of her workers – the image is in cruelly ironic contrast to the erotic and pornographic portraiture of the era it superficially mimics.

_Deadwood’s_ first two seasons offer only two wilderness idylls, and make us well aware such tranquillity is fleeting and fragile - the hinterland remains a site of unpredictable dangers, and most footage of it is laced with suspense if not actual violence. Generally, however, the hinterland and the landscape beyond remain unseen, and most other exteriors are characterised by crowding, chaos and filth.

Music, too, contributes to an overall tone of suspense and sinister undercurrents. In both the score and the (mainly traditional blues and folk) songs played over the final credits, minor keys and mournful or bittersweet melodies dominate, punctuated only occasionally by more upbeat material - often underscoring impending violence.

Within this aesthetic, Milch refers to and shifts various cinematic and televisual genre conventions. For example, _Deadwood_ reiterates to some extent the rawness and violence numerous cinematic westerns and seminal television series (especially _Gunsmoke_) and thereby inverts the conventions of “domestic” television westerns of the 1960s (_Bonanza, Big Valley_), which offered a largely comforting version of frontier life, marked by affluence and filial pleasures. However, _Deadwood’s_ closest companions, arguably, are not its generic predecessors but contemporary crime programs such as Milch and Stephen Bochco’s earlier _NYPD Blue_, along with _The Sopranos, The Shield, Oz, The Wire, and the Law and Order_ franchise, which also foreground complex moral dilemmas and morally compromised characters, and whose dramatic impact rests largely on lack of comfortable resolution. They also urge audiences to consider multiple facets of any given conflict, despite whatever truths may appear to be self-evident.

That these programs have attracted passionate audiences and widespread acclaim suggests an eagerness within American society to engage with these dilemmas. The act of readership is another issue in itself, but the acclaim does imply favourable responses to sophisticated dramatic works focused on moral issues, and acknowledgement of a more challenging socio-political and moral landscape than the Bush administration would admit. It is significant to note at this point that such programs’ emphasis on the social and/or psychospiritual efficacy of understanding others’ points of view (and the complex causal background to “criminality”) is at least as important to story as any other viewing pleasures.

It is well known that Milch was not originally interested in writing a western; he pitched a show to HBO about lawlessness and morality set in ancient Rome, but HBO had another program about the Roman empire in development. What Milch sought and found, then, was a setting that would provide for reflection at a distance on current and continuing issues around
American values and identity. Again, he is in accord here with Newcomb and Hirsch. Writing about the program Masterpiece Theater, they state:

> History is used here both to insulate the audience from the immediate impact of these unresolved issues and to demonstrate, at the same time, that the issues are universal, unbound by history and defined by the fact that we are all human.\(^\text{10}\)

Their statement is an entirely apt description of Milch’s thematic and narrative intent in Deadwood, and one that goes some way towards explaining its emotional impact.

For example, if considering the rhetoric and policies of the Bush administration in the light of Deadwood, it is hardly an effort to parallel Bush’s moral absolutism with that of the then administrations of Dakota and Minnesota, and to identify similarly inherent corruption, repression and hypocrisy. What is the invasion of Iraq about if not strategy aimed at acquisition/protection of power and wealth? And what is this if not malevolent? What is Abu Ghraib if not abominable? In Deadwood we see a nation in the process of being founded on profoundly corrupt power-mongering, and on the literal extermination of the Other; and here and now we see the reverberations for American culture.

As Lance Morrow writes:

> Bush uses the word [“evil”] in an aggressively in-your-face born-again manner that takes its resonance from a long Judeo-Christian tradition of radical evil embodied in heroically diabolical figures... In Bush’s usage, evil has the perverse prestige of John Milton’s defiant Lucifer.\(^\text{11}\)

Bush’s absolutism is also at odds with those who believe the existence of “evil” as such cannot be usurped via xenophobic foreign policy and/or military might. It is hardly a challenging exercise to compare the uncomfortable truths of Deadwood’s historical culture in the face of sanitised versions of frontier life with the uncomfortable truths of contemporary American culture in the face of sanitised versions of US culture and identity. The horrors of My Lai and Abu Ghraib, along with other revelations of US-perpetrated atrocities, have presented undeniable moral transgressions and hypocrisies that are by any standard the equal of the evils against which the US and its allies are allegedly fighting. This is not to brand the US as intrinsically or wholly immoral, but to acknowledge the profoundly harmful contradictions between rhetoric and deed. The frontier setting and the
aspirational aspects of its culture, too, serve to remind us that these issues stem from an early phase in the establishment of American values.\textsuperscript{12}

It is important to note that \textit{Deadwood}'s coverage of morality applies equally to more personal and mundane issues - in fact individual and societal morality are shown as inextricably connected. Milch’s explorations of personal accountability examine the ways in which evil and amorality reverberate throughout a community. Swearengen abuses all in his path; given the pre-emience with which his power has furnished him, along with Tolliver’s like behaviour, this culture of abuse dominates \textit{Deadwood}. Combine this with the minor immoralities of other characters and it is impossible to ignore the mechanisms, or the web of evil affecting individual and community decision-making and being.

So the nature of \textit{Deadwood}'s relevance to contemporary as well as historical moral dilemma is clear, and its attention to manifestations of evil and human error studious and rigorous. But what does Milch offer in terms of counterpoint and resolution?

To begin with, by way of counterpoint Milch offers no end of ribald (if bleak and often grotesque) humour; he also offers what is arguably some of the most richly layered and lyrical dialogue ever written for television. As for resolution, in his depictions of greed, weakness and selfishness amongst Deadwood’s more readily likeable characters, Milch offers astute portraits of universal fallibilities, and implicitly encourages tolerance and empathy for those susceptible to flawed thinking and behaviour. Through the insights he offers into Bullock’s intractability, into Alma’s jealousy, into Jane’s alcoholism and profane verbal abuse, into Trixie’s enmeshment with Swearengen, and so on, Milch sheds light on numerous habituated human shortcomings. He also emphasises how self-defeat as well as pain for others may be wrought by misguided emotion and self-interest.

Moreover, Milch offers us credible examples of uncommon selflessness, even in oppressive circumstances. One of the most affecting examples of this comes when Tolliver is in bed with Lila, one of his whores. He talks about the stupidity of religion and clearly assumes she feels the same; but Lila tells him, sincerely, she prays for his soul nightly. It is interesting to note this unsettles Tolliver more than anything we have yet seen: “All right stupid, time to shut your fucking mouth. You shut your fucking mouth, now, and turn over and close your eyes.”\textsuperscript{13} There is no more unpalatable thought for Tolliver than one of his slaves patronising him by seeking his redemption. And surely this reveals fear of some ultimate judgement - a spark of faith (or superstition) that signals even Tolliver regrets some of his actions or at least fears the consequences, because he acknowledges the actions were indeed immoral.

There are numerous other story events in this category - Jane and the already-ill Reverend Smith nursing smallpox victims tirelessly; and Doc
Cochran’s unfailing regard for all whom he treats, including Swearengen. (Doc is Deadwood’s omniscient observer, the character with an accurate overview of the town’s incessant skirmishes.)

A potent scene in this regard is one in which Swearengen euthenases Reverend Smith, whose brain lesion has caused extreme incapacitation. This is a mercy killing that moves Swearengen to (surreptitious) tears. We learn Swearengen’s brother died from a similar ailment; what the act demonstrates is an unexpected compassion underlying his customary brutality.

Here, and later when Swearengen divulges his childhood to one of his whores in the course of a blow-job, it becomes evident that like the women he exploits, his background is one of fear and misery. He was deposited at an orphanage by an uncaring mother and pimped and abused for years on end.

And therein lies one Deadwood’s main premises - that evil begets evil; but Milch suggests at least a shred of humanity can remain intact, even when an individual is severely damaged or traumatised. He also implies we would do well to foster the conditions that might heal such wounds.

It is in Reverend Smith, however, that Milch offers his most affecting advocacy for tolerance and humanism. Like Doc Cochran, Smith has a rare and objective overview of Deadwood. It is neither as extensive as Doc’s nor as suffused with horrors; but like Doc his main concern is the welfare of others. Doc is plagued by memories of what experienced in the Civil War - the deaths he could have prevented, the carnage he witnessed, so his presence in Deadwood is something of a penance. We could regard Smith as the flipside of this - an innocent who has yet to be traumatised by his own or others’ misdeeds. He shows himself willing to minister to all, and impervious to the abuse and degradation he frequently faces. In this alone, he is an exemplar of virtue. It is telling, too, that Deadwood has no house of worship. Whether this is attributable to historical reality or Milch’s purpose is a moot point; what is important is that it implies spirituality is most effective when manifest in attitude and action, when it becomes an inherent part of the individual psyche and the fabric of community rather than a matter of respectability and passionless ritual.

Smith encapsulates the core theme of Deadwood in the sermon he gives at Wild Bill Hickok’s funeral. Basing the sermon on Chapter 12 of St Paul’s first Epistle to the Corinthians, he says:

St Paul tells us “By one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jew or Gentile, bond or free, and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member but many.” He tells us: “The eye cannot say unto the hand, ‘I have no need of thee’, nor the head to the
feet, ‘I have no need of thee.’ Nay, much more those members of the body which seem to be more feeble, and those members of the body which we think of as less honourable - all are necessary.” He says that there should be no schism in the body but the members should have the same care, one to another. And whether one member suffer all the members suffer with it. I believe in God’s purpose, not knowing it.14

Here is Milch’s call for recognition of interconnectedness as the key to the resolution of human flaws, dissatisfactions and suffering. Significantly, Bullock does not understand, or want to understand, Smith’s words (the camera stays close on his reaction, which suggests frustration, disdain). He hears only riddles in the sermon. Or perhaps he grasps its meaning perfectly, but finds it sentimental, utopian - doubts it possible to enact the principles of this epistle in the face of actual evil. But in his implicit sympathy with Smith, Milch suggests the effort, at least, is imperative. In revealing the highly conflicted inner lives of his antagonists, he makes an affecting plea for empathy - if human beings understood others and the extent to which they are connected as social and spiritual entities, they would be less likely to remain locked into cyclical hostility and aggression.

Similarly, if they renounced dualistic concepts of morality founded in identification of “self” and “other”, they would be free from notions of self and society that perpetuate harm and destruction. This is the heart of Milch’s work in Deadwood - his push for pluralism. And in his uncompromising depictions of human malevolence, Milch fully acknowledges the immense difficulty of truly selfless action on an ongoing basis, which gives Deadwood a rare maturity and depth. This is crucial to its impact – as Susan Sontag notes in Regarding the Pain of Others:

Someone who is perennially surprised that depravity exists, who continues to feel disillusioned (even incredulous) when confronted with evidence of what humans are capable of inflicting on the way of gruesome, hands-on cruelties upon other humans, has not reached moral or psychological adulthood.15

Accordingly, Milch does not offer a naïve promise of redemption, but the possibility of it. Human nature being what it is - historically if not essentially - the exercise of absolutism precludes any real understanding of the machinations of evil, and thus perpetuates it. But the experiment that remains untried with any diligence is moral pluralism based on applied compassion. Compassion, arguably, could break the cycle. (At this point it
would be fascinating to enter into a Buddhist reading of Deadwood, given the parallels with Buddhist moral precepts; but this is another entire paper.)

Ultimately, what Milch implies is that evil is not so much an essence as a behavioural/cultural contagion, passed from one individual to another and hence whole communities and cultures either via intention or simply failure to override selfless impulses. He is not bent on identifying a single root cause so much as emphasising that in most if not all cases evil is the outcome of oppression and abuse, and that no matter what the cause, a primary concern should be the ways in which human individuals and societies might foster connectedness.

There is another crucial consideration here, finally - the issue of readership poses the question of whether Milch’s thematic intentions in Deadwood effect his desired reading - whether audiences absorb his humanism or simply relish the vigour and perceived truths of his storytelling (or at worst, only revel in the voyeuristic “pleasures” of Deadwood’s excesses). The answer, like that of Deadwood’s many dilemmas, lies in the exercise of free will. In the light of this, it is probably most appropriate here to finish by quoting Milch on the perceived bleakness of his work:

You know, people say that my writing is dark. And for me it’s quite the opposite. It sees light in darkness and doesn’t try to distort darkness. The essential thing is that the seeing itself is joyful.  

**Notes**

2. ibid. p. 461.
4. The word ‘whore’ is used in this essay not as a pejorative, but in keeping with the characters’ names/titles within the program.
8. A good example comes from Tolliver addressing disgruntled prospectors about the encroachment of government: ‘Wasn’t half our purpose coming to
get shed of the cocksucker? And here it catches up to us again to do what’s in its nature – to lie to us, and confuse us, and steal what we come to by toil. … Are we going to be surprised by that? … Will we be next shocked by rivers running, or trees casting fucking shade?’ Ibid. episode 5.


**Bibliography**


Moral pluralism in David Milch’s *Deadwood*


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Un/Monstrous Criminals - the ‘gay gang murders’: ‘not like us’ and ‘just like us’

Kristen Davis

Abstract: During the late 1980s and early 1990s there were a series of murders, disappearances and assaults of (presumed) gay men in the popular Bondi-Tamarama region in Sydney, Australia. These crimes – dubbed the ‘gay gang murders’ – remained, largely, unsolved for more than a decade when they became the subject of a fresh investigation, coronial inquest, and received sympathetic media attention. In this paper, I argue that the production of the assailants hinges on a contradiction. On the one hand, they are presented as ‘gang members’, denoted the ‘Bondi Boys’ – which in contemporary public discourses links them with notions of crime and deviance – and thus operates to symbolically distance them from the broader community. Yet, on the other, their violence is covertly viewed as an expression of widely held heteronormative values. The perpetrators may be demonized as an aberrant criminal minority, then, but this scapegoating process operates only to assuage the public of any social or institutional complicity.

The perpetrators’ killing spree rendered them human ‘monsters’, just as their crimes were read as ‘monstrous’ acts. However, such readings were problematized with a simultaneous construction of the alleged perpetrators as being ‘like us’. They are made ‘like us’ in that their sexuality is invisible and unmarked in contrast to that of their victims. Discursive productions of the ‘Bondi Boys’ – as a unified, homogenous, all-Australian, white, male ‘gang’ – serves to further normalize the group. In other words, despite the ways in which the so-called ‘gay hate gangs’ are publicly and symbolically distanced, the ways in which they are represented as being ‘just like us’ suggest that their ‘dirty work’ is in fact, to some degree, socially legitimized.

Key Words: Gay hate crimes; gangs; violence; deviance; community; sexuality

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December 2001. On the panoramic Bondi-Tamarama walkway, winding its way along one of Australia’s most mythologized coastlines, the police rescue squad throw a weighted mannequin from the fifteen metre cliff-face.
Sun-bleached tourists and Bondi locals, power-walkers and joggers alike, survey the scene with interest as the dramatic re-enactment unfolds. Six times face first, back first, face first again - the 55 kg dummy tossed off the cliff top down onto the rocks below. A small crowd gathers on the walkway whilst police photographers and media crews capture this surreal event. That evening the mannequin’s fall is broadcast on commercial television. The next morning, and in the days that follow, a wide range of national newspapers, both mainstream and gay, pick up on the ‘hot’ story. The re-enactment turns out to be part of a fresh investigation into the deaths and disappearances of gay men in the Eastern suburbs of Sydney during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Dubbed the ‘gay gang murders’ these disappearances and killings occurred in the location of Marks Park, a gay beat or cruising ground that borders the picturesque walkway. With the exception of one murder, these events were not properly investigated until more than a decade passed when an investigating detective noted a number of similarities between the cases. A task-force dubbed Operation Taradale was set up to examine links between the suspicious deaths – originally dismissed as suicides and accidents – and the so-called ‘gay-hate gangs’ which existed at the time. Following this investigation a coronial inquest was staged and numerous findings and recommendations delivered.

In July 2002 the boldly printed headlines of a New South Wales tabloid newspaper proclaimed “Exclusive: Six gay men disappear. Police believe their killers are gang members … LINKED BY HATE”. In this and subsequent news articles on the Bondi cliffs deaths, specifically those dealing with the police investigation and coronial inquiry, the alleged perpetrators are routinely characterized as ‘gay hate gang members’. Throughout this paper, I argue that the production of the assailants hinges on a contradiction. On the one hand, they are presented as ‘gang members’ – which in contemporary public discourses links them with notions of crime and deviance – and thus operates to symbolically distance them from the broader Australian community. Yet, on the other, their violence is covertly viewed as an expression of widely held heteronormative values. The perpetrators may be demonized and vilified as an aberrant criminal minority, as gang members, then, but this scape-goating process operates only to assuage the public of any social or institutional complicity. In transferring responsibility for these events to a specific, criminalized set of individuals, namely, ‘gang members’, the other reading of such crimes as ‘a ‘legitimate’ violence through which the social order is (re)produced’ is repressed.

As various critics have made clear, anti-gay violence ‘is not associated with exceptional (dysfunctional or pathological) individuals or exceptional settings or disorderly social structures; rather it is ordinary violence performed by ordinary people as part of the routine of day-to-day living’.
Barbara Perry echoes this point in her argument that ‘in a generally … homophobic culture violence motivated by hatred is not deviant behaviour. In fact it conforms to what is a normatively unjust value system. It is an affirmation of the … hierarchy that constitutes the “legitimate” social order’4.

However, whilst the Bondi Boys may have undoubtedly helped to constitute the ‘legitimate’ social order, there is also, simultaneously, a need to symbolically deny this climate of legitimate violence. This is achieved through symbolically punishing groups like the Bondi Boys. They have to be represented not only as ordinary men and women upholding the heteronormative status-quo, but rather as exceptional individuals – ‘gang members’, ‘teenage killers’, ‘thugs’. Characterizing the alleged perpetrators as members of a ‘gay hate youth gang’ criminalizes the suspects and in doing so symbolically expels them from the broader community, which helps to hide the endemic homophobia of that community. In other words, the perpetrators’ killing spree rendered them as human ‘monsters’, just as their crimes were read as ‘monstrous’ acts.

Yet, even though the discursive construction of the alleged perpetrators as ‘gang members’ clearly functions to distance them from the wider community, there are also a number of ways in which the suspects are simultaneously produced as being ‘just like us’5. Firstly, in mainstream media and legal discourses, the invisible and unmarked nature of the perpetrators’ sexuality highlights the normative nature of heterosexuality, in contrast to the over-determination of the victim’s sexuality, which renders it different from, and alien to, (hetero)normative standards. The perpetrators’ production as ‘not gay’, signified by the unmarked nature of their sexuality and repeated, public declarations to that effect, also brings them into line with a dominant heteronormative social order and further legitimizes their actions in reproducing such an order.6

The emphasis on the suspects’ ‘not gay’ status is not the only way that they are normalized. Discursive productions, including references to the group as the ‘Bondi Boys’, serve to further normalize the group within ‘everyday’ Australian culture. Such constructions, which play into familiar nationalistic stereotypes, function to erase the diverse ethnic and gender backgrounds of the members. By the mainstream media’s refusal to represent the diversity of the group, in terms of gender and ethnic backgrounds, the ‘gang’ is constructed as a unified and homogenous, all Aussie group, the (white, male) ‘Bondi Boys’. This is exemplified by the ‘anti hero’ who is selected to represent the group in the majority of the media coverage, namely, the alleged leader, a Caucasian man, Sean Cushman. The severity of the crimes that the group committed are undermined and trivialized in media discourses which state, for example, that in the course of the inquest and investigation which preceded it, ‘the alleged sins of youth’
were being revisited”. In other words, the ‘Bondi Boys’ are represented not as a ‘bunch of queers’, like their victims, or a ‘bunch of foreigners’, like many of Sydney’s so-called ‘ethnic gangs’, but instead as part of mainstream Australian culture, originating from one of the most iconic symbols of Australia, Bondi beach.

The alleged perpetrators, then, are simultaneously constructed as being both ‘like us’ and ‘not like us’. They are rendered ‘like us’ in that their presumed heterosexuality is invisible and unmarked in contrast to that of their victims. Although their production as ‘gang members’ does serve to criminalize and scapegoat them, the heavily gendered and racialized representation of the ‘Bondi Boys’ gang – as an all-Australian, Caucasian and all male grouping – contradicts this reading. In other words, despite the ways in which the so-called ‘gay hate gangs’ are being publicly and symbolically distanced, the ways in which they are represented as being ‘just like us’ suggest that their ‘dirty work’ is in fact, to some degree, socially legitimised.

Before analysing the ways in which the perpetrators and their crimes were socially legitimised, I will briefly examine how their construction as ‘gang members’ served to locate them within discourses of criminality, monstrosity, and bestiality. The ‘gay hate gangs’ were said to have ‘prowled’ through Sydney suburbs, ‘lurked’ on the Bondi-Bronte walkway, and to have ‘slaughtered’ young men with a ‘pack mentality’. Like other groups of teenagers congregating in public sites, they were perceived as a ‘polluting presence – a potential threat to public order’ exemplified in comments on their graffiti tags which were said to ‘litter’ Sydney beats.

In media discourses, the alleged perpetrators were routinely cast as ‘juveniles’, ‘teenage killers’ and ‘teenage thugs’. Such descriptions exhibited a pre-occupation with the liminal or ‘in-between’ age – and indeed youth – of the suspects. In doing so, they evoked the mythic figure of the ‘juvenile delinquent’, the criminalized and ‘at risk’ adolescent. The interchangeability of the terms – youths, teens, juveniles, thugs and killers – is not incidental, for as Howard Sercombe points out, terms such as ‘youth’ and ‘juvenile’ carry with them a strong sense of criminality.

These cultural anxieties have often revolved around the ‘gang’ concept, an ambiguous term which carries a diverse range of academic and popular definitions. In its broadest sense, the word ‘gang’ is used to denote ‘any group of young people on the street’. However, the dominant discourses on gangs which are most prevalent in the Australian media appear to be driven by inflammatory and negative images of threatening youths engaging in violent, illegal and criminal activities. As many criminologists have argued, this phenomenon is largely a media myth, produced periodically against a backdrop of sensationalism and public hysteria, and fuelled by traditional stereotypes on youth violence and anti-social youth group behaviour.
The self-named ‘Bondi Boys’, which consisted of thirty members, aged by 12-18 years, also adopted a range of alternate gang titles, for example, ‘PTK’ which was said to stand for either ‘People That Kill’, ‘Park Side Killers’ or ‘Prime Time Kings’. Despite the assumed monolithic masculinity of these gangs – as expressed in their titles ‘Bondi Boys’ and ‘Prime Time Kings’ – in both media and police discourses, there is evidence that girls were present during these attacks. Victim M, for example, recounted the presence of a number of girls who were witness to his assault, ‘I remember seeing the girls … [they were] watching and laughing and still to this day it runs through my mind that they could sit there and do that’15. When I searched through the Brief of Evidence, the mug shots of the ‘persons of interest’ also featured a number of girls who were said to be part of the ‘Bondi Boys’ group. In taped conversations of some of the female suspects, they openly acknowledged their involvement in the gang. Yet, the title ‘Bondi Boys’ subsumes and erases the female members of the group.

In the Australian context, the title ‘Bondi boy’, as a description, is often used in a semi affectionate way for men who have grown up in Bondi. Politicians, sports stars, celebrities and public figures who were ‘born and bred’ there are quick to identify as ‘Bondi Boys’. Certainly, the gang’s title ‘Bondi Boys’ suggests a sense of territoriality towards the geographic area the group congregated in, namely, Bondi. As opposed to other characteristics, such as ethnicity or race, the district the members were from appears to be what loosely defined them. During the inquest when Sean Cushman was first asked about the ‘Bondi Boys’, he was evasive, claiming, ‘I’ve heard that name … I grew up in Bondi so I am a Bondi Boy’16. After being informed that other people had referred to him as a member of the Bondi Boys gang, Cushman insisted, ‘I grew up in Bondi so I could call myself a Bondi boy, yes, and I’m proud to do that’17. When asked directly if he was the leader of the Bondi Boys, Cushman again evaded the question, responding instead, ‘Well, we’re Bondi boys because we grew up in Bondi, it’s like the Bra Boys, the Maroubra Boys … it’s not a crew or a gang, it’s my home and I’m proud of it. It’s a world famous beach and I’m very proud of growing up there’18.

The story of the ‘gay hate gangs’ was narrated amidst other media-fuelled ‘moral panics’ about Sydney gangs, specifically, ‘ethnic youth gangs’. During the mid 1990s, for example, there was extensive negative publicity about ‘Asian youth gangs’ such as the infamous 5T gang, and in the late 1990s there were further moral panics about ethnic gangs following the stabbing death of a Korean-Australian schoolboy, Edward Lee, in late 1998, and the drive-by shooting of the Lakemba Police Station for which senior police and state politicians alleged that a ‘Lebanese youth gang’ was responsible. From 2000 onwards, extensive and inflammatory media attention has been given to ‘Lebanese gangs’, firstly, in relation to a series of
‘gang rapes’ allegedly committed by ‘Lebanese Australians’, with white, ‘Australian’ women as their targets, and more recently, in relation to the Cronulla riots which took place in December 2005.

What is strikingly different in media reports on the ‘gay hate gangs’, as opposed to the cases I have just listed, however, is that the ethnic or racial background of the ‘gang members’ is, firstly, rarely identified, and, secondly, not constructed or emphasized as the focal point of the story. The only explicit reference to race was one sentence in an article which stated that previous offenders in other New South Wales gay hate killings were ‘mostly Caucasian’\textsuperscript{19}. Refusing to ‘racialize’ the Bondi Boys, or the more generic ‘gay hate gangs’, is highly unusual as throughout twentieth century Australia, particularly in recent public discourses on Sydney youth crime, direct links are frequently produced between ‘youth crime gangs’ and specific ethnic groups\textsuperscript{20}.

Given such prevalent stereotyping, the media’s refusal to racialise the ‘gay hate gang’ members led me to assume that they were all Caucasians. For as many cultural critics\textsuperscript{21} have suggested, one of the insidious properties of the domain of whiteness, like that of heterosexuality, is its apparent invisibility and normativity. However, after accessing the Operation Taradale police files, having read the coronial inquest transcripts, and seen police mug shots of the suspects, I discovered that my initial assumptions about a monocultural Caucasian gang were wrong. Instead, the sheer diversity of cultural backgrounds the suspects came from surprised me with Aboriginal, Maori, Middle-Eastern and Caucasian youth all represented\textsuperscript{22}.

My interest is not in profiling the perpetrators, or entering into debates about racial stereotyping in the media. Given the tendency, however, for dominant discourses to racialise youth gangs, I was intrigued as to why the ‘race card’ was not played or the ethnic gang stereotype evoked in the coverage. Instead, this possible angle was downplayed and excluded from the story with the events being named, narrated and developed around the sexuality of the victims.

1. \textit{Sean Cushman as the ‘face of hate’}

In news reports on the inquest proceedings, which were reported regularly in local and national newspapers over a fortnightly period, eight ‘persons of interest’, allegedly implicated in the Marks Park murders, were called to give evidence. Throughout the coverage, only one of these individuals is graphically depicted\textsuperscript{23}, Sean Cushman. Presented as the ‘face’ of the gay hate gang, Cushman’s image is used repeatedly. In a sample of twelve mainstream media reports produced during this period, photographs of Cushman are reproduced on three different occasions in two different sources, including in one instance where the media report relates to another suspect, Merlyn McGrath, giving evidence.
Given that the ‘gay hate gang’ suspects comprised men and women, and individuals from a range of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, why was Cushman’s image – that of a Caucasian male – selected in preference to other possible depictions? I am unable to offer a definitive answer as to why Cushman was chosen as the ‘poster boy’ for the ‘gay hate gang’, a stand-in for all the other members. If, as Moran and Skeggss maintain, homophobic violence is a ‘legitimate and legitimated violence’ for the heteronormative status quo, it could then be argued that Cushman – a white, Australian male – operates as a representative of these ‘ordinary people’, the archetypal Bondi Boy. With his stereotypical ‘blonde hair, blue eyes’ Aussie-image, Cushman occupies the Bondi Boy role far more effectively, I suspect, than the female and/or non-Caucasian members of his group would have. It is also possible that Cushman is being cast as an ‘anti hero’, a Wild West-type figure doing society’s ‘dirty work’ by cleaning the queers off the world famous beach he is so keen to identify with.

2. Free-floating confessions and ‘mistaken identities’

The ‘gay hate gang’ term connotes an amorphous identity which provides a certain level of anonymity to the (other) alleged perpetrators. Where, for example, do ‘gay haters’ congregate? How can one identify a ‘gay hater’? Who would own up, and under what circumstances, to hating gays? The intercepted conversations and survivors’ eye-witness testimonies revealed the suspects’ distrust of, and animosity towards, gays. Yet in the Coroner’s Court, only one of the suspects openly admits to having been homophobic. Instead, the suspects were keen to distance themselves, not only from the gang aspect, but also from the feeling ‘hatred’ and the identity ‘gay hater’.

The inability of investigators to positively link thousands of hours of intercepted conversations with the suspects provides another level of anonymity to the ‘gay hate gang’ members. In a secretly recorded tape tendered to the inquest two muffled voices are heard discussing a number of gay bashings. Patrick Saidi, representing the New South Wales Police Service, alleged one of the voices on the tape belonged to the suspect, RM. RM repeatedly denied that the voice on the tape was his, including when there was a reference to ‘Mrs. M’ as ‘Mum’. Throughout cross-examination RM maintains that the voice in the recording is not his voice. When asked whose voice it is, he responded, ‘I can’t recognize it at all’. RM also denied any involvement in other gay bashings or knowing anybody who regularly went gay bashing. Whilst prosecutors and police investigators have identified the voice as belonging to RM, without an admission from him, the police have not yet been able to ‘prove’ that this is the case. We have, then, a confession on tape, but we do not know for sure whose confession it is. This confession operates here as a free-floating signifier. A confession in search of a confessor!
This situation is echoed in the failure to charge some of the ‘persons of interest’ with gay-related assaults, despite repeated and convincing eye-witness testimonies. When one of the victims ‘Mr. Brown’ identified DM as one of the men who assaulted and robbed him in December 1989 in South Bondi, DM denied the allegation, claiming that it was a case of ‘mistaken identity’. ‘Mr. Brown’ also identified Sean Cushman from photographs in relation to this attack, yet Cushman denied it, asking, ‘Well, why wasn’t I charged?’ In relation to the assault of Robert Tate at Campbell Parade in November 1989, an offence that he was charged for, Cushman maintained that he had been ‘wrongly identified’.

When asked why a person called Robert Jewell would claim that ‘the Bondi Boys threw a poofer off the cliff at South Bondi’, Cushman said he had no idea. Likewise, when ‘Mr. Smith’ identified Cushman as one of the two main assailants in the January 1990 attack, claiming that he had said, ‘I’m going to throw you over the side’, Cushman again denied the allegation. When told that he had been identified in relation to another gay-related assault in Paddington in May 1991, and that the victim’s description matched his appearance at the time – ‘a tall blond male [with] a cropped flat-top haircut’ – Cushman, once again, said it was a case of mistaken identity. As the inquest proceedings demonstrate, despite the eye-witness identifications and without further corroborating evidence, Cushman’s claim of ‘mistaken identity’ can not be easily refuted.

Barring limited publicity at the start of the inquest, and images of Cushman during proceedings, the other alleged perpetrators remain, largely, unseen and unnamed. Out of the eight ‘persons of interest’ to appear before the coroner, only four are publicly identified in media reports. When the perpetrators do appear, they are subsumed into the loose, vague and generic ‘gay hate gang’ category. The mobilization of this amorphous category signals a number of key points. Firstly, the sexuality of the victims – men frequenting a beat – held more currency as a media frame through which to narrate the crimes. The presumed ‘gay-ness’ of the victim group became the identifying tag and pivotal frame through which the narrative was told. Secondly, as I argued before, the ‘gay hate gang’ category fails to identify or make explicit the perpetrators’ own sexuality, thus showing its normative and unmarked nature. Thirdly, the ‘gay hate gang’ category tells us little about the members of such a group, particularly in terms of other sociological factors such as gender, ethnic and class background. As I have just argued, even throughout the media coverage and inquest proceedings, many of the ‘persons of interest’ are not publicly identified for a variety of reasons. Hence they remain mostly unseen and unnamed. This anonymity also serves to position the perpetrators as just ‘everyday’, ‘ordinary’ people.

However, as I have demonstrated throughout this paper, the construction of the perpetrators as everyday Aussie’s operates simultaneously alongside
their production as ‘gang members’, a reading which symbolically distances them from mainstream Australian culture. Their representation is thus based on an irresolvable contradiction which seems to allow for symbolic (if not literal) punishment on the one hand, while carefully covering the traces of endemic cultural homophobia on the other.

Notes

1 A Kampar, ‘Linked By Hate’, The Daily Telegraph [Sydney], 22 July 2002, p. 1
3 L Moran and B Skeggs, 2004, p. 27.
4 B Perry, In The Name Of Hate: Understanding Hate Crimes, Routledge, New York, 2001, p. 35.
5 I am referring here to a mythical yet dominant heteronormative, Anglo-Australian benchmark.
6 It must be noted, however, that the terms ‘gay hate victim’ or ‘gay hate crime’ fixes both the identities of the victims and perpetrators, veering towards a sexual and cultural essentialism which doesn’t take sexual fluidity into account (S Tomsen, 2006).
11 For example, G Callaghan, 2003, p. 20.
15 NSW Coronial Inquest into the death of John Russell and suspected deaths of Gilles Mattaini and Ross Warren (2003), Glebe Coroner’s Court, Transcript of proceedings on 4 April 2003.
16 NSW Coronial Inquest, 10 April 2003.
17 NSW Coronial Inquest, 10 April 2003.
NSW Coronial Inquest, 10 April 2003.

For example, L Lamont, ‘Hate Crimes’, Sydney Morning Herald, 10 April 2003, p. 13.

J Collins et al, 2000; S Poynting, 2001

For example, D Riggs, 2004; R Dyer, 1997; R Frankenberg, 1993.

For example, D Riggs, 2004; R Dyer, 1997; R Frankenberg, 1993.

‘Person of interest’, Merlyn McGrath, for example, told two separate witnesses that she had been involved in the assault and death of one of the victims, Ross Warren, with a group of ‘eight Lebanese from Kings Cross’ (Statement to Police, NSW Police Service Brief of Evidence). Other ‘persons of interest’ had obtained legal representation from the Aboriginal Legal Service. Sean Cushman is of Caucasian appearance. One of Cushman’s associates, JP, is Maori. Another victim ‘Mr Smith’ identified his group of attackers as being Caucasians, Pacific Islanders and Maoris, whilst another victim, Robert Tate, described the key offenders in his assault as a Caucasian, a Pacific Islander, and ‘another young ethnic male’ (NSW Police Service, Brief of Evidence).

A much smaller photographic image of an associate, Darrell Trindall, does appear, although it is repeatedly made clear that Trindall is not considered a ‘person of interest’ or a suspect in the murders. Trindall was not, for example, called before the coroner to give evidence. Contradictorily, however, in initial news reports of the inquest, Trindall was said to be ‘implicated’ or ‘involved’ with the gangs, for example, A Kampar, ‘Gay hate gang faces justice’, The Daily Telegraph, 1 April 2003, p. 9; Journalist undisclosed, ‘Football star involved with gay bashing gang, inquest told’, The Canberra Times, 1 April 2003, p. 4.


B Perry, 2005.


NSW Coronial Inquest, Transcript of proceedings, 9 April 2003.

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Section 2:

Visual Monstrosities
Alessa Unbound: The Monstrous Daughter of Silent Hill

Ewan Kirkland

Abstract: This paper explores the figure of Alessa, the ambiguous monster of the Silent Hill videogame series. Focussing on the game’s first and third instalments, Alessa is discussed as revealing interconnected anxieties surrounding motherhood and childhood. Horrific images of birth, abortion and maternity pervade the games, together with unsettling signifiers of children and childhood. Firstly, Barbra Creed’s psychoanalytic discussion of the monstrous feminine is used to examine Silent Hill in terms of maternity 1. Accordingly, Alessa embodies the abject mother, evident in pervading imagery of bodily fluids, particularly blood and excrement, across the series. Next I explore Alessa as monstrous child, employing Robin Wood’s discussion of children in horror cinema 2. Here Alessa’s monstrousness resides in her horrific childhood, communicated through Silent Hill’s dark and malignant alternative dimensions. This ambiguous disposition towards the arcane mother and parental authority is partially resolved through the games’ endings, involving the re-assertion of patriarchal power. Finally, I argue, Alessa symbolises cultural fears that adult/child distinctions may be disrupted as children transcend their infant or adolescent status, by becoming parents themselves.

Key Words: horror, videogames, Silent Hill, gender, childhood, Creed, Kristeva, Wood

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1. Introduction: The Silent Hill Situation

For the past two years I have been researching the videogame series Silent Hill, a survival horror franchise published by the Japanese company Konami, currently in its fourth instalment. I have written and presented papers on Silent Hill and representation of gender and racial whiteness, narrative, self-reflexivity, remediation of technology, psychoanalysis and genre. This paper develops these latter aspects of my work in focussing on Alessa Gillespie, the ambiguous monster from the first and third games. I shall be deconstructing Alessa in terms of representations and constructions of monstrousness in popular horror, specifically monstrous mothers and monstrous children. I will argue Alessa combines both these formations in a kind of monstrous child-parent. Ultimately, Alessa’s monstrous emanates from her disruption of valued distinctions between adult and child.
A few points to make clear: I will not be justifying the study of videogames. I shall not be relating figures concerning the revenues the industry accrues, nor drawing apologetic parallels between videogames and cinema, literature, or other more critically and culturally valued media. Secondly, I shall be exploring Silent Hill (SH1) and Silent Hill 3 (SH3) as narratives, rather than as games, particularly in terms of theoretical frameworks drawn from the study of film. This will annoy any more ludologically-orientated games academics. Finally, I shall be taking these games seriously for the complex cultural texts I believe them to be.

Some background: the Silent Hill series takes place in a small American resort town of the same name, home to a strange satanic cult worshipping the god figure Samael. Twenty years ago, the leader of this group, Dahlia Gillespie, produced a child, Alessa. How this was achieved is not exactly clear, but the suggestion is that the child was created by magical means. This child, Alessa, was meant to provide a vessel for the embryonic Samael who, when eventually born, would bring about the end of the world. Growing up, Alessa had a terrible time, was tormented by her schoolmates for her peculiar background, called a witch because of the strange supernatural powers which began to manifest as she got older. Alessa was also bullied by her domineering mother in a narrative scenario owing much to Stephen King’s Carrie. Then, several years prior to the events of SH1, Alessa rebelled against the cult, refusing to cooperate with their plans. In retaliation, and realising her own power was strong enough to make her daughter redundant, Dahlia attempted to burn the girl to death. In this moment Alessa transformed part of her spirit into a baby, Cheryl, found and adopted by Harry Mason, protagonist of SH1. However, despite severe burns, Alessa did not die, but remained comatose, incomplete and imprisoned in Silent Hill’s hospital basement, tormented by pain and horrific nightmares which manifest like a dark psychic shadow over Silent Hill.

Meanwhile, Cheryl is drawn to Silent Hill, encouraging Harry to bring her there. She is driven by the instinctive desire to reunite with Alessa, making the two souls one, an act which will make the mother of Samael whole again with apocalyptic consequences. Alessa does not want this to happen, and creates a series of horrifying other worlds populated by grotesque monsters to frustrate her reunion with Cherly which the protagonist Harry will unwittingly bring about. Silent Hill 3 takes place seventeen years later. Its central character is Heather, Alessa’s latest reincarnation. The infant Heather was passed to Harry in Silent Hill 1’s closing moments by a dying Alessa, and she comes to Silent Hill as a teenager to avenge her father’s death after he is killed by cult members believing Heather now carries their unborn Samael.

Such scenarios, as I will argue, can be understood through the application of theories concerning traditional horror narratives, revealing
cultural anxieties concerning birth, maternity and childhood, crystallised in the enigmatic monstrous figure of Alessa.

2. Alessa as Monstrous Mother
In the context of feminist criticism of horror cinema Alessa might first be related to various female horror figures discussed by Barbara Creed in her application to horror cinema of Julia Kristeva’s work on horror literature.3

Creed explores representations of feminine monstrosity as expressing patriarchal fears. Within horror films monstrous female figures frequently combine several archetypes relating to male castration anxiety, fear of powerful women, and ambivalent attitudes towards maternity and childbirth. Alessa can be considered in terms of her maternity. She is a multiple mother figure, created by Dahlia to gestate the cult’s god Samael, subsequently reproducing herself as Cheryl, then Heather; while procreating without the involvement of male partners, a key feature of the archaic mother and representing an obvious threat to patriarchal authority.

Central to Creed’s discussion of horror cinema is the notion of the abject: boundary violations, particularly between bodily interiors and exteriors in the expulsion, leaking or otherwise production of bodily waste evoking sensations of profound repulsion. Silent Hill’s mise en scène contains many characteristics Creed associates with abjection. Throughout the games, play frequent shifts involuntarily from mundane locations, a school, a hospital, a shopping centre; into horrifically transformed ‘alternative’ versions. These levels are characterised by corruption, urban and industrial decay, and bodily fluids. More specifically, in combining bloody reds and excremental browns, these levels evoke the ‘polluting’ bodily fluids associated with what Kristeva calls: “rituals of defilement to the mother.”4 Full of blood-stained walls, floors and hospital mattresses, imagery of blood and shit extends across the series.

Within the game’s diegesis these moments represent the hospitalised Alessa’s attempts to disrupt the player/protagonist’s quest by producing hallucinations of darkness and corruption. Alessa features very little throughout both SH1 and SH3, and it is primarily through these horrific dimensions that her monstrous presence is felt. Insofar as Alessa’s monstrosity is rooted in the maternal, the games’ horror as characterised by these vile levels capitalises upon patriarchal associations between motherhood and bloody, excremental abjection. Alessa is the arcane mother, a maternal figure, which Creed makes clear, pre-exists the patriarchally-fixed mother of Freud and Lacanian theory. Instead, the arcane mother evokes an older time when parent and child were one, and taboos of abjection concerning bodily waste did not exist. The central monster of Silent Hill 1 is Alessa/Cheryl, arcane mother and child as single entity, the mother who is
the world, evident in her ability to dramatically transform game space, and the child who is still umbilically connected to the mother. Cheryl’s return to Silent Hill threatens maternal rejoining of arcane mother and child. To foil this meeting, the comatose Alessa warns Harry by evoking images of blood, excrement and abjection, associated with the child’s oneness with the arcane mother, symbolising the reunion of herself and Cheryl which Harry’s unhindered efforts will bring about.

Creed writes: “a reconciliation with the maternal body, the body of our origins, is only possible through an encounter with horror, the abject of our culture.” Silent Hill in confronting players with worlds of blood and excrement brought forth by an arcane mother, visualises the horror of such a reconciliation.

3. Alessa as Monstrous Child

If Creed provides a feminist-psychoanalytically informed understanding of Alessa as monstrous mother, she might also be understood as monstrous child. Children serve an ambivalent dual function within the horror genre, as either angelic or monstrous. In horror films child characters function as both victim and threat: as helpless figures of persecution in The Night of the Hunter (1955) and Aliens (1986); and as monsters in Village of the Damned (1960), The Exorcist (1973), The Omen (1976) and Children of the Corn (1986); while supernatural films like The Innocence (1961), The Shining (1980), Poltergeist (1982) and The Sixth Sense (1999) capitalise on children’s ambiguous cinematic presence.

Robin Wood in his article ‘Return of the Repressed’ explores monstrous children alongside other monstrous identities, as socially oppressed groups and psychologically repressed aspect of the normalised cinema spectator. Wood argues horror films construct minority people and characteristics as monstrous, the genre’s perverse appeal being the pleasurable destruction such individuals and aspects reek on the social order, both justifying their suppression and dramatising the release of repressed aspects of the audience’s psyche, cathartically contained by the traditional closing resumption of repressive normality. Monstrous children are similarly related to notions of children’s social oppression. As Wood writes: “When we have worked our way through all the other liberation movements, we may discover that children are the most oppressed section of the population.” This emphasises both children’s oppression and childhood’s repression, allowing a politicised critique of children in horror texts. Children are powerless and socially ostracised, Other-ed to hegemonic adulthood: an oppressed social group. Simultaneously the ‘child within’ must be repressed for the individual to function as productive adult member of society. Child-like qualities must be suppressed and/or projected onto an Other-ed child.
Both children’s oppression and childhood’s repression are implicated in the monstrous child.

Alessa functions as both victim and threat. Primarily, in SH1, Alessa represents not a rampaging monstrous child but a remarkably frank expression of children’s oppression. Locations from Alessa’s past reveal her misery: an attic room covered in maniacal graffiti, a schoolroom desk scratched with the spiteful words of bullying classmates, and Alessa’s bedroom, a small sad sanctuary of drawings, story books and framed butterflies. Indeed, the young girl’s suffering, tormented by fellow pupils and a fanatical mother, being burned almost to death, then kept alive in a hospital basement, constitutes an extremely critical representation of Western children’s physical and mental abuse, familial isolation and oppressive institutionalisation. This serves as foundation for childhood’s monstrousness in its various forms. As expression of Alessa’s torment, Silent Hill’s malicious dimensions, as well as signifying Alessa’s monstrous motherhood, bear traces of her formative years, communicating the repressed and abject horror of this cruel childhood. Enhancing the sense of a monstrous childhood repressed, alternative dimensions seep into reality, frequently heralded by a warning siren suggesting something chaotic and malevolent beneath the surface intruding upon rational space.

In Silent Hill 3, Alessa assumes a more threatening embodied form of child monstrousness. As the literalisation of Heather’s own forgotten childhood before her reincarnation as Harry’s adopted daughter, Alessa symbolises Heather’s ‘child within’ more explicitly than the externalised child figure of Silent Hill 1. Emanating from the Alessa side of Heather, the horrific dimensions of Silent Hill 3 constitute an appeal to remember her past life, while personifying an abusive childhood’s poisonous influence on adulthood. When such images fail to deter Heather’s return to Silent Hill, Alessa seeks to destroy her physically, assuming various gory incarnations which Heather must defeat in battle. This Alessa is vile and bloody, Heather’s age and visual double, a combination of abject mother, violent teenager and uncanny Other.

4. Conclusion: Alessa as Monstrous Parent
Returning, finally to Creed’s application of Kristeva, the fundamental boundary Alessa violates as Alessa, as Cheryl, as Heather, is between adult and child. While the distinction between the two is far from dichotomous, it is considered socially imperative that both know their place, crucially when it comes to sexual relations. While western society seeks to entrench the move from adult to child within legal and bureaucratic structures, this transition is more fundamentally earned through becoming a parent. When children achieve this state the child-parent becomes a social problem, a violation of childhood and adulthood: an abhorrence. For this reason the fundamental
monstrousness of Heather is her – albeit supernatural - pregnancy, childbirth, and parenthood.

**Notes**


**Bibliography**


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They’re not even sure it’s a baby yet… Body Horror in *Eraserhead*.

*Ils Huygens*

**Abstract:** *Eraserhead* tells the story of the strange-looking and socially unadjusted character Henry who has to take care alone of his diseased early-born child. The baby is a monster, hideous and revolting. Its body is not fully developed yet, its organs have to be kept together in bandages; the head looks glazy as if it didn’t grow any skin yet. The baby simply carries its insides, outside. The dissolving of the inside/outside boundary is a typical aspect of a group of horror films that came out in the late seventies, the so-called body horror genre, (*Rabid*, *The Fly*, *Alien*). In these films the monstrous always comes from within the body, grows in it, becomes with it. These films are also particularly gross and disgusting because of their extensive use of images of blood and organs. They call on immediate bodily effects in the viewer, filling his guts and throat with feelings of revulsion. An eerie atmosphere adds to the nauseating effect of the film. In this paper I’d like to take a look at *Eraserhead* as an example of the body horror genre, of which the monster baby plot may perhaps turn out to be the ultimate paradigmatic narrative.

**Key Words:** Body horror, Abject, *Eraserhead*, Julia Kristeva

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The 1977 film *Eraserhead* by David Lynch has become a kind of cult phenomena, because of its strange images, surreal nightmarish visions and droning industrial soundtrack but mostly because of the repulsion it causes in viewers. It is one of those rare films where some are forced to walk out because the images are just too disturbing to watch. And the most horrifying element that lies at the centre of the film is a monstrously deformed baby.

Now rather than looking at *Eraserhead* from the usual psychoanalytic perspective, and talk about castration anxiety and the monstrosities associated with female reproduction, and so on…we’d rather take a look at it as an almost paradigmatic example of the so-called body horror genre and focus on the way the monstrous is constructed visually and materially in the images and on what makes this film so particularly disgusting (even for contemporary viewers).
1. Body Horror

Body horror is a term first coined in a special issue of the film magazine *Screen* in 1986. The body horror as a genre is a hybrid of science fiction, horror and thriller. The focus in these films is on the human body and its alienation. The horror in these films does not come from an external threat but from within the human body, the monstrous grows inside the body and becomes with it until the body develops its own logic, a logic that is not necessarily human and often violent. The inner monstrosity is often invisible from without, until it brutally erupts like the alien-baby bursting out of the chest of Kane (John Hurt) in the first *Alien* film.

Body horror involves a confusion of boundary taking place on the body. Most importantly, the limits between inside and outside of the body become superfluous and open to transgression. Apart from alien life forces in *Alien* or *The Thing*, other body horror films often deal with viruses or genetic mutations, infectious diseases, biological terror (Cronenberg, George Romero’s zombie-trilogy...).

Body horror refers to films that express a conflicted cultural anxiety over the body, in the age of biotechnology and bioterrorism. But it also expresses the post-modern breakdown of subjectivity, identity and humanity. The body becomes a *posthuman* open body that transgresses traditional categories of human/animal, human/non-human, male/female, natural/constructed, alive/dead etc. At the same time, the body’s openness also makes it vulnerable to contagion by the environment and by other infected bodies.

But the term body horror is in fact double sided, not only do these films exhibit a desire to uncover the inner body and the monstrosities it can develop, they also try to effect the viewer in a physiological bodily way. These horror films do not aim at setting up suspense and then delivering the scare to the viewer, neither is it the uncanniness of ghost stories or haunted houses they seek. What these films seem to be after is to cause a general discomfort in the body, filling it with feelings of disgust, nausea and repulsion. There’s an extensive use of so-called gross-out shots with close ups of blood, organs and guts. Feelings of bodily distress are enhanced with an uncanny atmosphere, bleak imagery, pale colours and an eerie soundtrack.

2. Eraserhead

*Eraserhead* is not usually mentioned as a body horror film but as I’ll try to show it has many characteristics and reading it in these terms could be productive both for the film and for the genre. Perhaps its monster baby plot can even be seen as paradigmatic for the body horror narrative. As for a quick introduction to the story, the film deals with the strange-looking character Henry. In the beginning we see him on his way to his girlfriend’s parents for a dinner party. The dinner turns out to be an excuse to tell Henry...
that something was born and to force him into marriage with Mary, with whom he seemingly had already broken up earlier. The family turns out to be completely unstable, with a crazy-talking father, a numb grandmother and both daughter and mother suffering from hysteric attacks. The scene culminates in an absurd-comic but also highly uncanny moment when Henry carves the chicken and it releases a thick black fluid from between its legs, causing Mary’s mother to have another hysteric fit. An even stranger highlight follows when Mary’s mother tells Henry about the baby and then forces herself sexually on him, making him retreat in horror and giving him a nosebleed. Throughout the scene there’s a horrifying sound, that comes from puppies that are suckling milk eagerly from their mother, as well as a constant noise of industrial sounds coming from outside. During the dinner scene a lot of the film’s elements are set up: Henry’s fear of female sexuality and the many associations of female hysteria with bodily fluids.

Now let’s take a closer look at the little baby-monster itself and see why people find it so repellent. The baby, if we may call it that, is in fact unformed as a baby, it looks more like a foetus, but then again a deformed one with a wormlike shape and no limbs, only a head with strange cow-like eyes. The head is covered in a glazy thin membrane and the rest of its body, which we can hardly call a body, doesn’t seem to have any skin at all since its undeveloped organs are completely wrapped in bandages. A great deal of the horror comes from the fact that the viewer cannot but stare at the thing in disbelief. The baby cannot be assimilated in any order, we do not know whether it is human/animal/alien, whether it is really alive or animated, and it doesn’t exhibit any characteristics of gender either. And Lynch, who likes to keep his creative secrets to himself, has sworn never to tell anyone what it was or how it was made. It simply resembles nothing we know. Not knowing what this thing is makes it something utterly other and therefore fall into the category of the abject, a term developed by Julia Kristeva in her book *Powers of Horror*. The abject is what defies the category of an object or subject, it is (in Kristeva’s words) “A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing”.1

Many elements that Kristeva associates with the abject are prevalent in the world of *Eraserhead*, and as we shall see are interesting in relation to body horror in general. The abject, first of all is related to the boundary confusion of inside/outside that we already said is associated with body horror.

The body’s inside, shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container no longer guaranteed the integrity of one’s own and clean self but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut gave way before the dejection of its content. Urine, blood, sperm, excrement then show up in
They’re not even sure it is a baby yet.

order to reassure a subject that is lacking its ‘own and clean self’.

In fact the blurring of the inside/outside boundaries that makes visible the interior of a body is a recurrent element in Lynch’s oeuvre, as in the violently organic scene in *Lost Highway* where the main character Fred literally splits himself in two, or when entering the human body through an ear as in *Blue Velvet*. This boundary collapse, as Kristeva points out concerns a violent attack on identity structures and the integrity of self.

Secondly, the *abject* is associated with the formless. The baby, lacking both bone structure and skin does not have a real body to contain it, it is unformed mass, resembling “a spider or spit”, as in Bataille’s description of *l’informe*. Here Lynch’s love for Francis Bacon becomes very manifest. Both artists share a preference for showing the organic, the visceral, the insides turned outside. The baby could also be called a Body-Without-Organs, a Deleuzian term which is “opposed not to the organs but to that organisation of the organs called the organism.”

The Body-Without-Organs lacks a structure and a hierarchization of its organs and therefore opposes “the union of the organism, the unification of the subject, and the structure of significance.”

A third aspect of Kristeva’s *abject* is its association with body fluids such as blood, especially menstrual blood, urine, excrement and vomit. The baby having no skin, is a *leaking body*, pouring its insides outside. Being a baby, it does as all babies do; crying and moaning, coughing and spitting up food. However, it does all of these things in an extremely repulsive way and Lynch tends to deliver it to us in extreme close ups. Later on in the film the baby becomes sick and grows hideous open sores making it look even more repugnant then it already was. Many other scenes also contain associations to sperm and other body fluids, the aforementioned nosebleed and the thick black ooze coming out of the chicken, resembling menstrual blood. Later in the film there’s a scene where Henry makes out with his neighbour woman and they end up disappearing in a pool of milky sperm-like fluid.

Since it is neither object nor a real subject, the baby is something that simply cannot be desired, it can only be hated. In one of the first scenes after the dinner we see how Mary is repulsed by it and returns back to her parents. And while Henry tries a great deal of pretending the thing to be a real baby, at a certain point, he cannot stop himself from hating it any more and kills it. In the violent ending Henry cuts open the bandages, upon which its unformed viscera are plain for us to see in all their disgusting content. He pierces the baby’s innards with a scissor upon which an explosion follows, that resonates with the electric current and causes the lights to go wild and make all electric appliances go crazy. So this formless mass turns out to be filled with uncontained chaotic primordial energy.
3. **In Uterus**

The blurring of the inside/outside distinction is also reflected throughout the rest of the mise-en-scène. The main setting of the film is the small claustrophobic one-room apartment Henry lives in, his decorations include a dead plant in a heap of dirt, and a pile of dead grass; elements from outside however all referring to death and sterility; on the wall hangs a picture of a mushroom cloud. The house of Mary’s parents is also protruded by the outside, filled as it is with the noise and vibration of machinery and passing trains, furthermore there are pipes running everywhere throughout the small rooms, making it resemble the inside of a human body.

Even the outside world seems to somehow resemble the inner human body, but again a very sterile one. In the scene where Henry goes to Mary’s parents we see him traverse an endless array of half-lit tunnels, dark and grim industrial wastelands, all covered in dirt and waste material. Throughout the journey there’s a deafening sound of machines and industry zooming incessantly. In fact like the baby the world seems to have no real outside, only an inside filled with chaotically zooming energy about to burst. Decaying technology is also reflected inside with the burning out light bulbs and the extremely slow elevator.

The story also partly takes place inside Henry’s head. In his dreams Henry visits a theatre where a weird-looking woman appears on stage and crushes foetuses that keep falling from the ceiling under her feet while making a strange little dance. Here the sterility of the world he lives in is more symbolically presented and seems to take place inside the womb where the dancing woman makes sure conception does not take place. So inside and outside, real and imaginary worlds are constantly confused but all are sterile, unable to reproduce.

Mary’s name could very well allude to her being a virgin, and she seems to be as frigid and disgusted by sexuality as Henry is. Between Mary and Henry there is no passion whatsoever and they hardly ever touch. In fact, there is a kind of sterility and non-communication in the way all characters interact. There seems to be no joy or desire in their lives, only emptiness and boredom. The sterility of the world of *Eraserhead* also makes clear the prologue of the film, which seems to suggest that the baby is produced mechanically by a severely deformed man, who operates levers in a sort of extraterrestrial machine room. Birth is then visualised with an image of a wormlike creature (resembling the baby) being born out of Henry’s mouth, as if a complete reversal of biology took place.

The *abject* is caused by what “disturbs identity, system, order”. This brings us back to the body horror genre where the creation of monstrosities is strongly implicated with the idea of unnatural conception and reproduction, such as cloning in *Alien Resurrection* or genetic mutation in *The Fly*. In one of the few other monster-baby films, *It’s Alive*, the monstrous birth is
They’re not even sure it is a baby yet.

suggested to be caused by pollution. In Eraserhead, this same corruption of the natural world by man, (like the chicken which as the father mentions are “manmade”) seems to be responsible for the abomination of man itself. This is perhaps why Eraserhead’s monster-baby plot could be seen as paradigmatic for the body horror genre, since what is more horrifying than a monstrous baby that is neither alien nor animal but supposedly human - which becomes the same as manmade.

4. In Face of the Abject

As we mentioned in the beginning body horror also refers to the effects these films have on the body of the viewer and Kristeva’s theory of the abject is also a useful way for approaching the viewer’s reactions to body horror on screen. Facing the abject, our bodies get filled with feelings of loathing, nausea, disgust; making us violently turn away from it. And as already mentioned we get a substantive number of gross close ups of the baby and of its disgusting insides. We have not discussed the influence of the soundtrack that, with its monotonous humming and droning of industrial soundscapes, has a constant and almost subliminal effect on the viewer’s body. Nevertheless with its strange and surreal imagery the film manages to compel the viewer to keep watching and feel fascinated by this hideous creature, submissive to it, like Henry is.

The abject is an ambiguous something we do not recognize as a thing defies processes of interpretation and signification. Bypassing the intellect, body horror films like Eraserhead (and all of Lynch films) hit the viewer directly in the flesh. Pleasure is not derived from narrative resolution or from the interpretation of signs, but is caused precisely by facing the abject, which, following Kristeva, when treated in creative form can be “edged to the sublime”.

Notes

2 Ibid., p. 53.
Bibliography


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Ur-Real Monsters: The Rhetorical Creation of Monsters in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs).

Marlin C. Bates

Abstract: The fantasy fight against monsters dates back for years beyond reckoning. Given the age of such stories, it would be logical to assume that the current era of computer games has long since dispensed with tales of undead creatures come to life (a la Shelley’s Frankenstein) or rampaging orcs (everyone from Lloyd Alexander to J.R.R. Tolkien). However, a brief look to some of the most popular games demonstrates that those stories are still very much in vogue. One wonders, therefore, how the monstrosities of the past have been reconstituted in the modern era of computerized video games, specifically, the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG). The MMORPG represents the most recent step in the evolution of what I term the ur-Real world. In specific, the game space is not virtual, nor is it an ersatz copy of the Real; it is ur-Real. To be in the ur-Real world means to be in a world that is just as enrapturing as the non-electronic community.

The creators of online game spaces have unlimited narratives at their disposal, yet their representation of monsters and the monstrous almost exclusively focus on a fantasy world. The focus on the age-old narratives is, as this paper will argue, a rhetorical tool to invite users into a worldwide community. This paper will examine how two of the most popular MMORPGs, World of Warcraft and Everquest, use specific rhetorical narratives to not only present age-old representations of monsters for the player-characters to fight, but also to enmesh the player-character further into an online community of identity and belonging. Specifically, the paper discusses how the rhetorical constructions of these games blur the line between the Real and the ur-Real. The paper culminates by demonstrating an ongoing rhetorical cycle that adapts to continuous change both inside and outside the game.

Key Words: Online, identity, MMORPG, rhetoric, ur-Real, massively multiplayer

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Throughout the millennia, humans have sat around the communal hearth and told stories about the things that go bump in the night. Over the ensuing ages, the communal hearth has changed from one in some central location that the entire community could gather around to a hearth that was more individually based. Indeed, most of us, single or mated, parental or surrogate, gather around the modern version of the electronic hearth: the computer screen. Ever since the first story was told amid the sounds and glow of crackling wood at a prehistoric campfire, humans have been enraptured by the deeds and actions of others and how those deeds effect changes in their own lives. The only change is that now the stories are told amid the sounds of crackling electrons and the glow of phosphors. As the hearth has changed shapes and locations, one would tend to believe that the stories would have changed as well.

Given the age of such stories, however, it would be logical to assume that the current era of computer games has long since dispensed with tales of undead creatures come to life (a la Shelley’s Frankenstein) or rampaging orcs (everyone from Lloyd Alexander to J.R.R. Tolkien). However, a brief look to some of the most popular games demonstrates that those stories are still very much in vogue. One wonders, therefore, how the monstrosities of the past have been reconstituted in the modern era of computerized video games, specifically, the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG). With apologies to Stephen Donaldson, I believe it is best to describe the online MMORPG community as “ur-Real.”

The reasoning for the neologism is because although the MMORPG reality is not the reality we corporeally exist in, it is nonetheless an existence, a community of ways. Yet because it is non-corporeal, we need to set it apart. Some have used the term “virtual reality.” However, this term carries with it the connotation that the online community is “not real, but virtual.” The argument that I will make in this paper is that the MMORPG experience is somewhere in between and, thus, deserves a special designation.

Additionally, we will look to how the rhetorical identities create a sense of belonging and place so that users are able to exist in a community that is no longer bounded by the physical. Rather it is bounded by the acceptance of the game space as ur-Real. In specific, the game space is not virtual, nor is it an ersatz copy of the Real; it is ur-Real. To be in the ur-Real world means to be in a world that is just as enrapturing as the non-electronic community.

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as this paper will argue, a rhetorical tool to invite users into a worldwide community. This paper will examine how two of the most popular MMORPGs, World of Warcraft and Everquest, use specific rhetorical narratives to not only present age-old representations of monsters for the player-characters to fight, but also to enmesh the player-character further into an online community of identity and belonging. Specifically, the paper discusses how the rhetorical constructions of these games blur the line between the Real and the ur-Real.

In order to do so, we will briefly look at the work that undergirds the conclusions we will reach. Specifically, we need to re-acquaint ourselves with the thought of what makes up an online rhetorical identity. Additionally, we need to familiarize ourselves with Foucault’s thoughts concerning the discursive formation, or as he put it, the episteme. Finally, we will compare the epistemic descriptions of monsters from the past (Grimm’s Fairy Tales & Tolkein’s Lord of the Rings trilogy) and the present (World of Warcraft & Everquest II) to demonstrate that the reason the cybernetic monsters are ur-Real is because they cast themselves in the characteristics of the epistemes of the Real.

1. **Rhetorical and Cybernetic Identity Discussions**

In his “Second Persona” article, Edwin Black discusses the intersection of identity and rhetoric. His article provides support for the study on a number of levels. Black gives support to the idea that rhetors and auditors—in this case fellow player-characters—engage in some method of identity exchange when he states, “Actual auditors look to the discourse they are attending for cues that tell them how they are to view the world, even beyond the expressed concerns, the overt propositional sense, of the discourse.” His argument that “there is a second persona also implied by a discourse, and that persona is its implied auditor,” gives support to this study’s use of standalone USENET postings as examples of a multi-person identity creation. Black’s argument that ideology and identity are intertwined bolsters our argument that these statements made in and out of game are not simply “game-playing.” To put it in Black’s terms,

    Let the rhetor, for example, who is talking about school integration use a pejorative term to refer to black people, and the auditor is confronted with more than a decision about school integration. . . . And more, if the auditor himself begins using the pejorative term, it will be a fallible sign that he has adopted not just a position on school integration, but an ideology.
Furthering the discussion of how identity is produced in online MUDs, Sherry Turkle extends a metaphor used by some MUD participants: that real-life (RL) and MUDs are simply “different windows.” People, according to Turkle, have adopted the computer use of the term “window” in order to segment their different selves. As Turkle explains, “The self is no longer simply playing different roles in different settings.” Rather, people—inside of and outside of MUDs—are simply enacting “the life practice of windows [where there is] a distributed self that exists in many worlds and plays many roles at the same time.” Since MUDs are the progenitors of the MMORPG, the metaphor remains valid. Player-characters can be seen as producing one more iteration of how humans “become authors of not only text, but of themselves, constructing selves through social interaction.” Turkle’s treatise demonstrates that identity is being produced on the Internet and, through extension, in the World of Warcraft. Turkle expands on how MUDs create and extend identity via the computer when she argues that identities created via the MUD and those created in real life are different and yet the same. Specifically,

In sum, MUDs blur the boundaries between self and game, self and role, self and simulation. One player says, “You are what you pretend to be . . . you are what you play.” But people don’t just become who they play, they play who they are or who they want to be or who they don’t want to be. Players sometimes talk about their real selves as a composite of their characters and sometimes talk about their screen personae as means for working on the RL lives.9

Indeed, Turkle further posits that the identities created via the computer have a powerful hold on their creators.

When you play a video game you enter into the world of the programmers who made it. You have to do more than identify with a character on the screen. You must act for it. Identification through action has a special kind of hold. Like playing a sport, it puts people into a highly focused, and highly charged state of mind. For many people, what is being pursued in the video game is not just a score, but also an altered state.10

Turkle also offers the following admonition concerning research about the Internet and computer “life.”
Some are tempted to think of life in cyberspace as insignificant, as escape or meaningless diversion. It is not. Our experiences there are serious play. We belittle them at our risk. We must understand the dynamics of virtual experience both to foresee who might be in danger and to put these experiences to best use. Without a deep understanding of the many selves that we express in the virtual we cannot use our experiences there to enrich the real. If we cultivate our awareness of what stands behind our screen personae, we are more likely to succeed in using virtual experience for personal transformation.  

MMORPGs are more than a passing interest. It can be, for some, an all-consuming obsession. For others, it is seen as an oppressive job. Above all else, however, it is a hobby. In his investigation as to how we see even “bad” things as “good,” Kenneth Burke came to the conclusion that “hobbies are occupations: They are symbolic labour, undertaken as compensation when our patterns of necessitous labour happen for one reason or another to be at odds with our profoundest needs.” But, what Burke does not delve into is when that symbolic labour is engaged. Indeed, the issue is summarily dropped as Burke begins to discuss the combination of morality and occupation. Therefore, we are in need of a “bright, shining line” as it were. I put it to the reader as such: if in our current “sense of ‘reality’” we do not have an outlet to express our “personal equations,” we seek out these hobbies. The hobbies thus become a new sense of reality. Therefore, any collection of equations must co-respond to both our need to express our identity and the new sense of reality that surrounds us. In such a situation, if an identity is discovered it must align with the “other” sense of reality as well as the current one. If it did not, the debt to need would have remained unpaid and we would not have sought out this hobby as a means of compensation. Indeed, “when [we] change the nature of [our] interests, or point of view, [we] will approach events with a new ideality, reclassifying them, putting things together that were in different classes, and dividing things that were together.” If our identity changes, we will change the equations, which comprises that identity within the reality we currently reside AND the one in which we are presenting it, if there is a difference between realities. That difference resides within the ideality. As rhetors, we present that ideality as identity. The ideality does not alter the reality, but only the factors we must employ to present a true identity. As Burke reminds us, we must focus on “a study of communication which necessarily emphasizes the social nature of human adjustment, . . ., considering [humans] as possessed, and [humans] as the inventors of new solutions, but these two frames would be subdivisions in a larger frame, [humans] as communicants.” If we are in need to
communicate who we are, we will find a way to express that identity. However, that identity must be expressed in terms of links between others and ourselves. If we are socially isolated, we will seek out new ways to link up with other communicants in order to relieve the possession (occupation) of our identity expression.

This occupation is not a passing fancy either. It is a primal need. As Burke noted, we are “the only animal to [his] knowledge that seeks to define itself.” We must communicate who we are. Furthermore, any identity we communicate is not determinate of the “real” or the “false.” The identity we present and which our audience receives is one and the same. No matter how many differences may arise from the display of certain characteristics, it is the real. Again, Burke reminds us that “in the mimesis of the practical the distinction between acting and play-acting, between real and make-believe becomes obliterated.” There can be no falsity, per se. Indeed, whatever actions we present—which are received by our audience—becomes part of our identity. Therefore, questions of whether this is a “valid” representation become moot. Furthermore, actions that are not received by an audience, no matter what the sense of reality, can not be part of that identity. We may wish them to be, but unless our symbolic labour is received by the other, identity can not be expressed. If this labour is to be seen, we must find an outlet for it. That outlet, whether it is online or tête-à-tête, allows us to fulfil our need to define ourselves.

2. **Brief Focus on Foucault**

Before we begin our examination, we need to briefly understand how we are going to see the MMORPG hail and interpolate users into their ur-Real worlds. Specifically, my argument is that the MMORPGs have used as their touchstone a Foucauldian episteme. Foucault worked for years on discovering the epistemes of different social periods in history. His argument was, in essence, that “the basic episteme, for a given culture, is in a way its universal system of reference to a given period, the only relation that it maintains with the episteme that follows being one of difference.” In other words, the episteme of the society is how that society recognizes what is acceptable knowledge. That knowledge is not related to the epistemes of any other age or culture. Which is as it should be, a certain culture seeks to maintain identity with itself, not necessarily with another. Indeed, at the moment a culture seeks to achieve consubstantiation with another culture, the two combining cultures cease to exist! The resultant consubstantiated whole becomes other to the two parts and, thus, would have a completely different discursive foundations. As such, the episteme we discover inside of the MMORPG will be recognizable as an acceptable form of knowledge by those present within the culture, or ur-Real world. Additionally, as Foucauldian archaeologists of knowledge, we can see those structures as well.
3. **Analysis**

In his magnum opus, Samuel Johnson defined “monster” as “something out of the common order of nature.” More specifically, he cites Locke in that “it ought to be determined whether monsters be really a distinct species.” As a result, we have to consider that any time a monster is discussed, it should be seen as distinct from the normal order of things. It should be separated from nature and, therefore, humans. If this is truly the case, then the discursive formation of monsters in the past as well as in the MMORPG, must be seen as somehow separate from the “normal.” However, the monster must somehow be connected to nature and the normal. Indeed, if they are to be monstrous, the monsters must be seen as a perversion of nature.

As a representative of the past, J. R. R. Tolkein’s collected works delve into much detail on what the “monsters” of Middle Earth are. Although there are many evils lurking in Middle Earth for Tolkein’s heroes to overcome, the most ubiquitous of these evils is the Orc. To begin, the Orcs, according to Tolkein, were “not an original life form. Orcs are a previous life form that was corrupted. Their will is inextricably bound to that of Middle Earth’s prime evil powers – first that of Melkor, later known as Morgoth, then that of Sauron.” So in the beginning description of this most well known of monsters, we see how the orcs were once part of nature, but evil has perverted them into an unnatural state. The question now becomes: how does the MMORPG translate this formation in order to invite auditors into its ur-Real depiction of the world?

In the World of Warcraft, Orcs are both a non-playable enemy as well as a playable character race. This is an interesting turn because it allows the player-characters to not only recognize monsters, but also to become monsters! Indeed, the description of orcs is that they “are one of the most prolific races on Azeroth” and that at one time, Orcs, “cultivated a noble Shamanistic society on the world of Draenor. Tragically, the proud Orc clans were corrupted by the Burning Legion and used as pawns.” Again, we see the corruption of what was a natural state of being. This certainly aligns with the prior construction of “orc,” but it also alters the formation in such a way as to give the player-character an entrée into becoming part of that corruption. Why the player-character might do this is unclear. Perhaps he/she wants to reconcile to corruption; or become part of that evil cloak? In either case, the change in episteme allows the player-character to not only know the monster, but also become part of it; to enact monstrous behaviour as it were. This is how the MMORPG hails its auditors, it allows the human to become monster. Yes, there are repercussions to such an act, just as there are repercussions to such acts in the real world. Nonetheless, the hailing enmeshes the player-character into the ur-Real because he/she is able to act out a particular identity in ways that he/she cannot act out in the real.
Samuel Johnson’s definition of monster aside, another aspect of the monstrous that we need to contemplate in this ur-Real world is the continued use of the other fantasy races. In particular, that of the elves. Tales of the Elvis race date back to Grimm’s Household Tales and, most likely, before. The description of elves, however, differs from the orcs in that the elves begin as “different” and then become more “human.” For instance, in the Grimm’s tale “The Elves,” the characters are described as “pretty little naked men” that are transformed into “boys so fine to see” once the elves begin wearing normal clothing made by the cobbler and his wife. In this case, the construction of the monster is such that we are led to believe that elves are very closely related to humans. Additionally, it only takes a little push for they and us to become the same. When we look at the definition of Elves in Tolkein’s work, not only are the elves described as very human-like, but that they are quite wise and long-lived. Indeed, Elves seem to be a “perfected” race of human beings. Tolkein describes them in such a way because “he was, in a way, creating his own ideal people, based on his own values.” So, the past discursive formation for elves is one of a race of immortal and highly refined human-like beings. Some race that is close to us (e.g., Grimm’s elves were only a set of clothing from being human) and, yet, magical and serene.

In order for the World of Warcraft to seem grounded in this reality, it must use very similar discursive formations to link its users into World of Warcraft’s ur-reality. The use of the fantasy “monster,” the elf is another great example. The World of Warcraft description of elves is that they are “shadowy, immortal beings,” who were the “first to study magic and let it loose throughout the world.” Additionally, “as a race, Night Elves are typically honourable and just, but they are very distrusting of the ‘lesser races’ of the world.” So, we see the similarity in descriptions about the elvish race. However, there is a lack of linkage to being human or human-derived. However, the visual depiction of the elves within the ur-real world is quite human-like. Indeed, unlike other representations of elves (e.g., Tolkein, Grimm), they are represented in a fashion typically associated with a western male gaze. Male elves body templates are muscular and talk whereas female elvish body templates are relatively shorter and more “enhanced.” However, given the audience that this ur-Reality tends to be aimed at this departure from the standard discursive formation would actually enhance its acceptance and not detract. Since gamers and the like have been used to video representations of scantily-clad females and steroid-enhanced males, the trend to represent elves in this way would only be seen as a natural element of an ideal, yet ur-real world.

So, again, we are presented with an instance of the “monstrous” that is so similar to the accepted presentations that came before it. The reasoning is certainly the same: the rhetors want to call into being a particular audience. The creators of the ur-Real world are seeking to hail the “second
persona.” As we have discussed, Black’s argument that “there is a second persona also implied by a discourse, and that persona is its implied auditor,” gives support to this paper’s discussion of how the World of Warcraft creators had to use established and accepted forms of knowledge in order to call forth its intended audience. If WoW had departed drastically from what the intended auditors already knew about the monsters allegedly present with the ur-reality of WoW (e.g., Tolkein, etc), they the requested audience would never have materialized. Indeed, WoW would not be experiencing its ten million subscriber/user base! So, we can see that not only is the use of particular epistemes a reason for continuing with “known” monsters, but also the fact that those that accept these epistemes are the same people that the World of Warcraft seeks to pull into its new world.

4. **Conclusion**

In this decidedly brief foray into how the modern myth-tellers hail their audience into existence, we have seen the use of pre-existing epistemes. Specifically, how the MMORPG genre specifically calls upon the discursive formations of “monsters”—both good and bad—to give player-characters enough grounding in the real so that they make enmesh themselves in the experience of the ur-Real.

The crackling glow of electrons in the computer monitor is our modern equivalent of the campfire. The differences are significant: we tend to be the only ones in front of our “remote fire,” the interaction is almost entirely processed by our eyes (the sense that is the easiest to deceive), and the entire experience is only grounded in the Real. However, it is the similarity between the old and the new that allows this meeting to take place. We know that through Foucault’s episteme explanation that once we recognize a discursive formation as acceptable, that is the primary way in which we accept information as “Real.” When the rhetors of the World of Warcraft employ the old monster episteme, the new auditors recognize it and accept that knowledge as “Real.” However, since the experience is only grounded in the Real (and not actually real in a corporeal sense), it is an ur-Real experience. Remember, the ur-Real has all of the benefits and detriments of the Real world, but since we cannot be corporeally present, it is the ur-Real. We began this discussion by attempting to discover how and why the modern MMORPG still clung to the old discursive formations of what was a monster and monstrous. Not only have we found our answers, but we have also had a glimpse of the campfire tales of the future and, perhaps, a glimpse at our future selves.
Notes

2 Stephen Donaldson is the author of the fictional series “Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever.” It is in his books that the protagonist, Thomas Covenant, is given the title “ur-Lord.” Covenant is recognized as a “Lord,” yet because he is not of that world, he is an ur-Lord. The reasons for this are many and, if you wish to know further, I heartily recommend all three trilogies concerning Thomas Covenant and “The Land.” For much the same reasons, the online MMORPG reality is “Real,” but since it is not of this world, it is ur-Real.
14 Burke, p. 106.
15 Burke, p. 267.
16 Burke, p. 295.
17 Burke, p. 254.
19 Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language*, 1755, s.v. “monsters.”
Silverleaf Tyellas, “The Unnatural History of Tolkein’s Orcs,” (Auckland, NZ: [online], A: August 18, 2006), p. 3

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‘Gorgeously repulsive, exquisitely fun, dangerously beautiful’: Dog Women, Monstrous Births and Contemporary Women’s Art

Maria Luísa Coelho

Abstract: Several cultural discourses have always been eager to emphasise female’s fleshiness, perceived as that which binds women to abjection and the monstrous and a mark of women’s inherent sinful nature. Psychoanalysis has also contributed to this grand narrative by stressing the danger to a distinct self of the alluring and feared maternal body. Such socio-cultural positions have limited women’s participation in different spheres of action, from the political to the spiritual and to artistic creation and expression, and have frequently been a source of anxiety to women. They have thus become a central issue in both feminist discourse and women’s artistic praxis. This paper takes as its starting point the traditional connection of women to abjection and the monstrous and seeks to find in contemporary women visual artists and writers the reworking of such themes. From Helen Chadwick’s and Michele Roberts’ monstrous births to Jeanette Winterson’s and Paula Rego’s ‘Dog Women’, a connection should be established between these artists, who often create visual or literary objects populated with animal-like women, grotesque mothers and hideous births and who embrace the female abject as a source of radical power and as an image of transgressive resistance.


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“Gorgeously repulsive, exquisitely fun, dangerously beautiful” was what Helen Chadwick, the British visual artist who died in 1996, would say when asked to briefly describe her art. In her answer, Chadwick confirms some of the aspects that critics and art lovers have found and admired in her work, not to say the least its ironic and paradoxical nature. Indeed, if the artist thrived to achieve a sense of beauty and pleasure, such was reached by means of a dangerous game where the repulsive always had its share.

Now my argument is that a similar game between attraction and repulsion, beauty and grotesque is at stake in the work of other contemporary women artists. Moreover, I would like to argue that such a game is very often plaid on the ground provided by the female body and is thus a game that directly responds to as well as questions and reworks accepted views of the
same. These women artists are acutely aware of pervasive socio-cultural discourses built around the notion of the female body as monstrous in its corporeality, sinful in its fleshy nature and abject and alluringly dangerous to the self-contained and self-determined subject in its maternal dimension.²

However, the process of conceptual reworking at stake in the art objects produced by these artists doesn’t intend to replace a system of values and ideas regarding women and their bodies by an opposite one. On the contrary, the given examples will show how through the display of a carnivalesque grotesque (in the sense given to this term by Bakhtin and which will be further developed later on) these artists aim at destabilizing given notions and radically breaking with binary oppositions. In other words, more than rejecting, contemporary women artists seem interested in embracing female monstrosity, a subversive attitude since it saves woman’s body from absence and oblivion and gives it radical power through images of transgressive resistance.

In *Cyclops Cameo* [Figure 1], a work from the *Cameos* series, Helen Chadwick proudly exhibits a cyclopic foetus for which, in the artist own words, she fell madly in love while doing research at the Royal College of Surgeons.
The aberrant foetus and its freakiness escape oblivion and the clinical eye of the medical student and are moved from the medical museum to the art gallery, where they can be admired and cherished. The foetus’ removal from one exhibition space to another very different one intends to cause a similar movement in the way we look at it since instead of abhorrence, the Cyclops paradoxically invokes the beautiful, almost the sublime. The title given to the composition (Cyclops Cameo, the art work thus becoming an exquisite jewel and the Cyclops its precious stone) further inverts the marginalisation of the abject and places the grotesque at the centre of artistic creation. This “re-centring of the grotesque”, as David Alan Mellor labels it, is further emphasised by the frame given to the Cyclops photograph, and which suggests in its bright colours and vortex shape the abstraction and pureness of form searched after by High Modernism. By blending science, art and the grotesque Chadwick manages to disrupt the traditional separation of different socio-cultural domains while questioning the boundaries between the socially acceptable and the abject.

Mellor has rightly noticed that the female body, more specifically the maternal body, is also a relevant element in the Cameos series, for the foetus is physically as well as symbolically attached to and dependent of the mother’s body:

[Chadwick] also acknowledged a gendered grotesque, by centring upon foetuses that were incorporated within the maternal body. Indeed, in remarks to Louisa Buck in January 1996, Helen Chadwick imagined these Cameos as ‘canvas as maternal body’.

He further explores this gendered grotesque by connecting it with the seventeenth-century theory that supposes the maternal imprinting of monstrosity on the embryo and foetus through the power of the mother’s imagination. Mellor’s comment is in line with Kristeva’s theory of abjection, for Kristeva refers to the maternal body as the ultimate source of abjection, producing a boundary which is crucial for sustaining self and civilization in a coherent, defined whole. Grounded on a psychoanalytical reading, Kristeva places the maternal body in the Semiotic, the maternal chora, before the acquisition of language and the definition of self. Hence, the maternal body becomes an eternal sight of desire and fear, raising the desire of a pleasurable original moment when the new being and its mother are indistinguishable, when there is no Self and thus no Other, and simultaneously the fear of the self’s destruction in that loss of boundaries.

Chadwick’s Cyclops Cameo reflects and simultaneously disrupts all these readings of the maternal body. By treating the canvas as maternal body and displaying in it an aberrant, unborn creature, Chadwick seems to mirror
seventeenth-century concerns with the monstrous, lethal power of women’s imagination and echo Kristeva’s account of the abject maternal body and its threat to the subject’s formation. However, the artist disrupts such notions by recognizing in the grotesque being the sign of beauty and by embracing the monstrous. In doing so, Chadwick’s artistic gesture transgresses binary oppositions, re-centres and empowers what was at the margin of socio-cultural discourse and, in psychoanalytical terms, brings the female body from the Semiotic to the Symbolic space, which is represented by the signifying system of visual art.

Similar questions can be found in Michèle Roberts’ fiction, where the mother, or her absence, plays such a crucial role. Along with the search for the lost mother, left behind from the moment the child enters the world of the Father’s Law and Word, there is also the search for the female body, which Roberts seeks to set free through her writing. In Roberts’ fiction there is an evident clash between a woman’s needs and desires and what others expect from her. Therefore, the female body, when it relishes in its pleasures and celebrates its sexuality is socially perceived as grotesque, a monstrous body looked at with fear, punished as an example and kept at bay, in a marginal place, lest it contaminates and destroys the established order.

I would like to give closer attention to a small tale, published in a collection of short-stories appropriately entitled During Mother’s Absence, for I find in it a very brief exposition of the main topics that have been discussed so far. The story, entitled “Anger”,” is first centred on one woman, Bertrande, and then on her daughter, Melusine. Roberts sets the plot in an agricultural village of Provence. Against this traditional setting, inhabited by hard-working, god-fearing folks, Bertrande’s appearance and behaviour immediately strike her fellow villagers as grotesque and evil. Bertrande attends church with chicken feathers “stuck in her shawl for decoration” and wonders on the hillside; in summer, she wears “long, heavy clothes, and shivers” and she has red hair and dirty, broad and red hands that are used to slaughtering ducks and butchering lambs. The villagers also notice that she is not fond of children and seems unable to conceive one. To sum up, Bertrande is a deeply unfeminine, grotesque character, easily looked at with suspicion by the villagers. Her artistic nature, for she keeps “a stack of wax crayons and a drawing-book in her larder” and has “decorated the wall behind the privy with her own finger and palm prints”, also provokes the neighbours’ disapproval and is seen as another sign of her abnormality. Bertrande’s monstrosity becomes overtly exposed when at last she falls pregnant and tries to kill the child she carries in her womb on several occasions. After the child is born, Bertrande definitely becomes the deadly mother, attempting infanticide by dropping her baby into the fire. Such behaviour calls for a psychoanalytical reading, for in this act Bertrande seems to personify the abject mother who threatens to impede the child’s right to an
identity. No wonder then that for the villagers Bertrande’s fate is sad: she slowly vanishes as her baby daughter Melusine sucks and “seemed to use up her mother’s strength.” Bertrande, in a re-enactment of the lacanian drama, must die so that her daughter can survive.

Bertrande’s daughter, Melusine, is prone to daydreaming and, like her mother, is intelligent and shows a passion for drawing. She also has a freakish body, not only because she had been burnt as a baby and the skin in the uppermost part of her body would forever be “shiny, angry and red”, but also because of “the thick, silky thatch of bright red hair that curled from her neck down around her breasts and on down to her waist.” The girl’s grotesque dimension had already been hinted at through her name (Melusine is the name of a half-woman, half-serpent water fairy) and is confirmed by Melusine’s father and stepmother, who claim that Bertrande “had delivered herself of a monster.” Bertrande, the monstrous mother, becomes responsible for a monstrous birth. Eventually, Melusine’s strange outpour of red hair, which initially only lasted for five days (a detail which connects the red hair with menstrual blood and consequently with female sexuality), lasts longer and longer and the girl more and more evidences her mother’s independent and rebellious spirit and her artistic, creative enthusiasm. Driven by jealousy and fear, Melusine’s husband, helped by the villagers, enters the private sanctuary where Melusine lived while the outpour of red hair lasted only to find it empty.

Melusine’s fate seems to follow her mother’s and their story could be suggesting the pervasiveness of the female grotesque, its deadly consequence and the mother’s blame in the process. But Melusine’s disappearance is more of a flight to freedom and her “deformity” a tribute to her mother’s monstrosity, celebrated in Roberts’ short-story, which, in its sympathetic viewpoint towards the two women, embraces the grotesque female body and invests it with a capacity for resistance and consequently with a subversive power. Such celebration is also for all the other red-haired, monstrous women whom Roberts briefly mentions when the villagers try to find traces of Melusine and hear reports of a red-haired woman patient in a lunatic asylum, a red-haired prostitute in Marseilles, a red-haired woman painter from Paris, a red-haired monster lady in a freak show. The red hair ultimately acquires a universal dimension as it comes to represent women’s, and not only Bertrande or Melusine’s, monstrosity, that is, women’s anger at their oppression, women’s body, sexuality and passion, women’s independence and creativity and their transgressive resistance.

Transgressive resistance and grotesque female power are also central in the work of the London-based, Portuguese painter Paula Rego. Throughout Rego’s prolific career she has adopted different approaches to the medium and different sources of inspiration; but always present from the beginning are the questions of violence and domination, power and impotence,
abjection and the grotesque. This grotesque frequently exhibits the characteristics presented by Bakhtin to describe the carnivalesque grotesque of Rabelais’ work and Middle Age folk culture and which is centred on the bodily lower stratum (images of food, drink, defecation and the body’s sexual life), an inside-out logic that parodies the extra-carnivalesque world, and a principle of ambivalence found in the body’s unfinished, creative and regenerative dimensions.

Such description of the grotesque already applies to some of Rego’s earlier paintings. *Gluttony* [Figure 2], one of her earliest works, is, according to Fiona Bradley, “a painting made about, of and with the body”, to which I add that it is a clear grotesque body that is at stake, since the painting depicts a confusion of breasts, bottoms and an engulfing, gargantuan mouth.

Both body and canvas have an unfinished quality, a quality that is referred by Bakhtin in his description of the grotesque, and their voracity and messiness are products of a creative principle, a carnivalesque dimension that is simultaneously destructive and regenerative, thus capable of transgressing old, established taboos and boundaries and festively celebrating the body and its materiality.

Rego’s work changes formally in the 1990s: she gradually evidences a progressive realism, leaving behind the abstract-expressionist characteristic of her earlier period. However, despite these changes, the artist is still interested in narratives of power and in the grotesque female body. *Dog Woman* [Figure 3] is such an example and one which, as stated by Ana
Gabriela Macedo, “exhibits the fusion of the sublime and the grotesque in the most distressing way.”

The painting was inspired by a tale about an old woman who, driven insane by her loneliness and the wind, eats her numerous pet dogs. The woman’s old age, madness, loneliness and monstrosity transit from the tale to Rego’s *Dog Woman*, which depicts a lonely, mature woman in a dog-like posture. For this work Rego got rid of most of the props and sets the Dog Woman against an indeterminate background, directing all of the viewer’s attention to the woman at the front and to her aggressive monstrosity. Like Chadwick and Roberts, Rego also pulls the grotesque female body from the margin to the centre. The inherent violence of the woman is highlighted by the dark tones and by the pastel technique (more spontaneous and direct than oil), elements that confer a certain harshness and urgency to the composition. The triangular shape of the Dog Woman also highlights her clawing hands, her growling face and her gigantic and protruding knee. Rego is undoubtedly interested in working within grotesque realism, a concept which, according to Bakhtin, is a heritage of the culture of folk humour and which represents “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity.”

Certainly, the Dog Woman’s intense physicality and her intrinsic animality represent the material level referred by Bakhtin. What is more, the way the Dog Woman carries out her body – she is bent, her opened mouth almost touching the ground where she places all of her weight – corresponds to
Bakthin’s transfer to the material level, literally performing the union of body and earth.

Based on a grim story of loneliness and frustration, this Dog Woman lacks the gay and festive character that Bakhtin finds in the Rabelaisian images of bodily life.\textsuperscript{29} The Dog Woman’s battered features express pain, anger and hunger, which, as noted by Bradley, is “for food, love, and possibly for revenge.”\textsuperscript{30} However, there is a sexual sense in this mature female body as well as an intense idea of unrestrained power and strength\textsuperscript{31} that suggest fertility and plenitude and that contrast with the mentioned suggestions of pain and hunger. Like in Bakhtin’s concept of grotesque realism, the Dog Woman’s body is “grandiose, exaggerated, immensurable”,\textsuperscript{32} an image that is further accomplished through the large size of the painting (120cm × 169cm) and the disproportionate scale of the woman’s body parts. The work is thus ambivalent and subversive, speaking of violence, pain and privation at the same time as it celebrates female physical monstrosity and sexuality.

In Jeanette Winterson’s \textit{Sexing the Cherry}\textsuperscript{33} we find another affirmative, grotesque Dog Woman. The novel tells the story of an unconventional family consisting of Dog Woman, who gets her nickname from the dogs she breeds for fights and races at Hyde Park, and Jordan, the boy who is saved from the muddy and dirty river Thames by his adoptive mother. Though Winterson carries family life to the grotesque, inscribing the familiar into the strange and bringing the outcast home,\textsuperscript{34} this is a family governed by love, which exists between its two members. Therefore, love occupies a central place in the story, which is mostly set in the filthy, rowdy and dangerous seventeenth-century London. It is a contradictory, chaotic and brutal time, the perfect setting for someone as transgressive as Dog Woman.

From the very beginning, Dog Woman is described as a typical Rabelaisian character. Her most mentioned characteristic is her mammoth size, which is frightening to everybody, except to Jordan and the dogs, and which is a source of violence and subversive power. Dog Woman’s incredible size is confirmed by her stories, like the one where she outweighs Samson the elephant, sending it to outer space.\textsuperscript{35} That size is always a source of terror to others and prevents her from engaging in any emotional or sexual relationship.\textsuperscript{36} Though she has been in love, Dog Woman sadly confesses: “I am too huge for love. No one, male or female, has ever dared to approach me. They are afraid to scale mountains.”\textsuperscript{37} The grotesque dimension of this Dog Woman is also explored through the other attributes she displays. To begin with, Winterson constantly matches the filthiness of seventeenth-century London and the margins of the river Thames with the gruesome Dog Woman. In quite a matter-of-fact way, Dog Woman, whose teeth are only few, black and broken, describes how she sweats enough liquid to fill a
bucket, sweat that comes off with lice and other creatures,\textsuperscript{38} and how the scars in her face are home enough for fleas.\textsuperscript{39} Moreover, the events told throughout the novel often expose Dog-Woman’s anger and her violent character, which is increased by her gargantuan size. Two Rabelaisian episodes are enough to sustain this idea: when Dog-Woman, a supporter of the deceased king, takes part in a revengeful conspiracy and brings to the conspirators’ meeting, as a trophy, 2,000 teeth and 119 eyeballs, “one missing on account of a man who had lost one already,”\textsuperscript{40} and the brothel episode, the most gruesome of all, where Dog-Woman’s deceitful and evil neighbours, two hypocritical puritans, are dismembered and beheaded in a pool of blood, tears and excrement\textsuperscript{41}. Not unlike Rego’s Dog Woman, Winterson’s Dog-Woman defiantly exposes her monstrosity and proudly exhibits her animal dimension, a feature that is emphasised by her lack of a proper name since, as she herself confesses, “I had a name but I have forgotten it. They call me Dog-Woman and it will do.”\textsuperscript{42} We hardly separate her from the dogs she breeds as we see her coming home covered in saliva and almost bitten to death by the dogs.\textsuperscript{43} When she is depicted in the avenger’s role, as in the brothel episode, she mightily personifies the female grotesque, that is, she is the image of woman as the beast, a threat to man’s self-identity and virility. What is more, the novel constantly refers to Dog-Woman’s role as a mother (though a stepmother). Therefore, not only does she personify the female grotesque but also the abject mother, whose body and presence threatens to engulf the subject and split it into nothingness, a process that is metaphorically hinted at by Dog-Woman’s overwhelming body.

However, despite all the blood, sweat and pus leaking from Winterson’s gore tale, her Dog-Woman is an intense, human and ultimately endearing figure. That impression comes first of all from her wish to be loved and her capacity to love. Her relation with Jordan is full of love and devotion, feelings that also bind her to her dogs and her true friends. Furthermore, Dog-Woman goes through life carrying the innocent heart of a child since despite being violent, feeling anger and applying revenge, she is unable of being deceitful, contrary to the puritans portrayed in the novel. Her sexual inexperience also underlines her innocence as she candidly notices other people’s sexual and sexualized bodies and naively comments on them. Finally, she always tries to behave courteously according to her own set of rules, laws belonging to a carnivalesque logic that turns the dominant social logic upside-down.

More importantly, the monstrosity of Winterson’s Dog-Woman is more cheerful than Rego’s Dog Woman due to the humour that distils from her comments, her body and the situations she engages in, a humour very akin to the one Bakhtin found in his study of Rabelais, for it is based on the bodily lower stratum. Hence, her body participates of what Bakhtin terms a
carnivalesque regenerative principle and is a source of transgressive laughter. Jo Anna Isaak connects women’s laughter with rebellion and with Rabelais’s theory of laughter as misrule. In her naïve but immensely funny comments and in the way she proudly exhibits her grotesque body, Winterson’s Dog-Woman enacts a social critique as she is able not only to unmask the puritans’ hypocrisy and their loath of sexuality, the body and pleasure, but also to expose the patriarchal fear of and attraction for the grotesque female body. Dog-Woman is also a mother, whose monstrous body is proudly exhibited and celebrated. By putting Dog-Woman in charge of half of the narrative (the other half belongs to Jordan), Winterson gives women a literary voice (and what a loud, energetic voice, and a voice that so often speaks through the grotesque body) and gives the maternal a place in the Symbolic, that is, in the social realm of language.

At the end of this paper I hope it is clear how the artists who have been here discussed try to ‘grotesquely de-form the female body’ and go beyond the dominant socio-cultural construction of women and their bodies, which are either seen as monstrous or not seen at all. By using such a subversive strategy, these artists refuse to keep the female body in a place of absence and they bring women back to the centre of visual art, literature and culture at large, not by rejecting their grotesque bodies but by questioning, embracing and ultimately exploring the subversive potential of female monstrosity.

Notes

1 The Art of Helen Chadwick, Illuminations, England, 2004, DVD.
2 I am here referring to a psychoanalytical discourse with wide social resonance and which has emphasised, since Freud but especially after Lacan, the separation between mother and child as a crucial step in the process of a sense of subjectivity. This split can only be accomplished with the abjection of the mother’s body, the eternally feared and desired Other.
3 Images from Helen Chadwick’s work reproduced with kind permission of the Helen Chadwick estate.
5 ibid.
6 ibid. M Huet, Monstrous Imagination, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1993, provides an impressive analysis of how from classical antiquity to the Romantic era monstrous births bear witness to the fearsome power of the female imagination. Huet draws extensively on the history of

9 ibid., p. 3.
10 ibid.
11 ibid., pp. 3-4.
12 ibid., p. 4.
13 ibid., p. 7.
14 ibid.
15 ibid., p.11.
16 ibid., p. 10.
17 ibid., p. 15.
18 ibid., p.17.
19 ibid. This is a word used by Melusine’s husband to qualify his wife’s oddity.
20 ibid., p. 25.
23 Images from Paula Rego’s work reproduced with kind permission of the artist.
24 Bakhtin, op.cit.
25 For Rego, this move to a more realist art form is connected with her use of pastel: “it [pastel] looked real, or naturalistic – solid . . . I found that the process really suited me”. Bradley, op.cit., p. 83.
26 AG Macedo, ‘Da ‘Mulher-Cão’ à ‘Mulher-Anjo’: Paula Rego, Identidade, Desejo e Mito’, *Cadernos de Literatura Comparada 2: Identidades no Feminino*, June 2001, pp. 63-83, p. 70 (my translation). In another article on Rego’s work, Macedo further adds: “Rego’s ‘Dog Woman’, as well as her ‘Ostriches’, dwell on the shady in-between territory of the human and animal. They are disruptive primal images of the abject, a vision of the uncontrollable world of the instincts, a fragile borderland where any recognizable identity seems to give way to a threatening otherness. Moreover, victims of abjection are often, as Kristeva claims, ‘fascinated victims’, which adds to the horror

27 Bakhtin, op.cit., p. 18.
28 ibid., pp. 19-20.
29 ibid., p. 19.
30 Bradley, op.cit., p. 74.
31 According to Bradley, such power and strength come from the dog-woman’s maturity. ibid.
32 Bakhtin, loc.cit..
34 Winterson comments on her website a propos of Sexing the Cherry: “[t]he central relationship is between Jordan and the Dog Woman. It is a savage love, an unorthodox love, it is family life carried to the grotesque, but it is not a parody or a negative. The boisterous surrealism of their bond is in the writing itself. By writing the familiar into the strange, by wording the unlovely into words-as-jewels, what is outcast can be brought home”. J Winterson, Jeanette Winterson, [n.d.], viewed on 19 September 2006, <www.jeanettewinterson.com/pages/content/index.asp?PageID=14>
35 Winterson, pp. 24-25.
36 ibid., pp. 35-36.
37 ibid., p. 34.
38 ibid., p. 21.
39 ibid., p. 24, p. 25.
40 ibid., pp. 84-85.
41 ibid., pp. 86-89.
42 ibid., p. 11.
43 ibid., p. 13.
45 I am here recurring to an idea expressed by Mary Russo at the end of her book The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity. In relation to the interest in contemporary art in the female body and in its grotesque dimension, Russo explains, "[w]hat appeals to me about this vamping onto the body (to use the word in a slightly archaic sense) is that it not only grotesquely de-forms the female body as a cultural construction in order to reclaim it, but that it may suggest new political aggregates - provisional, uncomfortable, even conflictual, coalitions of bodies which both respect the concept of 'situated knowledges' and refuse to keep every body in its place".

**Bibliography**


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**Torn Posters and Monstrous Images: Damage and Spectacle**

*Jim Cross*

**Abstract:** Advertising posters crowd our walls, subways, and streets with unambiguous offers. They are carefully designed to express a single message as persuasively as possible. Often, though, a transformation takes place as weather, neglect, and over-postering impact on them. In place of a clear call to consumer action something results that is murky, confused, unclear as to provenance, purpose, or meaning. Sometimes promise is transformed into threat as slashed and mutilated figures start forth from the wall. Their ambiguous assault on our apprehensions is aided by text which is equally deformed and fragmented; a radically incomplete and seemingly random palimpsest. These urban works, thrown together by the ‘anonymous lacerator’ of chance, offer a dark and compelling contrast to what they once were. Half-headed portraits and torn figures and text stand in brief progress from the unspotted progeny of an ad-agency to totally inscrutable, totally weathered-away oblivion. What do they tell us, these brutalised wrecks of what was once meant to appeal?

I have researched this area creatively, using my camera to generate images that can constitute both an exploration and catalogue of what is presenting itself. This photographic re-presentation will permit an exploration both of the monstrously deformed and inscrutable imagery that torn posters offer us and also, by contrast, of the omnipresent ‘society of the spectacle’ that the undamaged poster helps to pen us into. The mangled and shredded visages, and unfathomable text of the torn item may give us pause to address the glossy, demanding plausibility of the undamaged display- and perhaps see something more monstrous yet?

**Key Words:** Torn Posters, Fragmented images, Media, transformations, Alternative Meaning.

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Arrested and disturbed by a ripped bedraggled poster in a dark subway some years ago I returned-camera and flash in hand- to make a photograph. Since then I have made pictures of hundreds of these transient testaments to the impermanence of street ads. Along with this activity went a growing curiosity to situate and characterize, and thereby understand, what it was that was distinctive about torn posters. That, in turn, required some
examination of what it was that characterised the function of the normal-untorn-poster, so that the ‘punctum’¹ that I experience with many torn posters (but not with undamaged ones) could be better understood. Hamish Reid provides a starting point. He too took photographs of damaged posters, in his case on the London Underground. He remarked:

Long streaks of disconnected colour, faded or ripped bodies, cut-up texts with missing letters or words, strange juxtapositions of images and meanings… These little surrealisms would change every day… and sometimes the results would rise above the mundane to become something accidentally beautiful …²

There is nothing in his comments with which I would disagree, except to remark that I find torn posters to be often thought-provoking and foolishly involving. There is something monstrous about them, perhaps not on the surface, more in terms of what stirs in the depths: it is that reflection with which this paper—both text and images—is concerned.

**Torn and Untorn, Intimations of Monstrosity**

On the surface the dissimilarities between torn and untorn posters are not hard to identify. ‘The surface’ is a good place to begin, that being all that posters offer up to us. There is a substantial industry devoted to the design and deployment of advertising campaigns, of which posters form such a ubiquitous and omnipresent component. Enormous care is taken to develop images and text which, together, speak persuasively to convey a single message. During any given campaign many identical posters will speak to us and they, in turn, will form but a single element of a deliberate campaign; they are just one part of an interlinked universe of meaning that is consciously orchestrated toward defined objectives: objectives which are typically framed in terms of consumption.

Once posters are damaged—weathered, ripped, scribbled on or over-postered—worked on by the ‘anonymous lacerator’³, then what appears to us is radically different. In place of something carefully formed, there is something casually *de*-formed. For an item that is complete and integrated there now appears something that is partial and fragmentary. Instead of a single poster occupying a precisely mapped-out territory there is something which is now manifold, typically a ‘collage’ of fragments of different posters. Paradoxically, though, the torn poster is always a single assemblage: each one is unique. The clear message is now, at best, unclear, and may well be completely undecipherable. And, just as the message of the individual poster
is subverted by damage, so is its articulation within a universe of meaning skewed, if not totally fractured.

This is an apt juncture to introduce some ideas about the depiction of the ‘monstrous’ as ideas about the functions of different sorts of posters are considered. Alexa Wright has noted that “the depiction of the ‘other’ as monstrous has existed since the first recorded descriptions of the Monstrous races, dating from the 4th century B.C.”

She further notes that “Traditionally, monstrous bodies have been subject to lack or excess, somehow defying a perceived natural order, and representing a threat to subjectivity.” That threat to subjectivity is certainly something which shall be revisited below. Finally, she remarks that-

The projection of fears and anxieties onto unknown or unfamiliar territories whether these be geographical or human, physical or psychological, is universal. It is in these territories, at the borders of the known world that monsters reside, policing the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

A collection of torn poster images accompanies this paper. Where people are portrayed it is clear that they are subject to lack or excess. They miss part of their anatomy, or seem to meld with their surroundings. Where they are partially present, or seem to be melting into their surroundings, or to be imprisoned or threatened by the shadowy presences behind them, then it is clear that either they themselves have something of the monstrous about them, or else are in situations where fear and anxiety are appropriate emotions for them.

**The Torn as Monstrous**

On a surface level, then, the monstrousity of torn posters is evident. Individuals portrayed can appear as composites of several people in the manner of Frankenstein’s monster. They can be missing parts of their head or body or, via paper slippage, to be distorted in their proportions. Yet, with all this, their lips are glossy, eyes bright, and they still ‘look at us’.

Bearing in mind Wright’s comments about the ‘monstrous’ inhabiting the territory between the known and the unknown, it is also easy to see how the text on torn posters can be thus characterised. We see text and, quite possibly, recognise it as being in a language we can read. But, then, weathering may have made it either totally or partially illegible. Tearing may have made it incomplete. Over-postering renders up a multiplicity of messages, but none of them can be clearly made out. We know, then, that this is a communication meant for us, but we also know that we cannot access it (at least, not in any way that was intended).
Such a manifestation can be disturbing: it invites and denies our understanding simultaneously. It can and does accost us at any street corner. Where we engage with it, it can be unsettling. Given what has just been said, it may then seem perverse to assert, as I wish to, that we ought to be more disturbed by the monstrous implications of the undamaged, untorn poster!

The Undead Untorn

To context concerns about ‘normal’ posters and their monstrous implications I wish to focus on a single Associated Press report concerning advertising on city transit systems.7 This is about the imperative for such transport networks to make more money. A.P. report “These days, cities are turning to creative technology to capture captive eyeballs, and shore up budget shortfalls.”8 One business commentator is quoted as saying “Advertisers are looking to own more eyeballs and one way to do that is to dominate a particular venue.”9 Although a passenger remarks “It’s becoming more difficult to have quiet personal space without getting bombarded by messages”10 another commentator affirms “for the transit system there is no downside to selling more advertising… some of the civic do-gooder types might rattle cages because they see cities becoming one more Disneyworld of commercialism… But I think most passengers get used to it.”11

What is worth attending to in the above is the characterization of us, the potential passengers. Our eyeballs are to be captured or owned, and our consent is not actively sought on the assumption that though we may rattle our cages, we will come to accept what we cannot change! Rather like the workers in Fritz Lang’s Metropolis, it is assumed we will accept what it is ordained is good for us.

The Living Dead

The critique of what it is done to people in contemporary society to ensure we consume is wide-ranging. Marx’s analysis of the ‘Fetishism of Commodities’12 is a celebrated analysis of how, within capitalist society, men come to have social relations with things, and to regard other people as objects. Advertising is a key element of that process: do we ever buy a car, or instant coffee, or do we pay for ‘lifestyle’? On the theme of the ‘monstrous’ one of the most compelling images Marx conjures up is a vision of how it is that none of us can now stop the processes that are, effectively, de-humanising us. He says modern bourgeois society “…is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.”13

Where Marx sees demonic powers, McLuhan, over a century later, sees tranquillisers:
Ads are not meant for conscious consumption. They are intended as subliminal pills for the subconscious in order to exercise an hypnotic spell… Ads are carefully designed… for semiconscious exposure. Their mere existence is a testimony, as well as a contribution, to the somnambulistic state of a tired metropolis.

Although the metaphors may vary, the underlying message of the limitation and distortion of consciousness is depressingly consistent:

Ours is the first age in which many thousands of the best-trained individual minds have made it a full-time business to get inside the collective public mind. To get inside in order to manipulate, exploit, control is the object now. And to generate heat not light is the intention. To keep everybody in the helpless state engendered by prolonged mental rutting is the effect of many ads…

Advertising campaigns, the glossy inviting posters on the walls and hoardings, are a key element of the process that is described by both Marx and McLuhan. They both, from very different perspectives, describe how human beings are compelled, despite what they will, to think and behave in a way that serves others, rather than themselves. It is clear from this that the system that they analyse and the instruments it uses (including posters) are both truly monstrous. Indeed, it has been noted how often Marx uses the metaphor of the vampire to illustrate how the capitalist system draws the blood from the veins of those compelled to work within it!

Return of the Living Dead

The most apposite analysis of the processes dealt with by Marx and McLuhan when talking of what we see all around us must be that offered by Guy Debord and that set of activists who came to be called the Situationists. Debord understood that the creation of a spectacular and illusionary universe of meaning, penetrating everywhere, was at the very heart of contemporary capitalism. He called it the society of the spectacle. For him, in the fetishised reality already analysed by Marx,

The real consumer becomes a consumer of illusions… This is the principle of consumer fetishism, the domination of society by ‘intangible as well as tangible things’.
This is a Sysiphian reality which cannot please: “The spectacle is a constructed reality. It does not satisfy, it cannot satisfy. It offers only the dream of satisfaction.”

But, although it is unsatisfying and tormenting, escape is difficult- in the society of the spectacle everything is a commodity for passive consumption, and as we consume what is portrayed, we become part of it, making refusal or rebellion very hard.

**Light through a Torn Curtain**

Is there hope? The situationists believed there was, and the nature of their belief redirects our attention back to the torn posters with which this paper started. The way to undermine a monstrous system might be to play with monsters! In his history of anarchism, Marshall remarks of Debord and his colleagues that:

They called themselves Situationists precisely because they believed that all individuals should construct the situations of their lives and release their own potential and obtain their own pleasure.

Situationists did not want to wait for some future revolution to transform the world, but to disrupt it and to transform perceptions now, as a form of catalyst for that future revolution. To that end they encouraged activity that would, in some sense, be subversive. A favoured form of such activity was détournement, a form of activity where both the source and meaning of some original thing were subverted by behaviour or interpretation to, in effect, create something new. So, as students in the uprisings in France in 1968 tore up paving stones to throw at the riot police they chanted ‘sous la pave la plage!’ (under the paving stones, the beach!).

Debord refers, in fact, to a further development of this concept: “ultradétournement, that is, the tendencies for détournement to operate in everyday social life.” Could torn posters be regarded in this light? They are certainly a pervasive element of the city, of urban social life. The very fact that, inasmuch as they are damaged, they are less efficient at doing the work of hastening our consumption is, in this light, a merit. Further, they invite us in, invite our individual engagement, because it requires work to decipher what they might have to offer. In McLuhan’s terms they are ‘cool’ posters rather than ‘hot’ ones because they do not offer us much information at all. We have to try ‘join the dots’. In doing so, and in seeing faces and celebrities out of context, sometimes looming at us in some monstrous pieced together or fragmented form, we are thereby decoupled from Debord’s spectacular society of consumerism- at least momentarily- and, perhaps, encouraged to see in the impermanence of such images the transience of the system of delusion and domination it represents.
About the Following Images

The activity that spawned this paper was at least as located in the realm of ‘seeing’ as it was in that of ‘thinking’ (though the two always interpenetrate). These images represent the myriad of torn posters that caused me to think as I have outlined. Taken together, they speak cogently of what I write. Ideally, the text takes the images as a starting point, just as it leads on to them, leading to a virtuous circle of understanding. In viewing the images, then, you are invited to engage in détournement, to ‘play with purpose’.
Torn Posters and Monstrous Images

Image 1
Image 3
Image 5
Image 7
Image 9
Image 11
Notes

1 To use Barthes’ term for that ‘something’ in a photographic image which seems to reach out and grab you.
3 As the artist Villeglé termed the agencies described above
5 loc. cit
6 loc. cit
Bibliography


Section 3:

Fearing the ‘Other’
The Nymph and the Witch:  
Female Magical Figures in the Works of Paracelsus 

Peter Mario Kreuter

Abstract: The natural philosopher, theological thinker and physician Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim, better known as Paracelsus (1493/94-1541), played an important role in shaping the perception of the female sex in the 16th century, a role not always easy to understand. On one hand, he still lived in a world in which the word woman was a kind of synonym for ‘sin’ or ‘inferiority’. On the other hand, he was the one who recommended clearly that women’s medical treatment should be different than that of men because of the differences of their bodies, an idea which today is regaining its place in the medical world.

But Paracelsus was not only occupied by this very practical question. He mentioned either the witch or the nymph repeatedly. Melusina takes a widespread place in his discussion of the world of the natural spirits. And one should not forget that Paracelsus created his very own paradigm of the witch, differing totally from the common paradigms such as the Malleus maleficarum. His interest in nymphs and witches was that of a scholar, not that of an inquisitor. He believed in their existence, but that was not enough: Paracelsus wanted to understand what they were. The aim of the presentation is it to follow the reflections of Paracelsus about nymph and witch, and we shall always see how he explained these two female magical figures.

Key Words: Paracelsus; Nymph; Witch; Female studies; 16th century

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The natural philosopher, physician, alchemist, and lay theologian Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim, better known as Paracelsus (1493 or 1494 - 1541), was one of the most relentless modernizers and revolutionaries in the 16th century, and “Lutherus medicorum” was one of the nicknames given to him by his contemporaries which he always rejected and fought against. In more ways than one, Paracelsus can be seen as a kind of a hinge between antique or medieval medicine, such as the four humours, and modern medicine. He is the inventor of iatrochemistry and parasitology, and he is the first one in modern European medicine for whom the experience, the
personal view of an illness or an ill person was the central point of medical arts - and yet, he still remains trapped in the old systems. His opinions and doctrines seem to be very inconsistent. Parasitology yes, but the invaders are not bacteria or at least any kind of “small existences”, but demons. And his whole medical concept was highly speculative in the details, basing on his theory of the “entities” and still accepting all kinds of demonical figures and spirits.

It is therefore no great surprise that Paracelsus believed in the existence of two female magical figures which still have their attraction today: the nymph and the witch. Both of them played a certain role in his books, not occupying his central interest, but nevertheless constantly reappearing in some of his works. And they are used to explain what Paracelsus judged as being crucial points of his own philosophy.

Paracelsus’ preoccupation with the nymph could be seen as paradigmatic for his treatment of all kinds of spirits and demons. He mentioned especially Mélusine repeatedly. Because of his little essay Liber de nymphis, sylphis, pygmaeis et salamandris (first published 1566), he became a sort of a source of the existence and the humanity of such a creature. For Paracelsus Nymphs are female elemental spirits inhabiting the watery depths. Paracelsus defined water spirits as one who was able to love and being worthy of marriage with a mortal man, but who have no souls. Because of their friendly and pure nature, seeking to understand them became an essential point for the nobility of his own scientific inquiry. “It is more blessed to describe the nature of the nymphs than [military or monastic] orders; it is more blessed to describe the nature of giants than courtly manners; it is more blessed to speak about Mélusine than about artillery and canons; more blessed to describe the little people living underground than to fight with swords or to serve the ladies.” As one can see, there was no problem for Paracelsus to believe in the existence of nymphs, and in his eyes it is more worthwhile to engage in the study of magical sciences than in any other matter. In Liber de nymphis, Paracelsus clearly underlines that in principle nymphs are soulless beings. Indeed, marriage has such salutary effects that even a soulless being could win a soul and bear children with souls - if lawfully married to a mortal man. Here we can state one of the central points in Paracelsus’ conception of society. Following him, man and woman are designated to come together to build up a family. He rejects any kind of celibacy. Neither man nor woman shall stay alone. Marriage is the highest sacrament Paracelsus knows, able to transform individuals with egoistic traits in loving and attentive couples with - of course - children. Two things are very important. On the one hand, Paracelsus judges not only unmarried women as egoistic and antisocial, but also men. In his concept, every human being has to marry. On the other hand, the power of marriage is so strong that even a nymph can gain what is the central point of being a
human being: having a soul. Love and marriage can jump over the borders between mankind and the world of spirits.

If the nymph is a positive figure in Paracelsus’ conception of the world, the witch at least is not the completely negative figure of a woman conjuring up the Devil to mate with him in perverted copulation and to harm people by magical tricks. This image was propagated, if not invented, by the Dominican Inquisitor Heinrich Institoris in his well-known book *Malleus maleficarum* (1486). It changed the meaning of the term “witch” which until then meant a male or female person, privy to secret knowledge, working with magic formulas and brewing magic potions. When Paracelsus wrote his *De sagis et earum operibus* some-where between 1529 and 1532, this new witch paradigm already had entered the theoretical discourse about witchcraft but nevertheless had not yet become part of the legislation. Both the *Bamberger Halsgerichts-ordnung* from 1507 and the *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina* from 1532 made a clear distinction between White and Black Art and punished only the Black Art. In this instable situation for the definition of the term “witch”, Paracelsus wrote his very own explanation about witchcraft and sorcery. His *De sagis et earum operibus* doesn’t seem to be influenced by the polemics of Institoris, and the book completely lacks the strident hatred of the *Malleus maleficarum*. It is the attempt to explain witchcraft by the means of science such as Paracelsus understood it, and his interest is that of a scholar, not that of an inquisitor. Witches are, following Paracelsus, women who are possessed by what he calls “Ascendent”, a bad spirit sent by the Devil in order to take over control of the person’s body and soul after puberty. A male person can also be possessed by an “Ascendent” but in this case the man will become an ordinary criminal. This bad spirit will first plant hate and envy in the heart of the woman and, when the soul is damaged by this negative feelings, will drive the woman to do Black Art, the spirit will even guide her by controlling her dreams.

This conception of witchcraft is elementary for Paracelsus’ concept of women. On the one hand, Paracelsus does not conceive women as soulless beings. In other works, he clearly speaks about the soul of women, and this fact has a quite simple explanation: if a woman is made from the rib of Adam, she was made by using a part of a human being with a soul. So how could it be possible that a woman has no soul? She shares this divine nature with him. On the other hand, witches are not guilty for the Black Art they performed. The “Ascendent” has infected them, and as in his purely medical treatises, Paracelsus recommends a kind of “artzney” (medicine) in order to save them: praying and fasting. Sorcery is a kind of illness, and Paracelsus knew the medicine against it. Therefore, there is no need of witch trials and stakes. The whole witchcraft concept of Paracelsus fits very well with his general concept of parasitology as mentioned in the beginning of this paper.
But there is just another interesting point about the Paracelsian witch. Besides the Black Art she is performing (and which is quite classical like “maleficia ad impotentiam”, love spelling or worsening the weather), a witch is also defined by a special behaviour with regard to men. Like his contemporaries, Paracelsus believes that women are more dominated by their sexuality than men, and a woman should be married to a man as soon as she has matured physically. If possessed by an “Ascendent”, a witch shows neither any interest in a man nor in the ‘normal life’ of a woman. Female refusal (a typical sign of being a witch) like “turning away from men”, “fleeing men, hiding, wanting to be alone”, “not looking a man in the eye” or “lying alone, shutting themselves in” represents aberrant sexual and social behaviour and is interpreted as a sign of satanic possession. The witch is behaving antisocially, and for Paracelsus this is as worse as any kind of Black Art because of the refusal of the ‘natural way of behaviour’.

A wider audience didn’t know the ideas of Paracelsus. For his contemporaries, he was espacially known as an astrologist, as the author of the Große Wundartzney and as a specialist of the syphilis. 25 years after his death, his books about nymphs and witches were printed for the very first time in shortened variants, to late to have any influence in the witch-craft debate. But today we are able to see how his main ideas about the influence of the world of the demons on our world are not only represented in his major works about medicine or theology, but also how his opinions about the demonic world were used by him to explain the penetration of our world by this forces. So both the nymph and the witch are two female figures with a clear rooting in another world, and any contact will have a certain influence, a good one in the case of the nymph which becomes a being with a soul, or a bad one in the case of the witch, which must then be treated with “Christian medicine”.

Notes

3. Ibid., p. 5-27.
4. Ibid., p. 13.
5. One should not forget that Paracelsus suffered, as best we know of, *Congenital adrenogenous syndrome*. A man suffering from this syndrome has not only a female-like skeleton and tends towards a choleric temperament, but also shows no interest in any kind of sexual contact. The diagnosis is based on an exhumation of the remains of Paracelsus and is given in Kritscher, Herbert, et al., “Forensisch-anthropologische Untersuchungen der Skelettreste des Paracelsus,” in *Paracelsus. Keines andern Knecht... 1493-1541*, ed. Heinz Dopsch, Kurt Goldammer and Peter F. Kramml, Salzburg: Anton Pustet Verlag, 1993, 53-61, here 61.


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Inconceivable Beasts:
The ‘Wonders of the East’ In the Beowulf Manuscript

Susan Kim & Asa Simon Mittman

Abstract: Strange, indistinct creatures peer out at us from charred pages. They writhe on brittle vellum, leap off the page, and refuse to be contained by frames. The headless blemmye, the fire-breathing, dog-headed cynocephalus, the man- (or woman-) eating donestre - these wonders fill London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, commonly known as the Beowulf Manuscript, after that most famous Anglo-Saxon epic. The main poem in this tenth-century manuscript has received abundant scholarly attention, but the other works bound with Beowulf remain understudied. This paper examines the Wonders of the East, a collection of illustrated descriptions of monsters and other marvels inhabiting the other end of the world.

These images have been critically dismissed or elided for being everything monsters ought be - raw, uncontained, unrestrained. Yet, as J.R.R. Tolkien wrote in “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics” (The Proceedings of the British Academy, 1936) - the essay which shapes most modern readings of the poem—Beowulf’s monsters “are not an inexplicable blunder of taste; they are essential, fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem, which give it its lofty tone and high seriousness.”

The Wonders are very much about how we locate ourselves. Explicitly and literally, entries begin by situating the creatures to be described: “At the beginning of the land,” “as you go towards the Red Sea,” “in the same place,” “between these two rivers,” and so on. These passages can disorient - they follow no geographic logic and map no possible journeys - yet nonetheless they shape for readers a progression though a loose ‘narrative’ in which one is led deeper and deeper into the unknown, almost mythical East and, thus, back again to the spaces of our own identities. We chart the location of these creatures both in their geographic context and in modern scholarship.

Keywords: Anglo-Saxon, Beowulf, Body, Manuscripts, Medieval, Monsters, Text-Image Relations, Wonders of the East

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The manuscript we will be discussing today is among the most important to survive the Middle Ages, as it contains the only extant copy of *Beowulf*, the oldest epic in the English language. This poem has received such attention over the years that a quick search in WorldCat returns almost 3,500 results and, according to Andy Orchard, “There's something like a book or an article on *Beowulf* being produced every week at the moment.” This is not to mention the numerous films, including *Beowulf & Grendel* (2005), the tragic Christopher Lambert *Beowulf* (1999), and a new *Beowulf*, forthcoming in 2007, in which (I say with a shudder), Grendel’s Mother will be played by Angelina Jolie. Add to this the improbable opera *Grendel*, recently playing in New York and LA, based on John Gardner’s 1971 book of the same title.

In short, a great mass of attention, scholarly and popular, has been heaped, quite justifiably, on the *Beowulf* poem. We are here, though, to deal with the *Beowulf* Manuscript, which is rather more complex than even the great poem, on its own. Particularly, we would like to open the book to its lesser-used but more magnificent pages - more magnificent because, unlike the folios bearing the *Beowulf* poem, these contain images. (See Figure 1.) Dark, burned, flaked, torn images - wonderful images - that have been as badly abused in scholarship as they were by the great fire which ravaged Sir Robert Cotton’s library in October, 1731.

These images accompany - or indeed are accompanied by, depending on one’s perspective - a text known as the *Wonders of the East*, a compendium of marvellous creatures, places and plants based on Classical and Patristic texts by the likes of Pliny, Herodotus and Isidore. The later cousins of the *Wonders* - two manuscripts containing the Latin *Marvels of the East*, have received more attention. (See Figure 2.) They are rather more firmly penned, with bolder, more distinct outlines. They can be apprehended with greater clarity, visually and therefore conceptually, and yet it is the wilder fantasies of the *Wonders* that call out for attention.

First, we will set the work in its context - indistinct thought that does remain - and then we will investigate the manners in which it causes us to rethink our notions of monstrosity. In short, *Beowulf* and the *Wonders* are housed, along with an Old English *Passion of St. Christopher*, *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* and *Judith*, all bound together in a manuscript known by its Cottonian shelf mark of London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, also known as the Nowell Codex or, more familiarly, the *Beowulf* Manuscript. The manuscript is controversial in its dating and provenance, but there is some consensus that it was most likely produced between 975 and 1025. This sits it toward the middle or end of the disastrous rule of Æthelred *Unraed*, “Good Advice the Ill-Advised.” This was a period of hard losses to and uneasy, bought truces with the Danes, who would eventually overtake all of England. The location for the manuscript’s production is rather more
uncertain, and we cannot say much more than that it is surely English, and possibly East Anglian.³

Regarding the audience, there is little we can say about who read this work,⁴ though we might well make plausible suggestions about how it was read. Certainly, it was read by a literate individual, which in this period would indicate a cleric or aristocrat.⁵ Given that some of the texts are, as Orchard has described them, “ostensibly secular,” and others are “those in which explicitly religious themes predominate,” it is difficult to assign the compendium to one audience or the other.⁶ Still, it bears mention that aristocratic readers read religious texts and monks not only copied but also read works we would think of as secular. However, the Wonders section gives an indication of how at least this section of the manuscript was meant to be read. The small images demand close-up inspection, visual interaction, and so this was a work likely read by an individual, rather than one read aloud to an assembled group. We may therefore think about direct connections between the reader and the text-image units.

The art history of these images has been rather limited. Elżbieta Temple, one of the few art historians to even touch on these images, refers to them as “rather rough and incompetent,” though she acknowledges that they are “not without their own fascination.”⁷ Kenneth Sisam refers to what he sees as “the childish draughtsmanship of the illustrations.”⁸ Orchard (in a chapter nonetheless dedicated to the Wonders) cannot quite bring himself to comment directly upon these images, though he does denigrate them though contrast with the later Tiberius Marvels of the East, which he says contains a “further (and much finer) set of illustrations” than Vitellius.⁹ Likewise, the recension of the text of Vitellius has been elided in favour of the slightly longer version found in Tiberius. Paul Gibb, for example, finds this text to be, of all the Wonders texts “by far the most problematic,” with “omissions” which “create hopelessly nonsensical passages.”¹⁰ E. V. Gordon finds the text “greatly inferior to that in MS Cotton Tiberius.”¹¹ Sisam, similarly, privileges the Latin of other versions of the text, and describes this manuscript’s English text as guilty of “perversions” which the slightly later Tiberius “avoids or tries to avoid.”¹²

Even recent studies of the Wonders and the context of the Beowulf manuscript take a strikingly uncomfortable position on the version of the Wonders which actually appears in the Beowulf manuscript. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, for example, in the opening chapter of his study Of Giants, turns his critical attention briefly to the Wonders and justifies the move with the argument that the Wonders is, after all, “bound in monstrous affiliation” with Beowulf.¹³ But Cohen directs his reading immediately to an image not from the Beowulf manuscript, but from the later Tiberius version of the Marvels of the East, an image, by the way, quite different from the image in our version.
While we are not interested in arguing that this manuscript is evidence of technically superior artistry, we do wish to take up a resonance between the contents of the manuscript, in particular of this version of the *Wonders of the East*, and the terms of the reception of both text and images as "debased," "problematic," and guilty of "perversions." When even critical examinations which have the *Beowulf* manuscript as their primary focus turn away from this text and these images - by dismissing them as inferior, by eliding them, by simply substituting sections from the related texts - we are fairly certain that there must be something in them - albeit something "debased" or "perverted" - that calls for our attention.

All three early medieval versions of the *Wonders* are illustrated, and all of the illustrations are characterized by an aggressive interaction between the images and their frames. As John Block Friedman has noted, following Otto Pächt, figures such as the Tiberius Blemmyae do not merely stand on their frames or reach outwards, but grasp the edges of the frame as if to thrust themselves outside of it. (See Figure 2.) But if all versions of the *Wonders* are characterized by aggressivity with respect to the frames, the Vitellius *Wonders* pushes at the limits of even that aggressivity. Unlike the analogues, the Vitellius *Wonders* contains a number of images which are only partially framed, with the space of the text vulnerable to contact with the monstrous images - here the chickens who set fire to anyone who touches them, or these extremely mangy creatures who set their own bodies on fire. (See Figure 3) Even more strikingly, some of its images are frameless altogether and these images penetrate not only what might be the blank space of the margin, but also the space of the text itself. As Michael Camille has argued for later manuscript traditions, the transgressive play in the margins of manuscripts - all those well-endowed scipods and defecating monkeys - remains play as long as it is confined to the *margins* of even very straight texts. The Vitellius *Wonders*, however, do not allow for that separate space of play, of safe transgression. Here, for example, the two-headed snake traverses the page, the flames from its mouths making contact with the very text which declares its proximity to "ungefæregelicu deor," unheard-of, inconceivable beasts. (See Figure 4.) More provocatively still, here we can consider these astonishing ants-dogs. (See Figure 5.) In contrast to the Tiberius version’s neatly framed and tidily narrative illustrations, here the illustration is frameless. The text tells us that these are "æmettan swa micle swa hundas," ants as big as dogs, which mine gold. If a man is brave enough to steal that gold, he is to take a camel stallion, mare, and foal. He ties up the foal on one side of the river, and then takes the stallion and mare to the other, where the ants are mining the gold. He then leaves the stallion to be attacked by the ants, loads up the gold on the mare, and rides the mare back across the river - "so swiftly that one might imagine they were flying." But remember that this is what the text tells us. Note that the illustration is not merely
gesturing towards the textual space, or even, as in the case of the two-headed serpent, nudging its descenders with a little bit of fire. Here the final word of the text for this episode, “fleogan,” is surrounded by the body of the ant-dog, a nugget of gold still in his mouth as he wraps his body around the text. If the text suggests successful plunder and flight from the encounter with the beasts, the aggressive penetration of the image into the space of the text disallows that suggestion: the text “flies” not away from the image of the creature, but directly into its body.

And the space of the text is not the only violated space in this exchange: as the small and blurry images demand close-up attention from the viewer they also demand interaction, participation from the viewer/reader who must move his body into unusual proximity to the manuscript itself, and look at it, not only listen to it as it is read by another. Furthermore, although we can read, for example, the Tiberius illustrations before or after the text, or in juxtaposition to the text, we encounter the Vitellius text and image often with a simultaneity which threatens the very ways we have learned to apprehend text and image meaningfully.

As Massimo Leone has argued recently, reading texts and reading images both require a semiotics of space. That is, as we apprehend the verbal text, we must move through a linear succession of letters and spaces. As we approach the visual text, although the clear linearity of the verbal text is lost, still, apprehending the image requires an understanding of, in his terms, “what is where” - what is above, below, left or right, etc. Yet for Leone, too, despite the similar reliance on spatial location, a “fundamental aporia” occurs with “the passage from word to image” or vice versa, as the image loses its non-linearity, and the word must move from its linear association with time to the non-linear mapping of space. In the case of the Vitellius Wonders, such an aporia is certainly captured in the very uneasy translations between text and image but it is perhaps even more palpable in those moments of collision, like that of the ant-dog episode, where we can see the image blocking the linear progression of the text, even reversing the semantic force of the text, and the image spreading around the text, yet still pushed as if out of position by it. When we are asked to read both image and text not in sequence but at once, we are asked to occupy, as it were, multiple dimensions, in none of which we can orient ourselves.

But it is not only in these obvious moments of collision that we find such a balking of the ways in which we read meaningfully. The interaction, indeed, interpenetration of text and image, here, allows us to re-evaluate some of our basic assumptions regarding the representations of all of these creatures, which have so often been given the simple - perhaps simplistic - appellation of “monster.” Modernity would, I think, generally define a “monster” as that which is horrible, but does not actually exist. The OED tells us, for example, that a monster is “an imaginary animal (such as the sphinx,
minotaur, or the heraldic griffin, wyvern, etc.) having a body either partly brute and partly human, or compounded from elements of two or more animal forms.” The Middle Ages might well have defined a monster as “an animal” with such qualities, leaving out the qualifier that it be imaginary. This is one of the crucial differences which must be born in mind. It seems that we are faced with a dichotomy that we would reject - either that mediaevals, like us, wisely and rationally viewed dog-headed men and centaurs and the like as metaphors, and never really believed all that nonsense, or that they were ‘superstitious’ and ‘benighted’ products of that dark age, unable to arrive at rational conclusions in the same manner as modern people. Neither of these are, we would argue, the case. Rather, as David Stannard argues:

We do well to remember that the [pre-modern] world . . . was a rational world, in many ways more rational than our own. It is true that this was a world of witches and demons, and of a just and terrible God who made his presence known in the slightest acts of nature. But this was the given reality about which most of the decisions and actions of the age, throughout the entire western world, revolved.

The question is therefore not “did mediaevals believe there were monsters hiding under their beds” - they did - the question is “what did they think a monster was?”

Our first glance reveals, as always, what we expect to see: Horrible beings made, like Frankenstein’s Monster, by sewing together bits and pieces of other creatures. The legs of a bird, the body of sheep, the ears of an ass. (See Figure 6.) Or, perhaps more luridly, the body of a horse conjoined without transition to the torso of a man. (See Figure 1.) Such images, it seems to me, always beg the question - where has the horses’ head, the proper culmination of such a body, gone? The text, also at first blush, seems to confirm this visual reading. Of the lertice, “they have ass’s ears and sheep’s wool and bird’s feet.” Likewise, of the onocentuar, we read “they are up to the navel human in shape and afterwards in the likeness of an ass.” This sounds rather clear - an onocentuar, or ass-centaur, is a creature with the upper parts of a man and the lower parts of an ass - but this is not what it actually says. Rather, it says quite clearly that this creature, this homodubii, has the shape of a human above and the likeness of an ass below, which is rather different. In the former, two distinct beings have been joined together to produce a hybrid monster, with blood no doubt still trickling from the suture tying them together. In the latter - the one more precisely based on this
text, we have a distinct creature, not made of the parts of any other being, but rather, having parts that look like those belonging to known creatures.

This distinction is important in two respects. First, it means that at least the creatures in the Wonders are not really hybrids, as many of them have so often been called. Second, it means that they are no more and no less likely to exist, not more and no less plausible and conceivable than those members of the Wonders that we often skip past, on account of their familiarity - the camels, (See Figure 7.) for example, or the gentle, oyster-eating bishop. Indeed, a camel would have been no more familiar in Anglo-Saxon England than an onocentuar, and both would have been known only through geographies, encyclopedias and travellers’ tales, like this text and like the letter of Alexander, bound with it, which recounts the 2000 camels the conqueror has in his retinue.

Essentially, while these creatures are all in some way “wondrous” or “marvellous,” they cannot simply be labelled “monsters” or species of monsters and then safely filed away for at least two reasons. The first is that we have to remember the truth-value of these descriptions for the Anglo-Saxon audience. These creatures are “wonderous” in the sense that they are “ungefrægelicu” - un-heard-of, unknown, even inconceivable, but they are not imaginary: they exist. The second is that because they are “ungefrægelicu” we only know them the way that we can know things we’ve never seen, touched, or been torn apart by: we only know them through text and image. Hence it is no surprise that so many mediaeval - and contemporary - commentators take up the etymological association of “monster” with “monstrare,” to show, to demonstrate, and “read” the monster as itself a sign, or even a representation of the sign. Yet, as we have been arguing, the creatures of the Vitellius Wonders resist, even as representations of the means by which we signify, as they ask us, again and again, to locate ourselves in those moments when our strategies for reading meaningfully are confounded.

As Bruno Roy has suggested, the monster catalogs may be conceived of as a strategy for naming what can go wrong with the human body or the animal world, and, by so naming those abnormalities, of reassuring readers of their own “normality,” and the resilience of that “normality” in God’s creation. But the Vitellius Wonders suggests that even this process of naming is already destabilized: even on the most explicit level, these monsters are described as “ungefrægelicu” - even after they are named, they remain “unheard-of.” Even without this sort of lexical play, we can see the anxiety about the process of naming throughout the Vitellius text, as the Latin monster names, like Homodubii, are translated into English which only reiterates their opacity: the Homodubii are “twimen” - double men or doubtful men in English or Latin, but made all the more double and doubtful
by the fact that the term is used, and with no explanation, to describe more than one monster in the text.

But, as we have been arguing, the text of this the manuscript - anxious as it is on its own - never can be resolved into any matter of text alone. Kenneth Sisam asks why an illustrator “so incompetent” would venture on the images of this manuscript at all unless he were simply copying from an illustrated exemplar. But certainly an incompetent illustrator need not copy the illustrations in his exemplar. We can propose instead that this illustrator created these images, whether he was copying them or not, because the images matter to this text - and in fact all three early mediaeval English versions of the Marvels are illustrated. But we cannot think about these images as supplements, as simply illustrations of the plot of the textual episodes. That might be one way to read the related manuscripts, but, as we have been arguing, this manuscript does not allow for such a safe containment. We suggest instead that the Vitellius Wonders is guilty of “perversion” in the sense that it requires us to read its monstrous texts and images differently. In doing so, if we are not going to dismiss these Wonders or otherwise turn away from them, we have to acknowledge our own dislocations, our own fear and puzzlement, but also our own recognition that something real is there, just beyond what we know how to understand.
Figure 1: London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv, f. 99v, Blemmye, *Wonders of the East*. (From *The Electronic Beowulf*, edited by Kevin Kiernan, and by permission of the British Library.)
Figure 2: London, British Library, B.v Tiberius B.v, f. 82r, Blemmye, Marvels of the East. (By permission of the British Library.)
Figure 3: London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv, f. 96r, Chickens and Beasts, *Wonders of the East*. (From *The Electronic Beowulf*, edited by Kevin Kiernan, and used by permission of the British Library.)
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Figure 4: London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv, f. 96v, Two-Headed Snake, *Wonders of the East*. (From *The Electronic Beowulf*, edited by Kevin Kiernan, and by permission of the British Library.)
Figure 5: London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv, f. 98r, Ant-Dogs, Wonders of the East. (From The Electronic Beowulf, edited by Kevin Kiernan, and by permission of the British Library.)
Figure 6: London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv, f. 99r, Lertice, Wonders of the East. (From The Electronic Beowulf; edited by Kevin Kiernan, and by permission of the British Library.)
Figure 7: London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv, f. 98v, Camels, 
Wonders of the East. (From The Electronic Beowulf, edited by Kevin Kiernan, 
and by permission of the British Library.)

Notes

1 A Orchard, quoted in an interview in The Canadian Press, October 19, 
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2 A Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 
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3 S Newton, The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East 
4 K Sisam argues, “The two hands indicate that it was the undertaking of a 
community, not of an individual who made a copy for his own use. Their ill 
matched styles, the poor capitals, the childish draughtsmanship of the 
illustrations to Wonders, and the modest format are evidence that the book 
was not produced as a present for some great man, whether an ecclesiastic or 
a lay patron.” Studies in the History of Old English Literature, Clarendon 
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the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, vol. 77:1, 1995, pp. 109-
142.
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7 Temple, Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts 900–1066, p. 72, no. 52.
8 Sisam, Studies, pp. 95-6.
9 Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, p. 20.
12 Sisam, p. 81.
14 Sisam, p. 78.
15 Gibb, p. 3.
16 Sisam, p. 81.
18 K96-98v, Ry99[98].
19 “Gothic marginal art flourished from the late twelfth to the late fourteenth century by virtue of the absolute hegemony of the system it sought to subvert. Once that system was seriously questioned, art collapsed inwards, to create a more literal and myopic dead-centre, taking with it edges and all.” M. Camille, Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 160.
19 K98-99v, Ry 99b.
20 K98-99v, Ry 99b.
21 K98-100r, Ry101[100].
23 Leone, ‘Words, Images, and Knots,’ p. 84.
24 Leone, ‘Words, Images, and Knots,’ p. 84.
27 “Unless he found them in his original, a scribe so incompetent in drawing would hardly have ventured on illustrations.” Sisam, p. 78.

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Monstrous Genealogies: Reconstru(ct)ing Teractical Females in A.S. Byatt's Fiction

Carmen-Veronica Borbély

Abstract: For a self-professed ‘non-believer’ and ‘non-belonger to schools of thought,’¹ A. S. Byatt’s fictional deployment of teratical females is striking on at least three accounts. My paper looks at Byatt’s genealogical exposure of the discursive layers that have led to the articulation of the ‘monstrous-feminine,’² focusing on Paul Ricoeur’s claim in Oneself as Another that identity is fundamentally relational and intersubjective and that an ontological hermeneutics need accommodate within the narrative constitution of a self the diversity of culturally and historically variable definitions of alterity. First I shall look at the significance of monstrosity at the core of Turner’s liminal experience; then I shall refer to the dialectic between selfhood and the otherness of the flesh that leads to Byatt’s female protagonists’ incorporating the m/other at the heart of the self; and third, I shall briefly outline how Byatt rewrites ophidian femaleness into a trope of the monstrous imagination underlying artistic and biological creation.

Key Words: Liminality, monstrous m/others, monstrous imagination

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Given Byatt’s ongoing concern with the problematic of identity, monstrosity is figured in terms of an otherness that both marks off and confounds the boundaries of the (gendered) self. Transitional creatures, neither human nor beastly (or both), Byatt’s monsters cross all sorts of frontiers (organic-inorganic, male-female, saintly-demonic), and are indeed anchored in what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen defines as the ‘ontological liminality’ of monstrous others.³ Byatt’s monstrified m/others correspond to a condition of ‘betwixt and between,’ the liminal stage of rites of passage ensconced in a ‘realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise.’⁴

In outlining monstrosity as analogous to an interstructural condition, Turner remarks that the biologically-patterned symbolism of the liminal stage may incorporate concurrent references to thanatic and parturition processes, that is to death/decomposition/dissolution and conception/gestation/birth. Furthermore, the ontological transformation effected in the liminal period (a ‘stage of reflection’) is grounded in the acquisition of arcane knowledge, which monstrosity can form an integral part of:
Much of the grotesqueness and monstrosity of the liminal sacra may be said to be aimed not so much at terrorising or bemusing neophytes into submission or out of their wits as at making them vividly and rapidly aware of what may be called the ‘factors’ of their culture.\(^5\)

As Turner insists, liminality ‘breaks, as it were, the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation’: given the incongruity of its components, the configuration of monstrous masks or effigies elicits a segregation of its grotesquely intermingled elements, enabling the neophyte both to distinguish between self and other and to arrive at an understanding that otherness is foundational to self-definition.\(^6\) In the words of Mihai Spariosu, Turner’s account of monstrosity eschews notions of antagonistic oppositions between self and other, giving scope to an irenic, integrative relation between these facets of identity.\(^7\)

Performing a ‘complicitous critique’\(^8\) of antinomic representational paradigms, in which woman is either birth-giving mater or deadly matter, Byatt posits her monstrous females - themselves interstitial beings - at the very thresholds of self and other. For instance, ‘The Thing in the Forest’ (2003) draws on fairy-tale patterns to describe a protracted rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood. Against a background of intense categorical disarray, two evacuee girls, Penny and Primrose, are extricated from their family and societal structures and, in an agrestic setting that simultaneously partakes of the symbolism of death and rebirth (repeated mention is made of entombment/enwombment inside a ‘crocodile’), they are confronted with the horrific apparition of ‘the Thing.’ It is a ‘provisional amalgam’ of biological and technological features, an unstable aggregate of flayed, fetid flesh and rank vegetation, to which are appended manmade prostheses. It is also described as a crossbreed between ‘a monstrous washerwoman and a primeval dragon,’ a gross befuddling of all categories, most prominent amongst which is that of gender. While its self-propelling, tubular shape is suggestive of maleness, its morphological instability, its abject emission of effluvia and its capacity to sprout forth selfsame progeny arguably contribute to a grotesque instantiation of a chthonian mother archetype, tinged with a hydra-like capacity for self-regeneration.

With its hyperbolically inflated scatological nature (its stench of maggoty putrefaction, its theriomorphic appendages), its exorbidant size and its perpetually shifting contours, ‘the Thing’ actually approximates a Bakhtinian definition of the ‘body in the act of becoming,’ which undergoes simultaneous degrading and regrowth.\(^9\) The convoluted, amorphous anatomy of ‘the Thing,’ permanently on the verge of self-fragmentation and reincorporation of its abjected fragments, constitutes a threat to the integrity of the embodied subject: if ‘the Thing’ represents indeed a maternal body, its
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monstrosity touches on suggestions of unnatural reproductibility in that it borders on parthenogenesis or selfsame-replication rather than on sexual fertilisation.

What inoculates the two girls against motherhood is, perhaps more than the monster’s somatic compositeness, its half-

human, blank, miserable face. The reflexive process which should have allowed them to understand the significance of the Thing’s human visage is deferred until decades later, when the two women return to the forest, and, through the visual lenses of a cultural artefact - a nineteenth-century mock-medieval illustrated legend of the Loathly Worm - also make legible the deformity of its body. Although identified here as an English version of the European dragon, its most remarkable deviation from the stock iconography is its lack of sharp-sightedness, which, according to Evans, renders dragons exceptional fabulous monsters in that they are not mere objects of ‘passive visual perception,’ but watchful guardians of inaccessible treasures. Instead the agency of looking falls onto Penny and Primrose: initially united through a sympathetic, non-

hierarchical gaze, the two women recognise each other in the invisible, because overshadowed, enemy or victim of a knight refracted in the glass

encasing of the mock-Gothic book. A reciprocal recognition of the otherness lying at the core of their identities, which eventually enables them to overcome the trauma of their childhood encounter with a monstrous instantiation of the mother figure and embark on parallel destinies of foster motherhood.

As seen above, notwithstanding Byatt’s aversion to categorial labelling (feminist or otherwise), her works exhibit a marked awareness that cultural representations of monstrous female corporeality revolve around such tropes as Kristevan abjection and what Grosz calls uncontrollable seepage. Thus, for several of her characters, monstirfication is generated by anxieties related to the body’s failure to achieve ‘permanence in time’ and, in turn, generates notions that, despite its contingency, embodiment is constitutive of the self. According to the distinction operated by Paul Ricoeur between idem-entity (synonymous with sameness and permanence in time) and ipse-entity (a temporalised selfhood, grounded in a ‘dialectic of self and the other than self’), Byatt’s protagonists question traditional strategies of self-definition through the exclusion of otherness, and arrive at an understanding that the otherness of the flesh or of the foreign is profoundly integral to the ‘ontological constitution of selfhood.’

‘A Stone Woman’ (2003) is a tale of metamorphosis, recounted from the viewpoint of Ines, a lexicologist, who undergoes a two-phased corporeal change. Its outbreak ensues from the trauma experienced at the sight of her dead mother’s epidermis: confronted with the visible index of final transformation, Ines registers an instantaneous transmutation into ‘the old woman.’ This, coupled with the surgical excision of her entrails, as well
as with the grafting on her womb-vacated body of a technologically fashioned, artificial navel, amounts to a symbolic defleshment, soon to be literalised as petrifaction into a geological amalgam of stone, ore and magma. The intensive redefinition of her body boundaries into a dry, numb exoskeletal carapace, aiming towards containment/congealment of internal forces and repulsion/rejection of external forces, signals a self-disciplining gesture under the clinical eye\textsuperscript{14} - in the sense of dislodging her female body from associations with maternal, amorphous or leaky matter.\textsuperscript{15}

The reverse change, from the inanimate to the animate, results from her immersion into a network of criss-crossing mythical and cultural threads, via the narratives recounted by Thorsteinn Hallmundursson, a Norse sculptor. The archival traces of her narrative identity, which, in Ricoeur’s terms, dislocates Ines from static, stable sameness into the construction of her temporalised selfhood, include Biblical references to Lot’s wife turning into a pillar of salt; the story of Katla, a volcano spirit, whose sole means of materialisation was by putting on garments made of human skin; or an Icelandic version of the earth mother figure, correlating geological formation with Ines’s own progressive realisation of the dialectics between her congealed bodily surface and the red-hot lava beginning to stir in her entrails. All in all, Ines comes, during a lengthy liminal stage - mutually beneficial for the sculptor and his muse - to retrieve a sense of selfhood that incorporates the otherness of her own flesh. For the stone woman, this implies the acknowledgment of her corporeality in terms of patterns of flow, causing a realignment of femininity with aquatic fluidity. Her body boundaries become what Battersby calls an ‘event-horizon, in which one form (myself) meets its potentiality for transforming itself into another form or forms (the not-self).’\textsuperscript{16} Ines’s renewal involves shedding layers of old skin (the crystals engulfing her body which glisten like dragon-scales), and embracing the monstrosity inherent in her vampiric cravings as she eventually turns into a troll or an ogress.

While Byatt refuses to detract from the fantastic overweight of the narrative, she does reinforce notions that female bodiliness is construc(t)ed as teratological through representation and specular deflection. Thus, under the gaze of the physician, her ‘metamorphic folds’ and ‘conchoidal fractures’ would border on the pathological and would be reified into an ‘object of horror and fascination, to be shut away and experimented on.’\textsuperscript{17} The change of perspective is brought about by the Icelandic carver of stone women, in a nineteenth-century graveyard, a heterotopian space by excellence, since for Ines it becomes fraught with terrestrial and celestial connotations. Her body is yet again the object of the eye of the beholder, but Thorstein’s gaze is non-hierarchical, full of solicitude for and ‘esteem of the other as oneself.’\textsuperscript{18}
He stared. She thought, he is a man, and he sees me as I am, a monster.
‘Beautiful,’ he said. ‘Grown, not crafted.’

That Thorsteinn should define her as a ‘walking metamorphosis’ only serves to emphasise identity as processual becoming rather than fixed essence, since, as Caroline Walker Bynum says, metamorphosis is fundamentally narrative, it is ‘about a one-ness left behind or approached.’

‘Medusa’s Ankles’ (1993b) also plays on the notion that the ‘monstrous feminine’ is a result of the discursive constructedness of female bodies within the reifying frame of ‘patriarchal and phallocentric ideology.’ Again, Byatt fuses several mythical or pictorial strands of representation in setting Susannah, a classicist, in the direct lineage of the Medusa, whose monstrosity entails from her duplicitous nature, or, as Suther maintains, from the ‘power of beauty and hideousness inextricably combined in the face and specifically in the eyes to exercise fascination on a victim.’

Besides the graphic association of the protagonist with the image of flowing hair from La Chevelure, an etching by Matisse, Susannah is lured inside a hairdressing salon precisely by a Matisse reproduction of a voluptuous rosy nude likely to trigger ‘reflections on flesh and its fall.’ Furthermore, her hair stylist is not gratuitously called Lucian, since in Lucian of Samosata’s The Hall it was the Gorgons’ stunning beauty that transfixed beholders.

While indeed acknowledging that the Medusa’s anatomical loci of deformity are her ophidian hair and petrifying gaze, Byatt unsettles the Freudian premise of castration anxiety. That the ‘anatomically odd’ relationship between the woman and her hairdresser should unfold within the field of vision, with the mirror functioning ambivalently, as a protective shield for the male gazer and as an impervious screen for woman’s nefarious gaze, strikes a note of dissemblance with Perseus’s ‘heroic’ deflection of the Gorgon’s stare in classical myth. Lucian’s handling of the scissors amounts to a symbolic beheading of Susannah, whose body is segmented into a visible, upper part (her head) and a concealed nether part (her swollen ankles, the index of her aging flesh). But the mirror is not merely a surface that acts as a point of convergence for their asymmetrical gaze. It begins to act a fluid, permeable membrane allowing for the violent irruption of a ‘snake-crowned’ daimonic mother figure in whom Susannah (mis)recognises her self. The outburst of her pent-up rage, which explodes the mirror into smithereens, comes from her being literally moulded into the Medusan cast not by Lucian himself, already symbolically castrated through a self-inflicted finger cut, but by Deirdre, a double of Susannah’s younger self, insofar as both detect the ‘fatality’ of the maternal ‘[s]ausages and snail-shells, grape-clusters and twining coils.’ The final twist, that only through acquiescence with this externally-imposed Medusa identity can Susannah retrieve the
mythic creature’s power and terrifying beauty, points to the ‘reversibility of roles and nonsubstitutability of persons,’ which, in Ricoeur’s terms, entails the notion of similitude between the self (Susannah) and the (m)other as a self, as an agent rather than a sufferer. At once excessive of and compliant with representational frames, Byatt’s Medusa amounts to a revisionary rewriting, in the manner of Cixous’ celebration of teratological beauty, of an enduring trope of evicting the other from the ranks of the same.

Consubstantial with Byatt’s self-avowed interest in issues of female creativity, her attempt to reconstrue generic female monsters is emblematic of a type of a Coleridgean organic, esemplastic imagination. In works like Possession (1991) or ‘A Lamia in the Cévennes’ (1998), the iconographic and discursive compositeness of such hybrids as the Melusine or the lamia plays on the Romantic conception of artistic creation as ‘teratological disclosure.’ The latter narrative charts the encounter between Bernard Lycett-Kean, an English expatriate artist seeking inspiration in the Cévenol countryside, and a female-snake hybrid, and reworks a host of textual and visual precedents, including a 1948 Matisse sketch of a fish-tailed woman, one of Ronsard’s sonnets, alluding to Ulysses’ eschewal of falling prey to the fiercely human beauty of the sirens, as well as Mary Douglas’s anthropological considerations on the ‘mixture of aesthetic frenzy and repulsion’ that border creatures elicit.

Their meeting ground is an oval swimming pool, which gradually loses its paradisiacal serenity and becomes an ‘Infernal Pit.’ In the grassy-green, viscous and opaque water, Bernard’s encounter with the Lamia will enable him to secure an individual, productive rather than reproductive vision, and it is here that Byatt self-consciously redeploy the Coleridgean reference to the serpent as a trope for the Imagination. The Lamia is precisely a metaphor, a corporeal trope of the imagination: what it facilitates is the perception of ‘identity and difference simultaneously […] dependent on each other.’ For the male artist, this tripartite rite of passage, beginning with his retreat into the Cévennes and ending with his acquisition of a sympathetic, caring vision of the suffering other, involves immersion into the ‘turquoise milk’ of the maternal imaginary, infested by the ambivalently-gendered, two-bodied Lamia. The latter experiences a triple-phased morphological transition. Hers is a case of shape-shifting monstrosity: from the oneness of an ophidian beast (all snake), through the two-ness of a theriomorphic female, to the oneness, that still bears traces of its dual nature, of a woman. While a serpent, the Lamia craved having its otherness suppressed; while a woman, Melanie risks having her herpetic genes detected: the duality of her nature is inescapable. For Bernard, unlike perhaps for the Lyricus of Keats’s poem, it is precisely the Lamia’s indiscriminate duality that is appealing and revolting, yet while refusing to lend a compassionate ear to her narrative, he is doomed to a failure of vision: he
cannot commit the fluid colours and shapes to canvas, since the water solves and dissolves the Lamia’s body into a continuous Möbius coil of head swallowing tail. This creative sterility will prevail as long as he refuses to free the creature from the position of a passive sufferer of his gaze. What is truly loathsome about her is not her difference but the possibility of her sharing in his humanity (another twist to the Romantic hypotext): he does not recognise in her the other who is a self. It is only after the Lamia’s evanescence and his own retreat into the ‘bliss of solitude’ that Bernard can rework the excessively repulsive Keatsian metaphor into a ‘visual idea,’ striking the note that his interest has been in ‘oddity - in its otherness - as snakes went.’ As a result of this exchange between self-esteem and solicitude for the other, he moves from ‘cold philosophy,’ the natural scientist’s vision which pierces through and tabulates mystery to a caring, exact study of the other, which does not aim at dissecting and tabulating that other but at intensifying its aura.

Victorian poetess Christabel LaMotte, the protagonist of Possession. A Romance (1991) is deliberately moulded onto the figure of the Melusine, with whom the artist fantasmatically identifies and on whom she grounds her most accomplished work. By casting Melusina as the emblematic figure of female creativity, Byatt appears to pay indirect tribute to Mary Shelley’s poetics of monstrous imagination. Connections are established between ‘sexual and textual generation,’ combining several strands of teratological discourse: explanations of monstrous progeny as the result of inter-species miscegenation; popular Renaissance contentions tying the birth of deformed offspring to the corporealising powers of maternal imagination; and Romantic conceptions of artistic creation as a ‘monstrous genesis.’

Accommodated by the reconciliatory topos of Romance, which embraces ‘women’s two natures,’ dissolving the duality of either/or, of ‘enchantresses and demons or innocent angels,’ Christabel’s Melusina is released from thanatic associations through a foregrounding of her constructive capacities: this is a figure associated not only with extreme bodily fecundity, but also with foundational cultural gestures: all in all, an avatar of the Mother-Goddess. Hence Byatt’s careful inscription of her female protagonists in the representational frames of vegetation or resurrectionary myths.

The attestation of the embodied dimension of the self is made by Maud Bailey, Christabel’s twentieth-century descendant, whose notion of the ‘awkward body’ - the body fractured and fragmented so that its constituent parts can be visually (mis)construed into ‘natural’ corporeality - is resumed over and over in Byatt’s text. What the aquatic Melusine assists both Christabel and Maud to accomplish is coming to terms with the ‘awkward body,’ becoming aware of its immense generative potential. A genealogical hybrid herself, the legendary Melusine produces a host of monstrous
progeny, all bearing ‘strange defects – odd ears, giant tusks, a catshead growing out of one cheek, three eyes, that sort of thing.’ In Byatt’s novel, this maternal aspect registers several permutations. Thus, while the daughter that Christabel gives birth to is physically flawless yet somewhat artistically degenerate, her Tales for Innocents – tales of terror derived from Grimm and Tieck – are fraught with references to the teratogenic powers of female imagination.

Besides, it is no gratuitous gesture on Byatt’s part that she should sequentially have inserted Christabel’s poem immediately after her erotic episode, making thus the analogy with Shelley’s narrative, ‘a book constructed like a pregnancy,’ stand even firmer in place. This conflation of sexual and textual offspring also resounds in the pastiched Pre-Raphaelite review of Christabel’s epic, which renders it ‘a quiet, muscular serpent of a tale, […] as was Coleridge’s Serpent who figured the Imagination, with its tail stuffed in its own mouth.’ If in the medieval legend the male gaze (of Raimondin and story-teller alike) poses the threat of reifying or monstrifying the female body, Christabel twists the visual angle from which the fabulous woman is looked at and writes ‘from Melusina’s – own – vision.’ This non-intrusive, transitional, and compassionate gaze allows Christabel to reconfigure the Fairy Melusine as a foundational, tutelary figure of female (pro)creativity, reinforcing the author’s firm advocacy of Romantic conceptions of poetic imagination.

Notes

5 ibid., p. 105.
6 ibid., p. 106.
16 ibid., p. 351.
18 Ricoeur, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
21 Creed, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
28 Amongst Byatt’s prevalent concerns are ‘problems of female vision, female art and thought’ (The Shadow of the Sun, 1964, p. xiv, quoted in Coyne Kelly, 1996, p. 78).
31 Byatt, Passions of the Mind. Selected Writings, p. 22.
32 ibid., p. 15.
33 Byatt, Elementals. Stories of Fire and Ice, p. 108.
34 ibid., p. 110.
38 Le Goff, op. cit., pp. 142-143.
39 Byatt, Possession. A Romance, p. 73.
40 Baldick, op. cit., p. 32.
41 Byatt, Possession. A Romance, p. 37.
42 ibid., p. 175.

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Monstrous Modernity: Frankenstein’s Creature, The Black, and Other Inassimilable Naturalistic Extremes

Jane Anna Gordon

Abstract: Lewis Gordon has outlined a typology of monsters comprised of three basic types—those metaphysical or supernatural, naturalistic, and nihilistic. I explore Victor Frankenstein’s creature as a clear example of a naturalistic monster and offer an account and explanation of why his account of who he is in the world is so strikingly similar to Frantz Fanon’s portrayal of the development of black self-consciousness in an anti-black world. Although Frankenstein’s creature is the product of modern science as “the Negro” is the product of the project of whiteness, both appear as inassimilable extremes of nature forced to ask in the face of their repeated failures to become part of the social world, “what, in reality, am I”? I close with two questions: first, whether we should read the monster that Mary Shelley, who at 19, while pregnant, offered the world autobiographically and finally, whether we should regret the increasing displacement of naturalistic monsters by nihilistic ones.

Key Words: Frankenstein, Mary Shelley, Frantz Fanon, monsters, naturalism, recognition, language, political nihilism, pregnancy

Lewis Gordon has outlined a typology of monsters comprised of three basic types. Ancient monsters, those that ground the mythopoetics for more contemporary ones, are figures that, as a function of enmity between the gods, disrupt harmony, bringing chaos. These frequently take their form in a monstrous act—killing a brother or sleeping with one’s mother—that is wrong, but the correction of which is necessary to the life of the community. The destruction of the monster therefore becomes a form of sacrifice. He or she must be destroyed for the sake of the community. All such monsters deviate from God’s or the gods’ standards of right and wrong, beckoning to others to do the same.

Modern monsters combine a dual logic of modern naturalism with the syntax of the past in the form of monstrous creatures. These are strangely anything that is naturally unnatural. In other words, people or animals or any other sort of creature that is too large or too small, even too smart. All deviants of the modern world belong to this category of the monstrous, in particular those creatures that combine more than one form of deviation. Of unique relevance to our discussion are those that embody physical deviation,
whether ugliness or sheer size, along with genius, racial deviation or blackness and genius, and gender deviation or not being male with genius.

Finally, there are nihilistic monsters that embody an absolute indifference to or absence of meaning. There is no normative content in their behaviour, because the meaning of both good and bad lack coherence. They simply are hungry or destructive. There is nothing unique or particular about their victims. They are nothing other than another body to be mangled or devoured. “The emergence of nihilistic monsters,” writes Lewis Gordon in conclusion, “suggests a death of values, includ[ing] values of knowledge.”

One of the many unique features of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks* is that in addition to exploring the very literal creation of two instances of modern monsters, in the former a collage of corpses filled with the breath of life, in the latter a black human being, they also offer tragic autobiographical accounts from the point of view and in the voice of the monsters themselves. Although *Black Skins* ends much more optimistically, with the hope of an alternative to being caught in the dialectics of recognition with one’s creator who shuns one, with the hope of rendering white normativity irrelevant in the reconstruction of the nature and meaning of modern mankind, both narratives are punctuated by central tropes of failure. Serving as a refrain, is the question the inassimilable person is forced to ask in the face of repeated failures to become part of the normative social world. In Fanon this appears as, “what, in reality, am I”? Frankenstein’s creature, when seeing his reflection and realizing that it really is his own, asks of himself, “And what was I?” It is a question, the creature recalls, that he could only answer with groans.

First, to *Frankenstein*. In it, the protagonist, Victor, a precocious aristocrat, moved by ancient scientific writings, is taken at University by the idea and challenge of reanimating life. The otherwise outgoing and sociable man becomes wrapped up obsessively in his endeavour, leaving his laboratory only to search through churchyards, vaults, and charnel-houses for parts to piece together into the enormous creature that he indeed brings to life. As he reaches the moment of its completion, rather than feeling delight and triumph, the creature opens its yellow eye, literally revealing its own point of view, and looks at the doctor, who shudders with fear and horror. The doctor rushes off, leaving behind his journal with its detailed account of his experimental endeavours. Victor hopes that the creature will simply disappear. Sick from overwork and anguish, he returns to Geneva at the urging of his friend, Clerval, wishing that what he has done will fade as a bad dream.

The creature, for his part, emerges into a blur of confused senses and sensations, alone, cold, and hungry. He leaves the lab only to discover that everyone he encounters recoils at the sight of him with violent disgust and horror. He eventually finds his way to woods in which he takes refuge beside
a cottage in which an exiled family live. He develops deep affection for them and their lives, observing them for months, learning to speak through their studious observation, helping to collect wood for them, becoming, in his view, an invisible member of their family. He hopes that his growing ability to speak will mitigate the visceral response that his appearance evokes. “By degrees,” he recalls,

I made a discovery of still greater moment. I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. I perceived that the words they spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenances of the hearers. This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it.  

But it proves very difficult: they pronounced words quickly and there seemed little or no apparent connection between the sounds and the objects to which they referred. Still, after many months of application, the creature discovered the most familiar of names. With great delight, he slowly learned the requisite sounds, devoting “his whole mind to the endeavour.” He worked as he did for he hoped to introduce himself to the cottagers, but had concluded “not to make the attempt until I had first become master of their language; which knowledge might enable me to make them overlook the deformity of my figure.” Having seen himself in a transparent pool, he had with despondence and mortification, realized that the monstrous reflection was his own. He imagined that with his “conciliating words” that he could win their favour over and against this.

He prepares himself for an interview with them that would “decide [his] fate.” The more he learned, the more profound was his sense of himself as a wretched outcast and the greater became his hope that speaking could transform his condition. Having seen that the cottagers never refused the poor visitors who stopped at their door asking for food and refuge, he hoped for himself. He identified with the isolation and misery of such visitors and hoped that the DeLacey family, who seemed not to blame the condition of marginality on marginal people themselves, would extend the same generosity to him. Still, he feared that his monstrosity was unique, not comparable with the poverty of social or political dislocation, but resisted resigning himself to such a conclusion.

Having observed that “the unnatural hideousness of [his] person was the chief object of horror with those who had beheld it,” he decided to enter the cottage when the blind old man, the family’s patriarch, was alone. He hoped that his voice, with “nothing terrible in it,” would encourage the
sympathy of De Lacey, who, on his behalf, could speak to his younger family.9

Things go disastrously wrong. When the day finally arrived and with diffidence the creature knocked at and entered the cottage, describing his isolation to the old man who he beseeched to help him to “undeceive” those for whom he had developed such affection, the younger family members suddenly return. Upon seeing the creature, one faints, while the other tore the creature away from his father, striking him with a stick. Devastated, the creature disappears into the woods and collapsed into sleep, hoping to return and in spite of what had just transpired, try yet again. When he awakes, the cottage is empty and dark, he sees the son explaining to his landlord that no losses could be too great, that the danger of remaining in their former home was to nothing less than their father’s life. His wife and sister, he explained, still had not recovered from their horror. The creature recalled, “My protectors had departed, and had broken the only link that held me to the world. For the first time the feelings of revenge and hatred filled my bosom.”10

Knowing that his reception, wherever he might go, would be equally violent, the creature travelled at night in search of his creator who he knew by name through the work journal left behind in his flight from the laboratory. The creature asked,

to whom could I apply with more fitness than to him who had given me life? . . . From you only could I hope for succour, although towards you I felt no sentiment but that of hatred.11

Having endowed the creature with both perceptions and passions, Victor had then cast him aside. But it was with Frankenstein alone, the creature reflected, that he could make any claim for pity or redress, “from [him the creature] determined to seek that justice which [he] vainly attempted to gain from any other being that wore the human form.”12

Having arrived in Geneva he is woken from “a slight sleep” by the approach of a small boy running into the recess in which he hid.13 It occurred suddenly to the creature that the child might remain “unprejudiced,” that he might not have yet lived long enough to have “imbibed a horror of deformity.”14 Perhaps he might educate the child as a companion and friend, ending his own absolute isolation. As the creature drew the boy toward him, however, the little boy’s response was immediate and extreme. He screamed and struggled violently, crying “Monster! ugly wretch! you wish to eat me and tear me to pieces - You are an ogre - Let me go, or I will tell my papa.”15 The boy threatened that his father, Doctor Frankenstein, would punish the creature and continued on with hateful epithets. Grasping the child’s throat to
silence him, the boy, in a moment, was dead on the ground. The creature, for the first time, embraced being THE MONSTER, doing what others expected of him, being what they claimed him to be. He declared, “I too can create desolation; my enemy is not invulnerable; this death will carry despair to him, and a thousand other miseries shall torment and destroy him.”

Failing to forge positive relationships with other human beings and through them a healthy connection with the social and human world, he realized that he could force others at least to pay attention to him. He could elicit an actual response negatively through violence and destruction.

When he does finally confront his creator, the creature offers a threatening compromise - create a female companion of the same species or face systematic decimation of all who Victor loved, of the fabric of his entire social world. The creature said of himself that he had not been destructive or violent, that the responses to him had made him so. He had concluded that “the human senses,” were insurmountable barriers to any kind of union between him and another person.

As a result the creature specified precisely what it was he wanted: a creature of another sex, as hideous as he; another monster who, also cut off from the world, would be all the more attached to him.

Frankenstein initially agreed, hoping to be “enfranchised from [his] miserable slavery.” He returned to his laboratory after three years when a series of concerns about bringing into being another living creature whose dispositions he could not know in advance struck him: She might, he reflected, be more malignant than her mate. She might delight in wretchedness. She “might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation.”

She might be repulsed and horrified by the creature’s deformity and refuse him completely. Worst of all, he considered, if she did travel into obscurity with the creature, to unknown parts of South America as the creature promised, they might have children and create a monster race.

Frankenstein would have been single-handedly responsible for all such disastrous outcomes, when his only hope had been to buy his own peace, to wake from a frightful dream which had thrown him into isolation and misery that he could neither explain nor share with any of the loved ones who might have offered him comfort. The creature, seeing Frankenstein tear the nearly complete female form to pieces, warns that unlike Victor, he is fearless and therefore extremely powerful.

He is, he claims, without doubt, Frankenstein’s master who will ensure the doctor’s unbroken misery.

After systematically murdering all of Frankenstein’s loved ones and pursuing him into the Arctic north, the creature sits finally over the corpse of his creator who had been brought aboard by an explorer, Walton, who was trapped in the ice caps, led there by an ambition to go where no one else had. The creature reflected,
[W]hile I destroyed his hopes, I did not satisfy my own desires . . . still I desired love and fellowship, and I was still spurned. Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me? . . . Nay, these are virtuous and immaculate beings! I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on . . . You hate me; but your abhorrence cannot equal that with which I regard myself.  

The creature swears that he will incinerate himself lest anyone encounter his horrible frame and be taken with a similar idea as was his creator. The failures of the dialectics of recognition have rarely been summed up so eloquently. Striking too are the theodician dimensions of the creature’s situation: his monstrosity, borne first of Victor’s scientific aspirations and then of being so violently shunned, raise no questions about the world that has brought him into being. He alone is responsible for his monstrosity. Shelley, of course, does raise such questions, unsettling the ease with which the reader, if not the story’s protagonists, designate who and what is actually monstrous.  

Frankenstein’s creature is the product of modern science, “the Negro” the product of modern European colonialism. An autobiography of the black person in an anti-black world, Black Skin White Masks, among many other things, is a meditation on the dead end of seeking recognition from those for whom one appears not as another human being, but as a comparative measure of no intrinsic value. In particular, Fanon offers a dialectical reflection on how one studies health in black encounters with whites in an anti-black world.  

Parallel with Frankenstein, Fanon’s first chapter also offers an account of searches for recognition that take linguistic form. Although more humorous, Fanon’s explorations are no less tragic. In the colonial context, Fanon explains, one is more or less civilized in direct relation to one’s mastery of the continental French language. He writes,  

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.  

Absent in the colonial situation is a standard feature of encounters between locals and foreigners: The local asks the visitor of their language and country. In the Antilles, in contrast, the colonized are assumed to lack both. And yet the colonized person faces a strange reality. Those black West
Indians who have mastered the French language, who can “quote Montesquieu,” inspire great unease, particularly in comparison to those Martinicans to whom Frenchmen can speak down in Creole. The former, colonials will warn, must be watched carefully.

Another dimension of this situation manifests itself in the return of Martinicans who have travelled, at long last, to the French metropole. On their way to Europe they have studiously practiced so as not to affirm the expectation of the “eating” island man. Now back, they speak only the French equivalent of “Queen’s English” (claiming to have completely forgotten their Creole), emphasizing an absolute rupture, that they have returned literally new men. Suggested at every turn is that French language is the key that promises to open barred doors to full recognition, what comes of being able to offer technical proof of having fully imbibed a culture with genuine civilization. And yet, as with Frankenstein, these keys are only available if the black speaker is not seen. If and when he is, it seems the visual senses do dominate, that they are the insurmountable barriers that the creature called them.

Fanon then turns to failures to find recognition through romantic love. These searches take the outward form of black individuals seeking refuge in relationships that offer none of the affirmations that one might thereby hope for. The first story tells of Mayotte Capecia, who, realizing that she cannot blacken a Manichean world divided into white and black, seeks to whiten it. She becomes a laundress and finds herself a white man, whose blue eyes, blond hair, and pale skin she loves and submits to even though she concedes that a woman of colour is never completely respectable in a white man’s eyes. She hopes to seal herself up in an entirely white world that will reflect back a lying image of her as also white. In the instances in which this fails blatantly, in which white women in an otherwise all-white dancehall scorn her, she blames neither them nor her husband who says nothing, but herself and her blackness.

In the case of Jean Veneuse, a man born and orphaned in Antilles and then sent to boarding school in Bordeaux, he is European but black and therefore Negro. He spends his vacations alone at school and develops habits of solitude. He can neither assimilate nor go unnoticed. He fraternizes most easily with the dead with whom he communes through books. When white women flirt with him he warns them that it is shameful for them to associate themselves with he who, after all, is a Negro. He wants to prove to the world that he is the equal of other men, but it is he who has the profoundest of doubts. Even as he prepares to marry, he requires words of love, approval, and recognition not from his fiancé, but from her white brother. These are words that acknowledge him as deserving the love of a white woman as would a white man, that say that he is not really black, but instead “extremely brown.”
Finally, Fanon’s narrator, as *Frankenstein’s* creature, becomes the object, here “THE BLACK MAN,” through an encounter with a child who, rather than being able to see him, responds with the most extreme, caricatured version of what his parents and other adults in his world might have said. Fanon has just reflected that in the white world, the man of colour encounters difficulty in developing his bodily schema, that consciousness of the body is a negating and a third-person consciousness, suffused with an awareness that white men have woven the Negro out of details, anecdotes, and stories. The parallel with the stitching together of the creature from the parts of corpses is striking. Fanon explains that the black person faces constructing a physiological self when suddenly he hears, “Look, a Negro!” an exclamation that he describes as “an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by,” in response to which he tried to forge a tight smile. He then heard again, “Look, a Negro!” “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” Fanon makes up his mind to laugh in response, to laugh himself into tears, but cannot. He writes,

> I was responsible for my body, my face, and my ancestors.  
> I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships, and above all else, above all: ‘Sho’ good eatin.’

Dislocated, he writes, “I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object.” This too, while necessary, fails. It is, like the creature’s embrace of his ability to have an effect through being violently destructive, a negative, reactionary moment. In response, Fanon reflects, that he must be both “a yes” and “a no”: a yes to life, love, and generosity; a no to exploitation, degradation, and to butcheries of freedom. He must demand human behaviour from others, without renouncing his own freedom through his own choices. He must be a black man rather than a Negro. He concludes, “I want the world to recognize, with me, the open door of every consciousness. My final prayer: O my body, make of me always a man who questions!” Rather than recognize him, it is with him, that Fanon hopes for recognition of the openness of his own and potentially all human consciousness.

It is commonly remarked that Shelley’s “monster” is far better known than she, an observation which I think requires some reconsideration. Mary Shelley herself was a clear example of the very same kind of “monster” that Frankenstein’s creature and Fanon’s Negro were and are: in her case she fatefully combined, in the 19th century, genius with being female. If there is any doubt, consider that she wrote a book that defined the genre of science fiction and became a gothic horror classic at the age of nineteen, while pregnant. Many might try to minimize the significance of this by
emphasizing her very unique parents, that she was, after all, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and of William Godwin. And yet what one would conventionally expect to emerge from this would be a highly educated, worldly, and very literate young woman. She most certainly defied the bounds of the normal. That Shelley’s mother died in childbirth, that she married a man whose first wife took her own life, that she lost three of her four children, and more generally lived a life of intellectual and sexual eccentricity, may well have been taken as signs of foreboding about both her own life and what would come of it.

In other words, I would suggest that rather than comparing the relative renown of Shelley and her creature that we consider whether the creature, rather than what might have been its female companion, is Shelley and that what few have recognized is that one of the prototypical monsters of the modern West is the fruit of Shelley’s own autobiographical reflections. What is more, as I hope the parallel with Black Skin White Masks has suggested, these reflections were not only genre creating in the realm of horror and science fiction, but also in postcolonial studies. Frankenstein and its retelling from the point of view of both creator and created, the one refusing responsibility for what it through both action and projection brought into being, and the creature locked in a search for recognition that promises only failure, can and should be considered as a proto-postcolonial text. Why this is so requires further consideration.

Perhaps reflections concerning the possibility of birth gone terribly wrong, of creating and animating with life ill-considered aims and ideas that one cannot dispense with since they then look back at one with an independent life and will, is part of the mythic life that informs colonial endeavours which framed indigenous people as perpetually underdeveloped whether in the form of political children in need of tutelage as subjects or as savages, even when noble. Or perhaps the prescient insight of Shelley is precisely because she so skilfully articulates what it is to be the monster by recognizing the monstrous as a social location, a genuinely tragic one in which the voice of the monster or the black person cannot be heard over and against or with its exterior form.

One response to the relegation of entire categories of people - whether they be too big or too small, too bright or too dark - to the realm of the monstrous is to criticize the very idea and maintenance of a particular set of features and qualities that constitute both what is normative and normal. In their place, one might argue, must be an all out rejection of any settled ideas about how everyone must or should be or instead an organizing centre and core that stresses rather than attributes of birth, those of intentional agency - our actions, values, habits, and dispositions. Informing this might also be the view and corresponding warning that we all move into and out of the category of the monstrous - whether in periods of adolescence, during
menstruation, or in fits of madness, for example - and that our loathing for those most tenaciously fixed in the role of monster may be coloured profoundly by an effort to distance ourselves from identifications that otherwise would draw us too near.\textsuperscript{37}

What seems to have emerged as a more typical though not preferable response to relegating people to the category of monsters and then blaming them for occupying it is an attempt to refute the possibility of forging any collective set of values or purposes. This is perhaps most evident in the kind of work that dominates American political science, work that insists that all one can expect from liberal capitalist democracies and politics more generally is the aggregating of private self-interests.\textsuperscript{38} It is as if Marx and Engels’s diagnosis, that self-interest and egoistic calculation would alone unite men under capitalism, has become prescriptive. This most minimalist and cynical account of what it is to be a human being emphasizes our kinship to other non-human animals rather than stressing the unique challenges faced by the project of becoming people. This tendency manifests itself as well in metaphorical and mythic life, in the realm of the monstrous, in what Lewis Gordon has called nihilistic monsters. Rather than what we might hope for through an engagement with the reflections offered by the monstrous of modernity, a kind of opening of consciousness for which Fanon argues, we find at the heart of nihilistic monsters a radical equality through which we are made most certainly equal because we have all ceased to matter.\textsuperscript{39}

Notes

1 See L. R. Gordon, “Monsters: A Philosophical Portrait” in this volume.
2 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 116.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., p. 133.
8 Ibid., p. 134.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p. 140.
11 Ibid., p. 141.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., p. 144.
14 Ibid.
When most critics of pedophilia imagine it, these are the kinds of images that come immediately to mind.

Surely being so physically monstrous and female would pose a unique set of difficulties, challenges, and responses. These are explored and elaborated in James Whales’s (1935) film, “The Bride of Frankenstein.”

One that might, presumably, eventually reproduce and thereby mix in with human beings. Victor might well have been caught up in a narcissistic parallel fear that is the stuff of so many classic myths: the disasters that occur when gods and human beings have children together.

This moment of great power linked to having absolutely nothing to lose could clearly be read together with Marx in very provocative ways. On the point of the female creature torn to pieces, Duane Kight has made the interesting suggestion, perhaps inspired by the film “Bride of Frankenstein,” that this would-be companion is Mary Shelley and that as she is torn to pieces, each of her fragments become part of the different female characters in the book. They are each pieces of Shelley, he maintains.

In fact, the settler is right when he speaks of knowing ‘them’ well. For it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence. The settler owes the fact of his very existence, that is to say, his property, to the colonial system.

In another instance, on p. 47, he states, “It is the white man who creates the Negro. But it is the Negro who creates negritude.”

Fanon adds that there is a local remedy for this kind of amnesia. Dropping something heavy and hard on the foot of the local-boy-come-home usually does the trick. The response to the pain usually emerges in very good Creole!
Both were famous radicals of their day. Wollstonecraft, called the “hissing serpent,” was a famous and infamous pioneer feminist writer known best for her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Godwin was an “ex-Dissenting” minister and atheist who became very influential following the publication of his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Modern Morals and Happiness* (1793). The two, in spite of their fierce criticisms of conventional marriage, wed when Wollstonecraft became pregnant. Unfortunately, she died only five months later of puerperal poisoning immediately following Mary’s birth. Godwin never fully recovered. Maurice Hindle writes on p. xv,

> The trials of birth and death so central to *Frankenstein* were to become living torments for nearly half of Mary Shelley’s life too, with the early deaths of three of her four children and the losses of Percy Shelley and Byron compounding successive agonies into feeling of unendurable isolation, which only the nurture and thought of her one surviving son, Percy Florence, would relieve.

One can here consider Simone Weil’s depiction of literary genius which she describes as giving us “the actual density of the real.” She writes,

> Although the works of these men are made out of words there is present in them the force of gravity which governs our souls . . . . In the words assembled by genius several slopes are simultaneously visible and perceptible, placed in their true relations, but the listener or reader does not descend any of them. He feels gravity in the way we feel it when we look over a precipice, if we are safe and not subject to vertigo. He perceives the unity and the diversity of its forms in this architecture of the abyss.

These comments can be found in the *Simone Weil Reader*, edited by George A. Panichas. Moyer Bell, Kingston, RI, 1977, pp. 292-293.

An interesting feature of several of the constitutions written in the immediate aftermath of the Haitian Revolution was their effort to delineate requirements for citizenship that were neither racially nor ethnically based.
They stressed instead one’s political loyalties, commitments, and values as manifested in one’s political activity and decisions concerning marriage. For a discussion of this, see Sybille Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2004. This impulse was similarly at work in the idea of “Black Consciousness” around which much anti-apartheid activism in South Africa was organized. One can find a consideration of the category of the normal inspired by a similar spirit in David Ross Fryer’s, ‘On the Possibilities of Posthumanism, or How to Think Queerly in an Antiblack World’ in *Not Only the Master’s Tools*, edited by Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon. Paradigm Press, Boulder, CO, 2006.

37 This suggestion, offered by David White, assumes that to be monstrous is to blur settled boundaries of age and generation, sickness and health, insanity and sanity. With the example of teenagers, one is really both a child and an adult and must face the quandaries of how appropriately to behave and relate both to one’s parents and teachers and to one’s younger siblings, relatives, or friends. In the case of menstruation, as Gloria Anzaldua wrote in her classic *Borderlands*, one bleeds incessantly for a week but does not die. Quite the opposite, one must, however comically, carry on with mundane life as if all were normal. In bouts of madness one suddenly sees, thinks, and acts with a different orienting calculus from another which is more widely shared to which one will return. But while in a state of lunacy, reality is so tethered. One indubitably makes decisions and interacts with others in ways that will look profoundly different, and often regrettable, days or hours later. As I hope such examples suggest, most human beings are episodically monstrous (in fact, there might be something monstrously inhuman about never being so!) and may then look with great relief upon periods of normality. Such relief may open one up to reflection on the condition of others relegated to the category of the monstrous. It may intensify one’s contempt for what is too close to home.

38 This is particularly evident in the attacks on Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s idea of the general will, a concept describing a tension and expectation at the core of democratic thought and practice, that citizens combine popular with reasonable willing. The general will, though occupying a sturdy place in the history of ideas, is believed by most readers and writers to be unquestionably unfeasible.

39 Such monsters can easily be compared with the tyrant or despot at the end of Rousseau’s *Second Discourse*. 
Bibliography


Why do Japanese Ghosts have No Legs? -
Sexualized Female Ghosts and the Fear of Sexuality

Natsumi Ikoma

Abstract: The big difference between Western and Japanese ghosts is that the former possess legs whereas the latter don’t. Through the analysis of various literary works, this paper argues that this fact may originate from distinct conceptualization of a dead body in each culture. In Christian culture, a deceased body instantly becomes a site of hope for resurrection, while it also inevitably becomes a site of horror, since the decomposition of a body takes time, and so is the process to establish its dead-ness. The length of this middle state of a dead body might explain why Western ghosts have such corporeality.

To contrast, in Japanese Buddhist-Shintoist culture, a dead body has no significance. A body is regarded as a temporary housing of a soul, and a dead one won’t be the site for hope nor horror, being a mere thing to be quickly cremated. Death is not as closely related to the body as to the smoke of cremation. Then what is the horror of Japanese ghosts? In many cases, the ghosts materialize when sexual frustration or sexual abuse occurs and female ghosts outnumber the male ones. It shows how women have been regarded as more sexual, therefore less sacred, in Japanese culture, and how it imposes on women’s body its fear of sexuality by creating sexualized female ghosts.

Key Words: Ghost, Japan, Christianity, Shinto, Ringu, Body, Sexuality, Tale of Genji

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A woman ghost appears from a well. (Katsushika, Hokusai)
1. **Introduction**

   The biggest difference between Western and Japanese ghosts is that the former possess legs whereas the latter don’t. Almost all the traditional pictures of Japanese ghosts are legless and sometimes floating like a smoke (see the picture on p.2). In today’s films, real actors who have legs play the ghosts, but their silence and lack of materiality are emphasized. A recent example is a Japanese horror movie, *Ringu*. In this film, the ghost, Sadako climbs out of the well, and then out of the TV. Her legs don’t really show until the end, and her bloody fingers are at the centre of the focus. Similarly, in other ghost stories, they either appear headfast clinging to something by their hands, or they silently materialize without a footstep, as if they don’t possess legs. On the other hand, if you look at the western versions, the difference is obvious. In the film, *The Others*, featuring Nicole Kidman the footsteps are vital indicator of ghosts. In Harry Potter series, the ghosts are very noisy. Haunted Mansion at Disneyland has many noisy and merry ghosts, in stark contrast to Japanese traditional equivalent, in which horrible looking ghosts quietly materialize with full of grudge and malice. How do these differences come about?

2. **Christianity and the Dead Body**

   Ghosts resides somewhere between existence and non-existence, life and death, body and non-body. As Mary Shelley’s classic gothic novel *Frankenstein* shows, the monstrous resides in this in-between arena, and this arena may be quite differently configured in the West and in Japan. Ghosts in Japan seem to be on a different level of corporeality. Therefore, we need to deal with the issue of body to analyze ghosts and it requires us to enter into the realm of myth and religion. David Punter maintains that the
body in the Western Gothic has “the most immediate connection” with the Christian myth and the suffering body of Christ on the cross."\(^4\) We can find in *Frankenstein*, for instance, the theme of resurrection: *Frankenstein* is about, first, the cannibalisation of the body, the work of the charnel house, and thus about the threat of decay and of what happens after decay.\(^5\)

Here, the body is connected immediately with decay and later with resurrection. However, it is not the case in Japanese culture. This is apparent if one compares the burial customs. In the West, the dead body has traditionally been buried under the ground, and it takes ages for a body to be completely decomposed. Usually we don’t get to see the decomposed corpse, so, we would imagine the deceased one is lying under the tomb as if sleeping. The actual decomposition is a protracted one, so is the process of his/her deadness to be established in our imagination. The length of this middle state of a dead body might explain why Western ghosts have such corporeality.

This burial custom provides the ground for Western resurrection myths, because the unclear boundary between death and life sustains the hope that the body might come back from the grave. In this situation, a strong desire for life can be attached to corpses. *Frankenstein* is but one obvious example. The decaying body cultivates the hope for resurrection and human fantasy of ultimate control over life and death.

The Western tradition of death mask and portrays of corpse prove such attraction to dead bodies. As Elisabeth Bronfen extensively analyses in her book, corpse has accommodated desire of Western humanity, and the Western culture has made the dead body of woman, in particular, an object of gaze and of artistic exploitation.\(^6\)
3. Japanese Concept of a Corpse

However, in Japanese culture, the concept of the corpse is totally different. They are never drawn or made a mask of, and they are rarely photographed. Why is that so? When we think of the reason, Japanese burial custom must be taken into account. The allegedly first novel in the world, *The Tale of Genji* suggests that, at least from the 10th century, cremation has been commonly practiced. Cremation is a clear-cut way to establish the dead-ness, because you can see that the corpse turns into ashes and bones. Before the cremation, the dead body is regarded as meaningless object to be burnt away. It is an empty vessel, from which the spirit is now safely detached. People feel somewhat awkward with the corpse, and they want to cremate it soon after the ritual, which normally takes 2 to 3 days. At the end of the ritual, the family takes the body to crematorium and burns it, collecting the bones afterwards. Only after this process, the dead are safely dead.

In the *Tale of Genji*, for instance, a mother laments, looking down at the corpse of her daughter: “With her before me, I cannot persuade myself that she is dead. At the sight of her ashes I can perhaps accept what has happened.” As this passage shows, dead bodies are something incomprehensible and we feel ill at ease with them. Perhaps this explains why Japan does not have customs of death masks and portrayals of dead bodies.

These burial customs make a huge difference to how we conceptualize death. In case of cremation culture, the corpse does not decay, as they are cremated before decaying takes place. The body remains in the middle state between life and death for no more than 3 days, contrary to the corpse in an internment culture, where it lasts years. After cremation, the dead acquires a clean and safe image like its ashes. The shape of the corpse is not maintained,
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and it becomes unidentifiable and anonymous, entering into a metaphysical world of the dead, which has nothing to do with the reality of the body. Imagery associated with normal death in Japan consists of white ashes or smoke of cremation, not rotting bodies or skeletons.

Generally speaking, the image of death in Japan is not a horrible one, but something clean and white, because it is regarded as liberation from a world full of misery. There is a particular phrase to call this world we live in, “Ukiyo.” It means both “a floating world” and “a sad world,” implying that this miserable life is only a temporary one. The concept of a better afterlife might sound similar to the Christian idea, but in Christianity, you have to wait for a long time before being resurrected. In Japanese thought, death is an immediate liberation from one’s corporeal confinement. The body does not have as much significance as in the Christian culture, because it is only a temporal housing of a spirit. The spirit may return to the world when reincarnated, but it is to a new body, not the same one as Christian resurrection myth suggests. The current body and the current world are slighted in Japanese thought. The less corporeal nature of Japanese ghosts, and why they don’t have legs, arising like a smoke, may be thus explained by cremation custom and such a lack of significance attached to a body in Japanese culture.

4. Ritual Necessitated

In Japan, the short space that separates life and death preconditions a proper ritual and cremation to be performed. They are very significant in making the death safe and clean. Then, what if the ceremony is not correctly, or at all, performed? This introduces the site for Japanese ghosts. The murdered, the abandoned, the neglected, and the suicide whose body is not
found, these victims of “horrible death” turn into ghosts in Japanese stories. Sadako in *The Ring* is a murder victim discarded into a well. Okiku, the famous female ghost in a story called *Bancho-Sarayashiki*, is also tortured to death and thrown into a well. Oiwa in *Yotsuya-Kaidan* is betrayed by her husband and murdered. When the dead body is not recovered, or when the family has not performed a proper ceremony to give peace to the victim’s mind, the dead body cannot enter into a better world, and comes to haunt us. In a myth of one temple in Kyoto, a girl died after being maltreated by her master. The master buried her body without performing a proper ritual, and lied to her parents saying she had eloped. One day her parents saw the same dream in which their daughter asks them to perform a proper funeral for her.

Indeed, the fear of such horrible death, and of becoming a haunted spirit, is still strong in today’s Japan. In everyday conversation, people talk about their concern whether their children carry out a proper funeral for them and take care of their tomb or not. It is a matter of great importance to them, since it determines their destiny after death, whether to be a holy Buddha or to be a horrible haunting spirit.

A contemporary Japanese writer, Banana Yoshimoto writes a lyrical short story called “Moonlight Shadow”, stressing the importance of the ritual. In this story, the heroine goes up to a bridge over a big river everyday after losing her lover in a car accident. She meets his apparition three times over the bridge. During the third encounter, she waves him goodbye and the apparition disappears forever. In a Japanese phrase, a better afterlife is also called “the other side of the river.” And this story describes the process of a necessary ceremony the heroine has to perform in order for her lover to enter into a better world. It also shows that the ritual is necessary for the heroine herself in order to break away from too much attachment to her lover, which
not only hinders him from going into a better world, but also prevents her to start a new life. Too much attachment to a relationship, especially a sexual relationship, has been condemned in Buddhist tradition, and this story demonstrates how to disconnect the unnecessary and unholy attachment.

5. Female Grudge

Too much attachment might be the key phrase to analyse Japanese ghosts, because women were considered in Buddhism to be more susceptible to such fault of unnecessary and unholy attachment to relationships. Women have been regarded as more sexual and therefore less sacred, and they cannot become Buddha after death, instead they have to reincarnate into men first. Hence Japanese ghosts are mostly female. By the tenth century when the *Tale of Genji* was written, Japan was heavily influenced by Buddhist and Confucian thought imported from China, and female obedience to men was the norm. In the *Tale of Genji*, heroines are told again and again not to have grudges or to be angry even when mistreated by their lover. Women’s attachment to male lovers is especially condemned as sinful.

You may see that this formula is a recipe for ghosts. There are numerous ghost stories in Japan, in which female ghosts, like Oiwa, express their grudges against unfaithful lovers. Lady Rokujo in the *Tale of Genji* is another example. She is an estranged lover of Genji, the hero. When he has an affair with a quiet and obedient young woman, Yugao, Lady Rokujo becomes a living ghost and possesses Yugao, who suddenly has a fit and dies. Genji sees a shadow of a beautiful lady, who blames Genji by saying, “While I am thinking of you and love you as the most wonderful man, you do not visit me playing around with and being affectionate to such a woman with no talent. I haven’t expected it and I have a grudge against you.” The spirit is not
identified, but suggested as Lady Rokujo. The ghost of Lady Rokujo appears again, this time possessing Genji’s pregnant wife, who eventually dies. Again Genji sees Lady Rokujo’s face. She says to Genji that she has endured so much pain by him that her spirit has come out of her body. When Lady Rokujo realises that she might have turned into a living ghost, she suffers a great deal. Finding her attachment to Genji too strong to manage, she finally decides to give up this world and becomes a nun. It seems female ghosts are the product of the oppression imposed by the patriarchy in Buddhist and Confucian systems. They may have used their religious authority as the sign of women’s weakness, their unholy nature and their wicked sexuality.

Put differently, by creating sexualized female ghosts, the patriarchal society has transferred onto women’s body its fear of sexuality, in an attempt to control it. As analyzed by David Punter, women’s bodies, with its sexuality and reproductive capacity, have always threatened male society, and to oppress, blame and control women’s bodies has been the vital task of patriarchal men. A traditional Gothic tale, *The Monk*, by Matthew Lewis, demonstrates such transference of blame onto a woman, when the high-ranking monk, Ambrosio, blames a woman for his fall into a state of sexual criminality. Sigmund Freud’s analysis of the totemic culture is also appropriate, as the sin of patricide was transferred onto women who became their taboo. I believe a similar formation is working in Japanese ghost stories. Many of these stories relate to sexual relationships between man and woman. When the heroine becomes a ghost, the horror of the sexuality that is so intense as to bring about terrible murder is successfully transferred onto the grotesque body of woman.
6. Female Ghosts as Mediator

As I have mentioned, the ritual and cremation to make death official and purified is very significant in Japan. When the ritual is not properly performed, the death becomes horrible, unclean and black. Interestingly, the ceremony to make death safe and white was performed by male monks, while it was female mediums that contacted the victims of the “horrible death”. By letting a female medium deal with the “horrible death,” male monks had only to do with the safe white death.

In fact, not only the female mediums, but also female ghosts themselves function as a mediator against horror of abnormal death. As if to signify the pain and torture of the “horrible death,” female ghosts often have disfigured face or body too horrible to look at. For instance, Oiwa was poisoned and her face was swollen up like an ugly rock. Ghosts in popular pictures often have cuts, bruises and trickling blood. By letting women become the sole receptacle of the pain of horrible death, patriarchal society might have tried to sanitize itself. The image of female ghosts, therefore, with their disfigured body and painful bruises is the symbol of fear for the horrible death especially one resulting from sexuality, in male-centred Japan.

7. Ghosts Talk Back

But, if you think of the patriarchal system, female ghosts can also be the symbol of a resistant woman, because, by becoming ghosts, they violate the rule of conduct. In this period of Japan, women were not supposed to talk back to men, since it was regarded as impolite and unfeminine. But in the figure of ghosts, they can blame the inflictor of pain, and say they have a grudge against him straight to his face. In the *Tale of Genji*, though the silent heroines cannot say a blaming word to Genji, Lady Rokujo managed to do
that, and through her ghost, the possessed ladies also can express their anger. Lady Rokujo’s ghost functions as the only outlet, through which women talk back to Genji unanimously. Together they become the ally to fight back the unfair society.¹³

Japanese sexualized female ghosts with bruised body can be translated into an expression of women’s unspoken words, about their sufferings and frustration under the severe oppression, and especially about the society’s neglect and despise of their female sexual bodies.

Notes

¹ Ringu (1998), based on the horror story by Koji Suzuki, directed by Hideo Nakata. Hollywood version was produced in 2003 by the title of The Ring.
² The Others (2001) Directed by Alejandro Amenabar.
⁵ ibid., p.50.
⁸ Bancho-Sarayashiki, one of the traditional ghost stories in Japan, whose origin is multiple and the dates unspecified. The oldest version is said to be created in the 16th century.
⁹ Yotsuya-Kaidan, a series of traditional ghost stories, whose first version appeared in 1727 as Yotsuya-Zatsudanshu.
¹³ See, D G Bergen’s ‘Spirit Possession in the Context of Dramatic
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**Bibliography**


Section 4:

Idols Revisited
Bill Condon's Mutable Monsters

Duane W. Kight

Abstract: Dr. Pretorius, in James Whale's 1935 film The Bride of Frankenstein, greets the creation of the Bride with a toast to "a new world of gods and monsters!" When Bill Condon came to film Christopher Bram's Father of Frankenstein, he preferred not to adopt the title of Bram's novel as his own, preferring instead to recall Pretorius' toast by entitling his film Gods and Monsters. The choice is apposite, given the film's emphasis on The Bride as the main intertext of the narrative, but is by no means a simple one, and in fact points to Condon's shaping of the film into a complex, layered reflection on monstrosity. Condon present us with a world of clearly delineated, dichotomous categories, with gods on the one hand and monsters on the other. From this perspective, Whale is obviously the creator-god. Yet this cannot be Condon's whole intent; the plural - godS and monsterS - suggests that his film is meant to depict a multiplicity of roles occupied by the characters, rather than a simple dichotomy. Thus, the "and" of the title is not a divider of categories but rather an indicator of their fluidity; the equation can be reversed, and monsters become gods.

Key Words: Condon, Whale, Bran, Frankenstein, monster, homosexuality
given the film’s emphasis on *The Bride of Frankenstein* as the main intertext of the narrative. Whatever Condon’s intent in his choice of title, that choice points to the shaping of the film into a complex, layered reflection on the mutable definitions of monstrosity.

On the most evident level, Condon’s title evokes the tradition of the horror film, which presents us with a world of clearly delineated, dichotomous categories - at the simplest level, good versus evil. In this case, however, the world presented is already a more ambiguous one, defined by gods - who are not necessarily good, as the failed Promethean Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley already shows - on the one hand and monsters - who are not necessarily undeserving of sympathy, again as Mary Shelley indicates - on the other. From this perspective, Whale is the creator-god, on the one hand molding *monstres sacrés* - his stars, consecrated by Hollywood - like so much clay into the embodiment of his characters, on the other shaping his gardener, Clay Boone, through the exploitation of Boone's homophobia into a monstrous killing machine who can give the director the death he desires as relief from his physical degeneration (but which he is not courageous enough to carry out himself). This manipulative, demanding figure clearly exhibits elements of the sadist, along with his more admirable qualities as film artist. Likewise, those he shapes - his monsters - are less horrible than pathetic: the boring Boris Karloff, the witty Elsa Lanchester, both imprisoned in their once and future roles from Whale’s films; the lower-class Clay, unable to find love other than that offered by tawdry one-night stands, reeling from the impact of a dysfunctional family, betrayed by his body in his aspirations to become a Marine, stuck in a rusty trailer, always at the beck and call of others, again imprisoned by barriers he cannot transcend. Yet depicting this obvious dichotomy cannot be Condon’s whole intent; the plural of the title - godS and monsterS - suggests very clearly that his film is meant to depict a multiplicity of roles occupied by the characters, rather than a simple dichotomy. Thus, the "and" of the title is not a divider of categories so much as an indicator of their interchangeability and fluidity; for Condon, the equation can be easily reversed, and monsters become gods.

Before moving on, I would like to suggest yet one more reason for Condon’s willingness to rebaptize what was at its inception called *Father of Frankenstein*. While one may separate out the thematic strands that structure *Gods and Monsters*, to try to pursue them in isolation is to some extent to do the director’s work an injustice; as with any thoughtfully-constructed work of art, the meaning of *Gods and Monsters* depends, not on elements considered in isolation, but in their intersection and interweaving. This is all the more true in the case, as here, of an artefact that constantly undermines reliable and stable categorization, preferring to define its parts against and alongside each other, and one which finds its central metaphor in the figure of the Frankenstein Creature, sutured together from components that are fragments
of dead matter, given life as a cultural icon in this film by a collaboration between history (the documented facts of Whale's life), fiction (Condon and Bram's speculative reconstruction of Whale's last days), monstrous intertexts (Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Whale's recensions of it), and performance (which includes all the elements of cinema), all "dead" because fixed in time and on film, all bringing something essential to its creation but none of them independently responsible for it. Bram's original title suggests a single paternity, but in Condon's view, there is, at bottom, no singular *Father of Frankenstein* that can generate *Gods and Monsters*, only a space between in which the film's meaning lies.

In the Christian tradition, creation first generates action, speech, and illumination in a single moment: “Let there be light, and there was light”, Genesis relates, and then the whole spectacle of the world and all there is in it. From this perspective, within the infinitely smaller world of the film studio, the director is a god, or at least plays at being one: his cry of “Lights! Camera! Action!” a speech act with light as its medium and performance as its product, generating a detailed world at least minimally corresponding to reality. Whale was a meticulous director, in full control of the elements of his chosen medium, which Condon underscores in the flashback scene of Elsa Lanchester's first appearance in *Bride of Frankenstein*: Whale is at the centre of a vortex of creation, shaping material elements - the positioning of Colin Clive (Henry) and Ernest Thesiger (Pretorius) around Lanchester, the drape of Lanchester’s robe—or spiritual ones - Clive’s insecurity and alcoholic weakness—into a scene that he can contemplate through the camera’s eye, raised above the scene ready to infuse it, like God, with life.

The idea of director as God is a fairly obvious one, but this scene is important to Condon’s definition of the director as God in more subtle ways as well. As the Frankenstein tradition has developed, it is easy to forget that the subtitle of Mary Shelley's novel refers to Prometheus, who brought the benefits of fire to humanity. In framing Whale here with two other Promethean figures from his 1935 film - Henry Frankenstein and Dr. Pretorius - behind whom stands the shadowy figure of Shelley's Victor Frankenstein that generated them, Condon forcefully associates the light of the film medium with the fiery lightning of creation, and Whale with the gift of creativity he offers.

That Whale is godlike in the context of the film is reinforced by Condon’s depiction of him outside the studio. His shaping of Clay (despite Christopher Bram’s protest to the contrary, the choice of name cannot have been arbitrary, at least on an unconscious level, since it fits the thematics of divinity I have been outlining too neatly) from the confused man we see at the beginning to a person with a stable identity is a secular version of what the God of Genesis does in Eden. When Whale draws Clay, even if the drawings he produces are pointless, he is simultaneously drawing him out:
even flawed, the artistic impulse that fires Whale is still a gift to humanity. When Whale plays his game of strip-interview with Kay, or aims sly innuendo at Princess Margaret and Cukor in the garden party scene, he is orchestrating details and positioning actors, albeit not professional ones, to suit the divine purposes of a director, not stumbling through the accidents of polite conversation.

But this divine director also exhibits a less positive, more sadistic side: gods not only create, but also destroy those to whom and for whom they should be morally responsible by virtue of their divinity - the examples of the cruel punishment of Prometheus, the dismembering of Actaeon, and the sufferings of Job spring readily to mind, among many others. While we do not see Whale monstrously manipulating his actors on the set, the film makes that side of his ability to direct readily visible: his game with Kay may be all in fun, but it exploits Kay’s naiveté to mock him as well, and Whale’s transformation of Clay into a killing machine by playing on his innocent desire for human connection, his fragile sense of identity and his hidden anger at that fragility, and his latent homophobia (perhaps more accurately seen as confusion about his sexuality) is horrendous in its egotism. One might assume that he is staging his life on the same reprehensible principles that informed his films.

Yet Whale, like Prometheus - and one notes how Condon complicates the myth by assimilating the punishing god to his eternally-suffering victim - is a pathetic god as well, and in this he reveals the abjection more characteristic of the monster. His stroke prevents him from controlling his thoughts; when Clay asks him what it was like seeing his monsters (Lanchester and Karloff) at the garden party, Whale responds that his monsters are now interior: once able to divinely shape human lives into films, he now cannot even direct his pathetically mortal body to obey him. He was not even able to control his personal life; Whale’s love for Barnet in the trenches was not enough to save the latter from death, and Barnet’s flashback appearances function in this context as a reminder to Whale that this Hollywood god was unable to promise immortality, or even a proper burial. Whale’s failure as god makes him as pitiable as the Creature he put on film, whose abjectly failed search for a Bride and a life informs the final scenes of Gods and Monsters through an evocation of the scene from Bride of Frankenstein where the Creature is raised on a cross by the villagers who mistreat him; when Clay finds Whale drowned in his pool, the director is similarly floating, crucified, in the water, a failed Christ who could neither promise immortality nor attain the heaven of a stable life marked by domestic love and lasting artistic fame.

Clay and Hannah are other characters who point to the fluid dialectic of god and monster, divine and abject, as an organizing principle of Condon’s film, but in inversion of the way in which Whale is presented. Both begin as
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monsters. Condon presents Clay as a body in pieces, a series of cuts of a hand, a head, a partial body, sutured together cinematically to allow Clay, framed by the door, to emerge from his trailer, the sequence recalling the introduction in parts, and then as a whole, of the Monster in a frame in both Whale *Frankenstein* films). Moreover, Clay lives beneath Whale’s world; as he sets off at beginning, he has to drive up to where Whale lives, but yet returns to the trailer and the beach bar, as if aspiring to overcome his abjection, but failing to do so—again, like the Creature in both Whale and Shelley. The similarity of names - Clay and Kay - furthermore suggests that Clay shares Kay’s abject status. Likewise, Clay’s body fails to obey his desires: his aspiration to the Marine Corps is destroyed by his appendicitis, his need for love overcome by the dictates of his libido, as his erstwhile girlfriend Betty recognizes in her cruel rejection of him.

Hannah, likewise, is monstrous by the objective fact of her unattractive appearance (underlined in her explicit visual identification with the Bride as she and Whale watch the movie on television together), her domestic service (she plays the role of the deformed assistants in the Whale films to Whale’s Frankenstein), and her longing - again like the Monster - for what she can only have in compromised form, a maternal relationship to Whale that the director’s egotistical dismissals of her denies. Moreover, it seems clear that Hannah also longs for a marital connection that likewise is denied her; again, the body intrudes: were she male, and were she as attractive as the boys that Whale lusts after (Kay, Clay, the nude men in Whale’s flashback of the swimming party), she could recreate the domesticity she shared with her dead husband and provide that to which Whale aspired. Her name, beginning and ending with an H, points to her being locked in who she is, like Shelley’s Creature.

But Clay and Hannah also share the capacity for directing life into shape that is characteristic of gods. Clay is able to stage his body into a spectacle when he stands naked before Whale just before the climactic scene where Whale tries to seduce Clay into killing him; the gardener has managed to overcome his discomfort at being aestheticised through Whale’s sketching sessions, and his discomfort at being the object of Whale’s erotic interest throughout the film (seen most notably in the lunch scene over cigars, where Clay defensively affirms his heterosexuality), and integrate what Whale sees in him into a full person, unashamedly sexual and attractive, meeting Whale’s gaze full on, individual to individual. Clay’s efforts throughout the film to piece together his identity - a psyche, not a body, in parts - is the creative act which allows him to overcome his dysfunctional family past and acquire the wife and child we see him with at the end of the film, having assumed and integrated the monstrous parts of his character: his final walk through the rain in the last frames, lurching like Karloff’s monster, is a divine answer to the abjected, isolated body and mind in pieces with which the film
began. Moreover, in that Clay begins and ends the film, Condon suggests that the film is at bottom his story, not Whale’s, the narrative taken out of Whale’s hands and given creative shape by a monster who has become a god in so doing. Hannah shares, in a less complex way, this ability to direct the events of the film: in her intrusions into the life of “Mr. Jimmy”, and most importantly, in her orchestration of the terms under which the drowned Whale will be found, she reveals herself as capable of being a god as well as a monster.

I have shown that Condon deploys intertextual references from Whale’s two Frankenstein films to support his questioning of the strict dichotomy of gods and monsters, inherited from the horror film tradition, that such intertexts might seem to dictate in an account of a noted horror director’s final days. However, there is a further intertext that is implicitly invoked so as to reinforce the instability of the categories that Condon establishes. This is, of course, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Whale’s two films of necessity simplify and rearrange Shelley’s text, as all Frankenstein films do (even Kenneth Branagh’s supposedly faithful adaptation makes fairly radical changes in the source material): no film of reasonable length could hope to convey all of Shelley’s complexity. But Condon tries to incorporate some elements of the original as he refers more explicitly to Whale’s film versions. Condon’s film owes more, I would argue, to Shelley’s fluid idea of the relationship between gods and monsters than the more rigid one established by Whale’s adaptations. Shelley’s novel insists that we understand the various characters not so much as individuals as elements in relation to a complex whole, no one part comprehensible without the others; her framing of the Creature’s narrative at the centre of the novel, within the narrative proper, and in turn within Walton’s narratives, demands that we look at the narrative synchronically rather than diachronically; likewise, Condon’s enclosure of Whale’s story within Clay’s - one recalls that the film begins and ends with that character, not Whale - imposes a similar perspective.

Thus, the lunch scene over cigars referred to above integrates the opposite poles of monster and god more fully and more consistently in Shelley’s manner than do Whale’s films: while Whale is finding out if Clay is capable of killing, and thus furthering his monstrous aims of exploiting Clay’s homophobia and brute strength (much as Victor, it can be argued, uses his Creature to kill Justine and Elizabeth, whom he blames for alienating his dead mother and depriving him of the love which should have been his alone), he is also providing companionship and education, a kind of family, just as Mr. de Lacey - a divine figure in his efforts to shape a person - does for the Creature in Shelley’s novel. In a similar way, this scene recalls on one level the scene from Whale’s *Bride* where the Hermit and the Monster smoke together, but beyond that, it recalls in Clay the blind de Lacey, whose
assessment of human nature is not clouded by preconceptions and hasty judgement. While Clay here may want to articulate his difference from Whale in terms of heterosexual versus homosexual, he is still open to what Whale has to offer on other terms than the sexual, as a whole person over and beyond his sexual identity; this is a far cry from the characters of Whale’s films, who categorize and reject the Monster purely on the basis of one quality, his appearance. Likewise, Hannah is shadowed by her direct equivalent, the frightful Bride, but also by the maternal Elizabeth of the novel: Hannah is simultaneously an incarnation of Shelley’s “hideous progeny” but also of the positive “angel in the house” who provides maternal care to the Frankenstein household after the death of Caroline in the novel, and, like Shelley’s characters, and unlike Whale’s, we can place her wholly neither in the category of monster or god, but must accept her, like Condon’s other characters, as a figure who constantly shifts from one to the other depending on her narrative context. Condon’s frequent use of mirroring in the film - Clay’s glance at himself in the shaving mirror, the dim reflection of Clay’s body in the window as he stands finally naked before Whale, Whale’s vision of Barnet as he dresses for what he thinks will be his death, even the dead Whale’s face-down position in the pool, which recalls the Monster’s glimpse of himself in bodies of water in both Shelley and The Bride of Frankenstein - remind us that what a mirror reflects is not an objective correlative of reality, but a layering of all the aspects of ourselves, of people and texts of various kinds, that invisibly contribute to what we are seeing and which coexist.

One aspect of what we see in the mirror is our sexuality, and this is the final area where Condon interrogates and collapses the categories of god and monster in his film. While this is rapidly changing, it is difficult to deny that the culture of which Gods and Monsters is situated, and of which it is a reflection, is heterosexist; according to much-cited “family values”, to follow God’s plan is to reproduce within the context of a heterosexual family, and to dissent from that plan is in some way monstrous. By this measure, Whale is at worst deviant in refusing reproductive sex, in his promiscuity, perhaps even in corrupting Barnet and undermining, in his own small way, the British war effort; at best, he incarnates the stereotype of the pathetic old voyeur queen, impotently lusting after young bodies from afar - as Clay’s friends characterize the director just before they watch Bride of Frankenstein on TV - or as the decadent esthete, more interested in painting and film, or in exchanging innuendo with the even more queeny Ernest Thesiger, than in more manly pursuits like hard work. This conventional view of the homosexual carries over to Hannah, who rather than remarrying or moving in with her family once widowed, is akin to the “fag hag” pal of effete men in classic Hollywood film. Clay, on the other hand, is the hypermasculine heterosexual god: his manly flattop, his interest in the Marines (by reputation
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the butchest branch of the Armed Forces), his promiscuity as a phase on the way to a wife and a family, are all indicative of the values that put the heterosexual on top, where he, so society tells us, he should be, in the bedroom or the boardroom.

Characteristically, as Condon sets up what might be read as a conventional narrative of justly punished homosexuality and equally justly affirmed heterosexuality, he simultaneously demolishes it. Whale as a gay man may be pathetically circumscribed by the possibilities open to him in his lifetime, but within those limits, his gayness has affirmative value. He has been able to channel his family’s rejection of him as effete into great and lasting art; his refusal to hide who he is—unlike George Cukor, whose discomfort with open homosexuality is all too evident in the scene where Whale and Clay meet Cukor and Princess Margaret, or his former lover David, who is equally embarrassed to be seen with anyone who might compromise his cover, or Kay, who implies in the same scene has slept his way to the top and sees sexuality as a commodity—has come at a great personal cost: his relationship with David has broken up over his openness, and some film historians think that Whale’s disappearance from Hollywood was due to an industry distaste for open homosexuality that still rules today. While the final scene, where Clay as Monster gives Whale permission to lie down in the trench next to the dead Barnet, could be read as a final concession to abjection, the homosexual as dead, buried, an invisible dream monster to scare potentially gay children into heterosexuality with, the sheer beauty of the scene suggests instead that Whale is taking his place (sadly only in death) in a community of men and in a relationship of which he has dreamed but which society has denied him. This homosexual, at any rate, has been able to shape his identity as well as he could, and has orchestrated his life and death as a god might, rather than stumbling haphazardly about at the mercy of an angry society or at the arbitrary directives of a creator’s script—or Scripture—as Whale’s Monster does in the films.

Condon likewise brings Clay’s hypermasculinity into question. It is clear that Clay’s sexuality is instable. While he initially resists posing for Whale, he does so nonetheless: he has no objection to being the object of the homosexual’s probing gaze, which necessarily has an erotic dimension, and he keeps coming back to encounter that gaze: however limited, Clay feels some kind of queer pleasure in the experience. Likewise, his frequent iteration of his heterosexuality to Whale, to Hannah, to his bar friends, suggests a concomitant disavowal of the possibility of homosexuality, and thus its presence: Clay’s sexual surface is defined by his shadow, and his glances in the mirror perhaps imply that he is on some level questioning where he belongs. When he drops his towel and stands naked before Whale near the end of the film, Clay offers his body as a concession to Whale’s
desire: the fact that he can make the gesture means that the possibility of homosexuality is at least there.

Once again, however, Condon is not organizing his narrative according to a dichotomy: this is not the story of Whale’s failed attempt to recruit Clay to the so-called “homosexual lifestyle”, and the final domestic scene of Clay with his wife and child are not meant to depict a narrow escape and a discovery of the proper heterosexual path to take, nor is it the tale of the homosexual Whale’s unhappy life that could have been happy if he had been heterosexual. On the contrary, once again, the categories blur and coalesce. Whale may not be married, but he and Hannah behave much as an old married couple might, and her anguished outburst at discovering Whale beside the pool at the end confirms the validity of their union in heterosexual terms, however unconventional. Whale may be a rejected homosexual, but his shaping and nurturing of Clay, however much self-interested, is also the creation of a human connection equivalent to family: Whale’s bequest of the original drawing of the Monster to Clay is the gesture of a father recreating the family that Clay no longer has by passing down an inheritance (and corrects Frankenstein’s rejection of his creation in the Whale films and Shelley’s novel); the question of “Friend?” that Whale inscribes on the back invites the response, “No, father”, and one understands that Christopher Bram’s original title for the novel refers to this son as much as to the cinematic Monster.

Clay, in much the same way, brings the two sexual categories together. In the final dream scene, Whale falls asleep, and two figures, at first indistinguishable, appear. It soon becomes apparent that Clay is leading Whale toward the trench in which Barnet lies with his comrades. With a nod, Clay gives Whale permission to join Barnet, and the dream ends as Clay wakes up. Here, Condon assimilates Whale to Clay: which is the dreamer, which is the directing god or the following monster, which is the homosexual and which the heterosexual, is blurred. Clay’s nod to Whale and his separation from the director acknowledges at one and the same time that Clay has determined his true nature, but in a way that allows him to walk hand in hand with a gay man without being threatened and that Clay acknowledges the validity of Whale’s homosexuality in its bodily and emotional dimensions. It is Clay’s integration of the possibilities of his nature and a conscious choice of the path to follow that allows Whale peace. In this scene, if Whale is the dreamer, Clay is offering a more profound version of the spectacle of identity than when he dropped his towel. If, on the other hand, Clay is the dreamer, it is this dream that makes the conclusion possible: after the struggle to define sexuality and to understand emotional connection with both men and women, Clay is now empowered to achieve the domestic harmony with which the film closes.
Yet even here, Condon refuses to close down the mutability of his monsters and gods. As he and his son watch *The Bride of Frankenstein*, Clay is smoking, and the gesture recalls the cigars smoked at lunch with Whale and the layered quality of that scene, as if the issues raised there are still smouldering, as if the possibilities were still evanescent and coalescing like smoke. Then Clay goes to take out the garbage—metaphorically the detritus, perhaps, of what we have witnessed in the course of the film—and under a falling rain—a fluid that blurs outlines—we see him metamorphose from domestic, godly paterfamilias into the familiar, shambling Monster from Whale’s films. As with all good horror films - of which this one is, despite appearances, at least a cousin - this valedictory scene points to an inevitable sequel, acknowledging that inside or beside the godly figure is always and inevitably an accompanying monster, with boundaries between the two that are eternally mutable and always to be interrogated.

Notes

1. Clarke Fountain has usefully summarized the plot of Condon’s film: "*Gods and Monsters* was promoted from the outset as an artistic drama, but the publicity tended to play coyly on the possibility of a homosexual romance between the retired film director James Whale, played by Ian McKellen and his hunky gardener Clayton Boone (Brendan Fraser). While the film does involve romance, the central relationship between the director and his gardener is about the development of a genuine friendship between two outwardly dissimilar but inwardly kindred spirits. In the story, Whale has been living for many years in peaceful, if not entirely contented retirement, under the loving and watchful eye of his contentious and argumentative Hungarian housekeeper (Lynn Redgrave). His earlier celebrity as the director of the original *Frankenstein* movie and its sequel, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, results in his being visited occasionally by disagreeable young men who have come to bask in the reminiscences of this creator of two "camp" classics. His reputation as a fairly outrageous homosexual comes into play here, when one particularly unpleasant and effeminate young man comes by seeking cinematic tidbits: the director challenges the boy to a game of stripping off one article of clothing for every revelation he shares about his moviemaking past. He had gotten the boy down to his briefs when he is stricken with one of his ever-recurring bouts of epilepsy, the result of a series of strokes. By way of contrast, while he is clearly interested in his gardener as a sex-object, gradually luring him into ever closer association, the openness and vulnerability of this awkwardly aggressive heterosexual boy inspires him to reveal the history of his heart. It turns out that, like the young man who is
modelling for his supposed artworks, he came from a poor and difficult background. By the time naïve gardener learns of the director's homosexuality from the housekeeper, he has been drawn too deeply under the man's spell to stay away from their meetings for long. While the tension between the men never departs, a genuine relationship of caring develops between them. Meanwhile, Whale has been clearly observing the progressive deterioration of his mental faculties, and is increasingly being overwhelmed by vivid memories and visions.” C. Fountain, "Gods and Monsters: Plot Synopsis", Allmovie, 2006, viewed on 25 October 2006, http://www.allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll?p=avg&sql=A160237.


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**Filmography**


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Quatermass and the Canon: A Critical Re-appraisal of the 1950s Hammer Quatermass films

Christopher Auld

Abstract: Critics have noted the immediate impact on British film and television production and, ultimately, the wide-ranging influence of the 1950s Quatermass phenomenon on the representation of science fiction and horror. It is cited as an influence on *The X-Files* and the films of John Carpenter and Stephen King, as well as on the *Doctor Who* series. *The Quatermass Experiment*, written, filmed and broadcast live in 1953, had a strong impact on the viewing public, with audience figures rising from 3.5 million for episode one, to 5.0 million for the final instalment. Hammer undertook production of the film adaptations because of the success of the original series. As David Pirie’s study on English Gothic Cinema states, the impact of Quatermass on horror cinema production was immediate.

The film version of *The Quatermass Experiment* was produced in 1955 by Hammer and directed by Val Guest. Hammer was at their ‘lowest ebb’ according to Pirie in 1955 due to poor box office returns. Therefore, a mediocre reception could have been disastrous for the company. However, they were redeemed by the unprecedented financial success of *The Quatermass Experiment*, which broke box office records in both Britain and the U.S.A. Realising the financial potential of the commercial impact of the film, Hammer overturned their 1956 production schedule to concentrate instead on horror production.

This included the follow-up *Quatermass 2* in 1956, also directed by Val Guest.

Key Words: Hammer Studios, The Uncanny, British Cinema, The Quatermass Experiment, Quatermass 2

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*The Quatermass Experiment* provided Hammer with their first major box office hit and is regarded by critics as a forerunner of the following Gothic cycle, which included the Frankenstein and Dracula cycle of films. As indicated by Peter Hutchings, this suggests a key film text for British cinema culture with significance in and beyond the 1950s. The Quatermass phenomenon, then, needs to be appreciated as a key cultural text. However, when viewing the existing literature, there appears to be a gap in the criticism. Despite Pirie’s assertion of the centrality of the Quatermass films in British cinema, and in particular *The Quatermass Experiment*, he confines discussion
of them to several pages. These are situated within a chapter focussing on the
development of Hammer as a studio switching gradually from low budget
melodramas and thrillers to Gothic horror. Conversely, there are separate
chapters dedicated to the Frankenstein and Dracula cycle of films
respectively. It is interesting how much coverage is awarded to discussion of
a particular series of films, as if these are considered to be emblematic of
either the genre or the particular studio that produced them. This can cause
certain texts to become marginal or elided altogether as they become less
important, or when their value appears to be measured by the degree to which
they prompted the more critically lauded material. This focus on the later
Gothic output of Hammer is echoed by Hutchings, 1993, who, while situating
discussion of horror and of the Quatermass films within wider social contexts
and critical discourses, tends to focus on discussion of them as part of a
transitional phase in British cinema. Rather than meriting their own study, the
Quatermass films appear to be constructed as part of the development of
Hammer towards their “mature” stage of Gothic horror production. Despite
their impact, there is little critical material.

This relative absence of sustained discussion indicates that there is
scope for further, detailed investigation of the Quatermass films. This is
e specially the case as other horror studies and collected editions, such as
Hutchings, 2004, and Jancovich, 2002, omit mention of the Quatermass films
entirely. Within existing literature, one can identify three discourses within
British film criticism that could shape this critical neglect: literary origin, the
realist aesthetic and the prevalence of content over form. As Hutchings states,
the contribution of Pirie was significant in how it began to reclaim the
popular horror film as worthy of serious criticism and appreciation. Part of
this re-appraisal of horror was to specifically locate it within British cinema
practice and to stress the literary sources of the films. Pirie focuses on the
literary origin of many of the narratives used by Hammer, especially the
Gothic antecedents of the Frankenstein and Dracula films. Evidently, this is
an attempt to legitimise horror and find for it a place within literary based
critical discourses. Julian Petley notes the privileging of the realist aesthetic
and suggests this has resulted in critical discourse dominated by acceptance
of this approach above others.

Responses to films with a poetic or non-realist character have
therefore been inhibited. Petley also notes the emphasis on content and the
notion that British films suffered from ‘formal invisibility’. The main
problem with emphasising realism and a content-based approach is to deny
critical space to films that present a challenge either through their visual
language, narrative form or source of material. This constructs a perception
of British film as following a particular path, and, as Petley maintains, as
having commonly perceived tendencies, of “hostility towards stylisation, the
hegemony of the documentary spirit, the elevation of content over form.”
Hutchings suggests that the 1980s resurgence of critical interest in British cinema and the refocus on critically neglected areas ‘reveal the limitations of, perhaps even works to deconstruct, the realist aesthetic’\textsuperscript{13}. As Charles Barr states, it is most useful to speak of a heterogeneous British cinema culture with flexible boundaries, which has implications for how it is constructed\textsuperscript{14}. Previously marginal texts, defined as popular, self-reflexive or those that mine elements of the fantastic and the non-realist, have been placed within the centre of British cinema traditions. This has, as Chibnall and Petley suggest, reclaimed and re-discovered previously neglected popular film texts marginal to mainstream criticism.\textsuperscript{15} These include Gainsborough melodramas and Powell and Pressburger, as well as Hammer. Therefore, a critical climate has developed in which the potential of the Quatermass films can be realised more fully with an appreciation of how their non-realist elements place them firmly within British cinema practice, without having to rely on linking the films back to literary sources.

The uncanny and the fantastic, closely related subjects associated with horror and the monstrous, can be used as models within a reappraisal of the Quatermass films. Freud situates the uncanny within the horror paradigm, but adds that it ‘is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and familiar’\textsuperscript{16}. It is not something that frightens through unfamiliarity and strangeness alone. Freud sees the uncanny as ‘everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open’\textsuperscript{17}. Rosemary Jackson offers further perspectives on the two levels of meaning associated with das unheimlich. Firstly, the known and the sense of being comfortable, “at home” in the world, is made strange, with the associated feeling of being alienated from the world. Secondly, that which is concealed from others, obscured from view, is revealed to the light. What is normally not seen, or absent, becomes apparent. What appears known is, in fact, strange and what is perhaps deliberately forgotten, resurfaces. Jackson links the uncanny with the fantastic. The fantastic reveals what ‘needs to remain hidden if the world is to be comfortably known’\textsuperscript{18}. The seemingly ordinary space made strange is a defining factor of the fantastic, with both character and audience taken to a region of uncertainty and doubt, with a slipping of the known. Plagued by self-doubt, the subject becomes a stranger to itself and identity is threatened by the challenge to the notion of the unified self. Jackson notes that, through problematising the “real” and exposing what should remain hidden from view for the sake of normalcy, the uncanny reveals ‘an obscure, occluded region which lies beyond’ the known\textsuperscript{19}. Therefore, for Jackson, this region sits alongside the ‘real’, and the uncanny reveals this space, which is normally absent from view. The uncanny is relational to the real, presenting itself ‘on the edge of something else, being marginal and liminal\textsuperscript{20}. For Nicholas Royle in \textit{The uncanny}, the uncanny disturbs the sense of place, of the division between inside and outside, being
concerned ‘with a strangeness of framing and borders’\textsuperscript{21}. Consequently there is a blurring between categories. The resulting disintegration of binary codes creates anomalies, figures threatening due to their excess of meaning, indicating the presence of the foreign within the self or as Royle suggests, even the feeling of the self actually being a foreign body.\textsuperscript{22}

The uncanny can be used to appraise both Quatermass films. Hutchings considers the unsettling of complacency due to the imagining of the Other, as ‘humanity becomes limited’\textsuperscript{23}. The gaze of humanity is forced back on itself as previously unknown threats evoke hitherto forgotten fears. In both films, knowledge that alters previously held assumptions, prompts anxieties that surface once the threat becomes known. In \textit{The Quatermass Experiment}, conventional science, medicine and belief systems appear unable, initially, to comprehend and deal with the threat. The police chief who becomes allied to Quatermass professes to thinking in a routine manner and the conventional investigative methods he represents are only partially effective. Although a combination of rational and lateral thinking defeat the monstrous threat, unanswered questions and partial explanations at the close of the film result in an inconclusiveness that suggests how the uncanny can never be properly understood. The declaration of Quatermass that he will now start again suggests potential for uncanny repetition. In \textit{Quatermass 2} the uncanny again is present through the impact upon perceptions of power relations and the social fabric. Pirie refers to a “ball of twine” in reference to what happens to Quatermass as he discovers, during his routine, seemingly unrelated disconcerting events.\textsuperscript{24} Once picked at and examined, the twine unravels rendering “the fabric of the whole universe with chaos and nightmare”\textsuperscript{25}. Hutchings suggests that with \textit{Quatermass 2} there is the sense that ‘something is wrong with Britain and that this pre-dates any alien invasion’, as if the discovery of the monstrous has, in turn, exposed what should have remained hidden for assumed normalcy to function.\textsuperscript{26}

In \textit{The Quatermass Xperiment}, the astronaut Victor Caroon, on his return from the space mission, can be understood through the uncanny. Already infected by the alien being and undergoing change, he quickly begins to lose the elements that define the human. His only words are “Help me” before he lapses into silence. As Marcia Landy states, this loss of the capacity for speech leading to eventual loss of the human form represents disruption of the signifiers of the human and a return to a pre-symbolic state, of un-differentiation through the amorphous form of the monster\textsuperscript{27}. There is also a fear of contagion in that he reduces all he comes in contact with to the same state, the monster becoming almost vampiric. The loss of boundaries ‘on which social life depends’\textsuperscript{28} is dramatised by the anomaly Caroon becomes, characterised by both human and non-human elements. In the zoo sequence he is represented through fragments of his physical form, his eyes, or by vestiges of his presence such as a shadow,
slime, or the effect of his nearness to the zoo animals, whose agitated state suggest the primeval quality of the monstrous. His presence is shown through absence, which challenges any assumed inherent nature of humanity. The commingling of the familiar and the unfamiliar can be seen in the earlier stages of Caroon’s change. The uncanny nature of his part-human, part-alien figure is conveyed through the inner conflict shown by his manner of moving towards the cactus in the hospital, a source of sustenance and change that the human part of him resists. His expression when looking at his wife in the car, also, conveys an alien presence tinged with sexuality made threatening through the presence of Otherness. The sight of his transformed arm causes madness, as if the conventions and social fabric normally held in place are now threatened by the presence of the uncanny figure.

What is crucial for the uncanny is the presence of the monstrous within the everyday world. This is especially the case as the invading force operates through control of the human— the strange and the familiar are therefore commingled. In Quatermass 2, When Quatermass and an MP investigate the power plant, supposedly manufacturing synthetic foods though actually at the centre of the alien operation, the semblance of normalcy is carefully constructed for the visiting group. However, the continued comments by the MP on the ordinariness of the proceedings is belied by the empty medical wing, the urgency of the hectoring guard and the remarks by the one woman in the group about how different the manufacturing processes are to what her studies led her to expect. The impact of the plant on its immediate surroundings is to create a sense of an uncanny familiar yet strange and dangerous space. The map used by Quatermass and his assistant to get to Wynerton Flats early in the film does not tally completely with the actual roads. The topography appears wrong and the physical environment is out of balance, with roads that end suddenly and serve no apparent purpose. After the guards take away the stricken assistant and Quatermass drives to the nearest town, the newness of the estate has a forlorn and eerie quality suggested by a long shot of his car entering the town and the camera panning right to reveal two empty standing buses, as if held in time or waiting. The absence of the agents of regular law and order and government in the town compounds the feeling of strangeness, which is pitted against the mundane streets, houses and familiar-looking committee house with business as normal.

Pirie suggests that Hammer never really dealt with monsters as such, but concentrated on creating fear in another way.29 There is a sense of horror created through implication, suggestion and through seeing the effect that the monstrous has on the unfortunate who witnesses it. In both these films, the uncanny and the fantastic can be used to read the effect that the monstrous threat has on the diegetic world of the films, and by implication, this can contribute to discussion about the nature of the “real”
world refracted through the filmic lens and the screen. The uncanny provides a framework through which the film texts, as Hutchings suggests, reveal anxieties internal to society. The lasting effect of the monstrous presence is therefore the self-examination and empirical uncertainty experienced by humankind. As Hutchings further affirms, the films reveal internal discords that, once discovered, render a return to previous normalcy and assumed certainty impossible. The uncanny invite further ways of thinking about both the monstrous and the fantastic within cinema practice. For Quatermass, an extensive re-appraisal of the films employing the uncanny and the fantastic as a framework can help to reassess its place within the wider contexts of British cinema and confirm its significance.

Notes

3. ibid., p. 159
5. ibid., p. 28.
8. P. Hutchings, Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1993, p.3.
11. ibid, p. 99.
12. ibid, p. 99.
17. ibid, p. 132.
19. ibid, p.65.
20. ibid, p.68.
22. ibid, p.2
23. P. Hutchings, “We’re the Martians Now”. British SF Invasion Fantasies of the 1950s and 1960s’, p. 35.
25. ibid, p.35.
28. ibid, p.411.
29. D. Pirie, p.30
30. P. Hutchings, “We’re the Martians Now”. British SF Invasion Fantasies of the 1950s and 1960s’, p. 34.
31. ibid, p.38.

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**Filmography**


The Marquis de Sade: Building Walls

Paul L Yoder

Abstract: The medieval castle has long been seen as that which separates; the greatest man-made obstacle to keep the forces of nature at bay. Thus, it is easy to understand the relevance of castle ruins in gothic literature as a symbol of the ultimate power of nature and man’s inability to isolate and control such natural powers. In short, the symbol of the castle embodies man’s realization that he is powerless against the forces of nature. I will argue that the castle embodies the monstrous in the Marquis de Sade, and more specifically the castle wall ultimately symbolizes the divide between the interiority of the psychoanalytic Self and the exteriority of law and moral values. Sade’s Les 120 Journées de Sodome, as disturbing as it is, most clearly illustrates the divide between inner and outer, primarily because it is such a shocking text. Sade was influenced by the English Romantic Gothic, having read Lewis and Radcliffe, and there is a strong reflection of the Gothic tradition in his works. However, my main emphasis will be on the relationship between the spatial divide illustrated in Sade’s use of the castle, and the divided space between cultural value systems and personal desire.

Key Words: Marquis de Sade, Interiority, Castle, Desire, Psychoanalysis, Gothic, Abject, France, Debauchery, Pornography

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It was in the Bastille, in 1789 that Donatien-Alphonse-François, better known as the Marquis de Sade, finished his novel The 120 Days of Sodom, and it is not surprising that the setting of the work is an impregnable fortress, the castle Silling, a French reflection of the castle of the English gothic romances so popular at this time. For Sade, the castle wall of the gothic tradition perhaps too closely resonated with meaning as he faced the reality of his own confinement, and the understanding that the castle, abbey, subterranean catacomb all represent the man-made that hides the horror from the outside world, creating within itself a space of redefined rules where natural law, the real beyond the walls, cease to exist. If, as I will argue, one can only define the real through the imaginary, the castle wall allows for a redefining of these very principals, and thus, creates a world of shifting paradigms and a fluidity of textual meaning. The castle wall quickly becomes a prison wall, where rules and meanings become dislodged from that of
society’s unconfined counterpart. Private spaces become redefined through their separation with the public, and the monstrosity shaped by external perception also becomes redefined as an internal structure with an ever-changing series of governing laws. It is in just this context that we perceive an endless external repetition, the walls of the castle never change; however, the internal structures, divided from the monotonous external recycling are allowed to remain fluid. The medieval castle has long been seen as that which separates; the greatest man-made obstacle to keep the forces of nature at bay, and as Markman Ellis defines, “it could also figure within a more popular tradition as the place of refuge, where the entire community found protection and succor.” Thus, it is easy to understand the relevance of the ruins of the gothic castle as a symbol of the power of nature and the ultimate lack at the very core of man’s ability to isolate and control such natural powers. The ruined castle is representative of man’s lack of power in the face of nature. In short, the symbol of the castle produces its affective quality precisely because it defines the truest nature of fear created by the realization that man is left powerless and will eventually succumb to the forces of nature.

The wall plays an important role in the life of the Marquis de Sade, not merely because it is at the very heart of his novel The 120 Days of Sodom, or that he clearly distinguishes in his work the concepts of public and privates spaces, but because a very real prison wall confined him in one form or another for twenty-seven years of his adult life. For Sade, the interior, behind the castle wall, was not grounded in a political sphere of safety and protection as I have previously defined, but instead the wall becomes one of confinement. In Sade’s case, as that of any prisoner, this model functions in reverse, as the individual within his cell is separated from the protection of those on the other side of the wall. The imprisoned individual within the cell, locked away from society, in fact becomes the untamable nature outside the seclusion of the castle. From such a transverse position, it is not the space, either interior or exterior, that is important; for the criminal in the cell, these definitions become meaningless. We must remember that the concept of “space” cannot be defined in isolation, that “space” is ultimately infinite, lacking any specific quality of meaning. A word that can be defined as anything, in turn, means nothing. It is what divides (the wall) that allows us to define, to establish meaning.

The wall, in either its literal or figurative sense, becomes arguably the key symbol to the Sadean world as it separates and allows us to define, and it is through the act of defining that one grapples with the Marquis de Sade. As we will see, the Sadean world is a world of division between public and private spaces. What I wish to address is the very nature of these spaces and ultimately their relationship with the internal and the external. But to approach Sade in a manner that clearly delineates the public from the private becomes problematic, especially if we consider that many of the “private”
acts I will be considering actually take place in very public spaces. So we must take care not to associate the Sadean private world as meaning wholly individualistic, but instead, it is a world associated through an act of separation, in the case of the castle Silling, one of complete and total isolation from the rest of the world.

Cross the bridge and you come down into a little plain about four acres in area; the plain is surrounded on all sides by sheer crags rising to the clouds, crags which envelop the plain within a faultless screen. The passage known as the bridge path is hence the only one by which you may descend into or communicate with the little plain; the bridge path is hence the only one by which you may descend into or communicate with the little plain; the bridge removed or destroyed, there is not on this entire earth a single being, of no matter what species you may imagine, capable of gaining this small plot of level land.²

This description may very well come from his own feelings regarding his imprisonment. For a man in Sade’s position, imprisonment was the day to day reality of his existence, and one often commented upon in his letters. But it was not simply the fact that Sade was locked behind bars; we must not forget the initial acts that were the catalyst to land him there in the first place. Sade, at a very young age, seems to have had problem distinguishing the boundaries that defined the public spaces from the private ones, the boundaries between internal desire and external action.

It would be almost too easy to jump to the conclusion that in Freudian terms the young Sade had no superego, no way to distinguish right from wrong; although, in the context of his early acts of debauchery, such an assertion may very well be true. One instance, and the one that seems to most clearly mark the beginnings of many legal troubles associated with his sexual escapades, occurred in 1763 with a prostitute, Jeanne Testard. Sade spent the majority of the evening preaching blasphemy in the most erotic terms and reading similarly blasphemous poetry; although, the actual physical sexuality of the evening seems to have been confined to masturbation. But this event establishes a pattern for Sade’s behavior and one that will be repeated with relative consistency. This initial scandal sets the stage for Sade’s continual focus between public and private spaces and the wall Sade creates to differentiate the two. As soon as Sade released her at nine o’clock the next morning, back into the society of the public sphere, she went straight to the police to file a legal deposition to bring charges against him. As Neil Schaeffer notes in his biography of Sade,
The Testard deposition is of interest because of what it suggests about Sade’s obsession—absolutely evident and fantastically elaborated in his novels—for creating a privileged space, a sanctum for perverse sexuality. [...] For Testard, being locked and bolted in with a man like that was frightening enough. [...] This was a fearful space, farther away from the bolted door, with safety and civilization on the other side.5

Sade is arrested ten days later and incarcerated at Vincennes. But to infer from these acts that Sade has no conscience, or that he is somehow unaware of the rules and codes of conduct that govern general society, would be a mistake. We simply have to look at Sade’s own words after being imprisoned to see that he is aware of the law (both of a formal nature as well as spiritual). He writes while in prison,

Unhappy as I am, sir, I do not deplore my fate; I deserved God’s vengeance, and I’m experiencing it. Crying for my sins, loathing my errors—those are my only occupations. Alas! God could well destroy me without giving me time to acknowledge my misdeeds and repent for them.4

Are we to take these words at face value, or as a form of self mockery? As with all of Sade’s work, such a question remains ambiguous; however, it is difficult to take Sade’s words seriously when we consider the unusually Sadistic turn his pattern would take five years later.

On April 3, 1768 in Paris, Sade meets Rose Keller begging outside the church of the Petits-Peres. Sade offers that she escort him back to his residence at Arcueil about an hour’s coach ride outside Paris, but she refuses, informing the Marquis that she is no such lady of the evening. Sade calmly informs her that he is only requesting her services for some housecleaning, and with that she agrees to enter the coach. Arriving at Arcueil, Sade deposits Keller in a second floor room and locks her in. Upon returning an hour later, he demands that the girl disrobe. When she only partially complies, Sade strips off her chemise himself, pushes her face down into a bed upholstered in red-and-white chintz. Then he covers her head with a bolster and his fur muff to stifle her cries, and still holding a candle in his left hand, he starts to whip her, flaying her alternately with a bundle of cane and cat-o’-nine tails.5
When Sade had finished his activities, he informed Keller that she would be free to return to Paris that evening. Once he had existed the room and relocked the door, she managed to escape her confines by lowering herself out of an unsecured window.

This is one of the few times we actually witness Sade being “Sadistic”; his tendency is to be masochistic by assuming the passive role. However, there is a consistent attitude regarding Sade’s use of an enclosed space, and more specific to our purpose here, begins to establish the importance of boundaries as a key to comprehension. As soon as Keller had freed herself from captivity, she ran to the authorities to make her claim against Sade and the abuse that she had suffered at his hands. But this is apparently where the similarities of the two stories end as Neil Schaeffer describes the episode:

Rose Keller claimed that Sade renewed the whipping seven or eight times (Sade said three or four). After each whipping, Keller claimed that Sade had dripped hot wax on her wounds, specifying white wax, and also a red wax that has a much higher melting point. Sade denied that he had tortured Keller with melted wax. Rather, he claimed that after each episode of whipping he had applied dabs of a wax-based salve to heal the wounds. The surgeon Le Comte testified that he found no burn marks on Keller and no traces of red wax, though he did find some drops of white wax.\(^6\)

What had happened behind the closed walls of Arcueil will remain shrouded with inconsistency because of Sade’s apparent ‘misreading’ of his own private act, so that

Within ten days, on April 13, the Marquise du Deffand reported to Horace Walpole in England that Sade, ‘far from disavowing or blushing at his crime, claimed that he had performed a highly commendable act, and had provided a great service to the public by discovering a salve that instantly healed wounds’.\(^7\)

While Neil Schaeffer is quick to point out that there is no evidence to prove that Sade had ever made such a statement, it does reflect the growing public interest in Sade and how “every aspect of the scandal at Arcueil was immediately exaggerated and sensationalized to satisfy the intense public
interest in this case.”

Public space was already rewriting the private to create its own interpretation of events.

Society’s created fiction of the myth of Sade continued to build, but this certainly did not prevent him from continuing his pattern of behavior, this time in the summer of 1772 in Marseilles, perhaps one of the most documented of Sade’s acts of debauchery. There is little sense recounting the events in detail, except to mention that once again they include women of questionable nature being confined to a room, supposedly against their will, and forced to take part in Sade’s masochistic and bisexual fantasies, either of which could be punishable by death. During this particular event, however, Sade gave the girls chocolates laced with Spanish Fly, thought at the time to be an aphrodisiac, and had given it in such quantities as to make one of the girls sick enough to need medical attention. And while the acts committed where directed at both Sade and his valet Latour, as opposed to the Sadistic violence of the Keller affair, Mariannette Laugier was so distraught that she burst into tears and had to turn towards the window as not to bear witness to such monstrosity. For Sade, the acts were of no great immediate consequence, and he returned to his hotel to take a nap as if nothing of importance had happened. What had occurred in the privacy of the chamber seemed to have no relevance beyond those walls. Unfortunately for Sade, Mariannette Laugier would see things quite differently, and as with the other victims, as soon as she broke the boundaries of Sade’s circle, she went straight to the police. According to a letter Sade would later write from prison, there seems little doubt that he had not intentionally meant to make anyone sick. Even his mother-in-law, Mme de Montreuil, who was responsible for his imprisonment, defended him on this particular count. But for Sade, such an error in judgment was commonplace, and the fact that he had created, intentionally or not, a very public and very scandalous name for himself, only made the situation worse.

The well documented debauchery and legal troubles for the Marquis de Sade stem not from a lack of a super-ego or the mis-understanding that certain boundaries should not be crossed. On the contrary, it seems that Sade knew such boundaries all too well, and the danger for him (an assassination attempt and his ultimate imprisonment) stem from holding too tightly to the laws that govern the borders between the public and the private. For Sade these boundaries were not transparent, but an illusion so distinct as to represent two forms of existence, and ultimately characterized by two differing sets of meaning. Where Sade seems to so miserably fail, historically, is in his incessant need to conceptualize two independently functioning Others which govern the “legal” structures within each mode of reality. Sade has constructed a very real wall of isolation which divided existence into two spheres, and like the castle of Silling in his fiction, or the real life need to confine himself within his home at La Coste, one is
completely isolated from the other. However, society did not and does not see it that way.

Society’s reaction to the libertinage of which the Marquis de Sade became the embodiment, and perhaps to an even greater extent the strategically planned legal maneuvers of his mother-in-law, Mme de Montreuil, where designed not so much as a means of punishment, but specifically as a way of suppressing his existence, and in a very real sense, entombing him. The legal system, with the help of Mme de Montreuil, showed little interest in want to rehabilitate Sade and later reincorporate him back into society. The goal, it seems from early on, was to make Sade shut his mouth and go away, forever. But can we assert that it was merely his actions which caused his unnaturally long confinement, merely facing the wrath of a mother-in-law who was protecting the name of her daughter? Perhaps. But one must also consider that Renée, the Marquis’s wife, was rumored to have taken part in the activities at La Coste and continued to visit her husband in prison while petitioning for his release. It doesn’t seem unreasonable to consider that the wrath the Marquis instigated, at least partially, derived from beyond the spectrum of his actions alone. For we only have to consider the moral character of late eighteenth century France to see that much of Sade’s behavior ran parallel to the immoral undercurrents common to the time.

Iwan Bloch points out in Hegel’s Philosophy of History that “The whole state of France at that time was a dissolute aggregation of privileges against ideas and reason; in general, a mad state with which, at the same time, was bound the highest depravity of morals and spirit.” The loose moral fabric of society was common to the time, so common one could argue, that the bounds between public and private spaces were dangerously close to being crossed, as the debauchery entwined in the darker recesses of French society were clearly encroaching not only from the bottom up, but also from the top down, as reflected by King Louis XV incessant need for prostitutes to satisfy him, a number so great that he ultimately created Deer Park, his own private bordello. This was a society consumed by the pleasures of the flesh, and as a result “The eighteenth century produced the greater part of the pornographic literature existing today; and in the number of individual erotic works more than all the other centuries combined.” Needless to say, this was a culture difficult to shock, yet the Marquis was considered dangerous even in such a climate.

Initially, and most obviously, we must not underestimate the role of Sade’s mother in law for being the main catalyst for seeing Sade safely imprisoned. But if we consider the connotation the name The Marquis de Sade has even today, we begin to understand that there is a danger here that transcends even the debauched nature of eighteenth century France. To say
that the Marquis de Sade was a shit, may be less a figurative statement than a literal fact.

According to Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, since the eighteenth century, “‘Sex [has been] driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence.’”\(^1\) But what sets Sade apart from the contemporary erotic literature of the time, is not his focus on the erotic as the fulfillment of desire, but specifically that the sexual act is itself only a byproduct of the drive to fulfill an emotional need outside that of physical consummation (in its numerous perverse forms). As I illustrated in the opening section of this paper, Sade was not concerned with the boundaries that separated interior and exterior spaces but strove to tear down the boundaries which separate the act of sex reflected in much of the erotic literature of the time, and that which remained the unspeakable desires of the unconscious. Sade’s work, especially *The 120 Days of Sodom*, reflects on a conscious level the need to suppress sexuality,

As if in order to gain mastery over it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present.\(^1\)

This establishes the duality of the portrayal that separates the act itself from the word. The rhetoric becomes the symbol of that which can be known, but must remain unspoken and as a result, silence becomes the wall that separates interior and exterior spaces through the discourse of text. But what seems to become evident here is that Sade’s mode of operation in his real-life and very suspect legal troubles runs a parallel course with his own literary conventions. Sade’s real-life troubles stemmed from his inability to clearly differentiate between the public and the private, and this is illustrated in his understanding of the power of the narrative voice to tear down walls. To remain silent is in essence to remain behind the wall of an enclosed private space. But the importance here is to understand, as Foucault points out, that silence does not imply a lack of meaning and

Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies.\(^1\)
Meaning stems from the overlap of both discourses, but I wish to take Foucault’s theory a step further and posit that meaning develops in a single direction as exterior space; what is spoken can freely impact interior space, that which remains silent. However, this barrier that ultimately allows us to develop meaning does not readily permit an even exchange, and those ideas that cross into the interior spaces, into the silences, remain hidden from that which is exterior. The outside defines itself not by its recollection of what is within the silences, but instead the wall becomes the object of definition and defines the exterior as that which is not interior; that which we speak is merely that which is not unspeakable. Our difficulty results from the fact that we know that one can’t exist without the other, and as such, the interior and the exterior are codependent. As Foucault says, “there is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say.” But I argue that there is a binary division between what we choose to see, and how what we choose not to see in the interior spaces directly defines how we perceive the physical world. Sade represents the interiority, the silence that is striving for a voice, and thus, Sade becomes the embodiment of excrement.

Julia Kristeva discusses filth as “not a quality in itself, but it applies only to what relates to a boundary and, more particularly, represents the object jettisoned out of that boundary.” What better definition for Sade himself than as one whose private exploits have been jettisoned into the public sphere from the enclosed interior space. In this context Sade parallels the filth that Mary Douglas refers to as issuing forth from the orifices of the body. However, as Douglas also notes, “The mistake is to treat bodily margins in isolation from all other margins,” and this would include, I argue, castle walls.

Notes

5 ibid., p.94.
6 Schaeffer, p.92.
7 ibid.
8 ibid., p. 93.
Neil Schaeffer’s depiction of the incident is interesting in its negotiation of physical space as a concrete example of the danger when the rules of exteriority encroach upon Sade’s interior as Trillet comes to avenge the abuses his daughter experienced while confined at La Coste: “Sade was attempting to conduct Trillet out the great door of the château, Renée was at her husband’s side throughout this encounter. If only they could get the heavy wooden door shut! According to Sade, ‘at the precise moment the rascal’s feet touched the threshold of the great door,’ Trillet turned to face them. [He] then ‘furtively slipped his hand into his pocket,’ and ‘drew out a pistol.’ Sade has no capacity for anticipating what Trillet would do next, as he was propelled from his daughter’s presence and out the door of the château. ‘At that very instant,’ Sade would tell Gaufridy, ‘without replying and without warning, he let fly a pistol shot point-blank at my chest, of which, fortunately for me, only the primer fired.’”

I Bloch, Marquis de Sade, His Life and Works, Castle Books, New York, 1948, p.3.

ibid., p.45


ibid., p.17.

ibid., p.27.

ibid.


Bibliography


The Monstrous Hero: Medicine and Monster-making in Late Victorian Literature

Sylvia A. Pamboukian

Abstract: Unlike earlier monster texts, Victorian novels and short stories by H.G. Wells, Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson and others often attribute the production of monsters to medical doctors rather than to supernatural creation. Many critics interpret the link between medicine and monstrosity as a symptom of Victorian anxiety about science’s challenge to traditional institutions and values. Is there more behind the emergence of the monster-making doctor? This paper argues that the monster-making doctor represents a new twist on the traditional relationship between hero and monster which celebrates science’s epistemological power. By reading comedic as well as horrific monster texts from this period, this paper examines this new, monstrous hero and the power of scientific epistemology in the late Victorian period.

Key Words: Victorian, medicine, literature, nineteenth-century, mad scientist, hero, anxiety, science

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In recent years, the monster has moved from the periphery of literary criticism towards the centre because, as Elaine Graham asserts, monsters invite us to locate the “gates of difference,” the very boundary between natural and unnatural, moral and immoral, human and non-human. Graham asserts that literary monsters represent the horror of breaking social, cultural and racial boundaries and are “a trope for invasion, contamination, assimilation, and loss of identity.”1 Certainly, this view of monsters has become popular in nineteenth-century literary criticism. For example, Mr. Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde has been interpreted as a symptom of Victorian anxiety about the invasion of mainstream culture by various groups: professional men, homosexuals, and New Women.2 Similarly, Victor Frankenstein’s nameless monster has been read as a symptom of anxiety about the breakdown of barriers around issues of female sexuality, reproduction and class identity.3 While fruitful, these readings foreclose on certain intriguing avenues of interpretation. They may allow the monster to dominate our reading, oversimplify the doctor into a mere “mad doctor” or “mad scientist” or overlook the medical context. In its most reductive form, this reading may
become formulaic: “monster X” leads to “hidden anxiety Y” leads to “Victorian social crisis Z.” Is there no more?

In this brief paper, I would like to focus on the doctor-as-monster-maker trope and on the productive nature of Victorian monster texts. Nineteenth-century texts are often preoccupied with the monster’s scientific production rather than supernatural creation. In H.G. Wells’ *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *The Invisible Man*, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, among others, doctors create monsters using scientific methods which reflect contemporary sciences, such as electricity, X-rays, and anatomy, rather than focus on the contest between a hero and a monster. Unlike Odysseus and the Cyclops or Beowulf and Grendel, the doctor and the monster are intimately connected and may even be one and same. While in earlier texts, the hero and monster are often parallel in many ways, both in the world of the text and in their rhetorical presentation to the reader, this similarity only highlights their opposition. Odysseus and Beowulf do not create the Cyclops and Grendel and are not responsible for the monster’s conduct; on the contrary, the heroes must eliminate the monsters to restore order as these enemies embody the opposite of the hero’s values. In Victorian texts, the doctor produces the monster and, often, also destroys him, both instigating disorder and restoring order. Because of this, there is an overlap of culpability between manufacturer, monster and hero, so the monster’s destruction at the end of the text hardly restores the status quo. While the doctor-as-monster-maker trope may indeed represent trepidation at the power of science to undermine or to destabilize social and cultural boundaries, the doctor’s ability both to ignore and to reaffirm boundaries is both admirable and culpable. We remain in awe of the monster’s production and of the doctor who is able to ignore tradition, flout taboos, and reshape reality using science, becoming hero, creator and monster. A glamorous figure, the doctor-as-monster-maker revels in science’s epistemological power and, I suggest, creates a new kind of heroism, which resides in drawing boundaries rather than merely defending or restoring them.

Robert Louis Stevenson’s 1886 monster story *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* illuminates the complex, sinister yet glamorous boundary work of the doctor-as-monster-maker trope. In this novel, Dr. Henry Jekyll discovers a drug capable of releasing his baser self, which he names Mr. Hyde. Hyde is a monster, variously described as: “pale and dwarfish,” “troglodytic,” “hardly human,” and a “Juggernaut,” who “gives a strong feeling of deformity.” His monstrosity is evident in his behaviour: Hyde tramples a young girl, beats a Member of Parliament to death, and “drink[s] pleasure with bestial avidity.” Jekyll repeatedly transforms himself so that he may indulge his sensual nature while preserving the respectable persona of a much-sought-after physician. By choosing a transformative drug
as the link between Jekyll and Hyde, Stevenson represents monster-making as scientific, and this choice implies that it is morally neutral compared with the supernatural evil of earlier monstrous creations. The drug which Jekyll discovers “had no discriminating action; it was neither diabolical nor divine.” When the narrator, Utterson, breaks down Jekyll’s door, he is shocked to find only a dull room rather than a den of evil:

a good fire glowing and chattering on the hearth, the kettle singing its thin strain, a drawer or two open, papers neatly set forth on the business table…the things laid out for tea; the quietest room…but for the glazed presses full of chemicals, the most commonplace room in London.

The fire, kettle, papers, and tea things create a quiet atmosphere, and the fateful chemicals seem neutral, unusual perhaps, but neither intimidating nor welcoming.

Just as the chemicals resist categorization, Jekyll himself also defies easy classification. As Jekyll explains, his is not a contest between good and evil but between shifting boundaries and absolute boundaries. While Hyde is pure evil, Jekyll is not pure good, but a mixture of moral and immoral impulses. Utterson describes Jekyll, a respected physician, as “wild when he was young” and speculate that Hyde may be Jekyll’s illegitimate son.

While Jekyll’s countenance has a “slyish cast,” it also shows “every mark of capacity and kindness.” Like the reader, Jekyll is both tempted by and fearful of his drug’s power. Jekyll says, “the temptation of a discovery so singular and profound at last overcame the suggestions of alarm.” Jekyll initially enjoys the drug because it allows him “like a schoolboy, [to] strip off these lendings and spring headlong into a sea of liberty.” The wish to escape the boundaries of adult respectability is both understandable and blameworthy. Similarly, Dr. Lanyon, Jekyll’s genteel colleague, is tempted by the drug because it offers “a new province of knowledge and new avenues to fame and power,” revealing even respectable Lanyon to be also a mixture of impulses.

Almost as a warning to readers, Utterson misreads Jekyll because he views events through the lens of traditional heroism and monstrosity, with its limited and clearly defined boundaries of good and evil. Utterson assumes that he, himself, is the hero of the piece, Hyde the monster, and Jekyll an unfortunate in need of rescue. He imagines Jekyll asleep in his bed “dreaming and smiling in his dream; and then the door of that room would be opened, the curtain of the bed plucked apart, and lo! There would stand by his side a figure to whom power was given.” In this fantasy, Hyde’s entrance into the bedroom, his opening the door, parting the curtains and awakening the sleeper seem to presage the moment when the hero, presumably Utterson,
must intervene to save the distressed heroine from a libidinous villain. But, Utterson is quite wrong.

Jekyll has not simply crossed a boundary, he has redrawn boundaries using science: more importantly, he has displayed their arbitrary nature. Jekyll was always a multivalent figure, and the drug only makes clear the fictive nature of Utterson’s (and possibly the reader’s) view of monstrosity and heroism. As Jekyll says, “I was in no sense a hypocrite; both sides of me were dead earnest; I was no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged in shame than when I laboured in the eye of day.”

Both Jekyll and Hyde share the same handwriting, a sign of their similarity. The structure of the novel itself reinforces this unity between heroism and monstrosity by repeating the pattern of temptation and resistance in a series of first-person descriptions, including Mr. Enfield’s midnight encounter with Hyde, Utterson’s account of his own first meeting with Hyde, a maid’s description of Hyde’s murder of Carew, the MP, and finally Lanyon’s and Jekyll’s letters. Like Utterson, readers must seek the macabre through layers of the mundane. We are tempted to explore Hyde’s evil nature even as we censure Jekyll for doing the same.

To some extent, the ending restores order by killing Hyde; however, Jekyll’s narrative resists this interpretation. Jekyll writes, “when I know how he fears my power to cut him off by suicide, I find it in my heart to pity him.” This statement differentiates between “him” and “me” in a futile attempt to redraw the boundary between hero and monster (just as Utterson’s interpretation does), but it also expresses a sense of unity between hero and monster through pity, which relies on recognition of shared experience. In killing the monstrous Hyde, sacrificing himself and restoring order, Jekyll presumably becomes a hero, but a different kind of hero. In questioning the rigid moral categories of the monster narrative, in stylizing the pleasure of discovery both in the drug itself and in the epistolary form, and in depicting the scientist as creator, monster, and hero, the text bestows glamour not merely on science nor on the doctor-as-monster maker but on the power to rewrite the narrative of romantic heroism itself.

Where Stevenson gives the monster-making doctor dramatic treatment, H.G. Wells’ “The Stolen Bacillus” mocks the glamour of the monster-maker and of the monster. Published in 1895, this short story recounts the adventures of a bacteriologist who unwittingly gives a vial of Asiatic cholera to an anarchist, bent on poisoning London’s water supply. After a chase sequence through the crowded city streets, the anarchist drinks the contents of the vial, confident that he will cause an outbreak of the fatal disease. As the anarchist vanishes into the crowds, the bacteriologist confesses that the vial did not contain cholera at all: it held only harmless bacilli that will soon turn the anarchist blue. He had exaggerated the danger of his specimen in order to impress his visitor.
Wells’ story exploits the glamour of the monster-making doctor to great effect: while the doctor is in fact quite ordinary (dwelling firmly within social, gendered, and class boundaries), he aspires to the mantle of monster-maker because of its sinister yet impressive connotations. When confronted with a guest who seems fascinated by his research, the scientist performs the role of menacing “mad scientist,” since this role is clearly far more interesting to guests (and readers) than his humdrum research:

Only break such a little tube as this into a supply of drinking-water, say to these minute particles of life that one ...can neither smell nor taste—say to them, ‘Go forth, increase and multiply, and replenish the cisterns,’ and death-mysterious, untraceable death, death swift and terrible, death full of pain and indignity—would be released upon this city, and go hither and thither seeking his victims. Here he would take the husband from the wife, here the child from its mother, here the statesman from his duty, and here the toiler from his trouble.16

In this passage, the dull scientist mimics the overblown and blasphemous language of a cliché “mad scientist.” With Biblical cadence, he bids cholera “go forth and increase” in an apostrophe which uses the lyrical repetition of the word “death” to hammer home the horror of science and its attack on the stable boundaries of marriage, family and nation. Initially sinister, this language becomes comic when we later realize that he is exaggerating, playing the “mad scientist” for effect. While the scientist truly has no such power, his attraction to this role showcases the pleasurable frisson of danger associated with it.

Wells’ undercutting of the glamorous and sinister doctor-as-monster-maker trope continues when the bacteriologist realizes that his guest has stolen a vial of specimen. Hatless and shoeless, the scientist runs out into the street followed by his wife, Minnie, who is distressed at the thought of her husband running around London during the Season in his socks. She exclaims, “he has gone mad!...It’s that horrid science of his!”17 While the literary mad scientist may safely unleash death through monsters or germ warfare, we laugh to find his madness involving sock-footed pursuit: these were not the social boundaries we expected to break. When the anarchist climbs into a cab, the scientist follows, with Minnie in a third cab, bearing shoes. Racing through the streets of London, the three cabs are noted by other Cockney cabdrivers:

“Arry Icks. Wot’s he got?”
“here’s another bloomin’ loonatic”
“He’s drivin’ a loonatic, as you say!”

While Hyde and Frankenstein may terrify members of Parliament and arctic explorers, the Bacteriologist’s supposed lunacy seems comic rather than sinister. While he appears to be a madman to the cabbies, this is not the glamorous mad scientist he had hoped to be.

If the scientist seems attracted to the power of the monster-maker, the Anarchist himself aspires to become a monster, a scientific creation with great anti-social, destructive power. Like Frankenstein’s monster, he muses on death and isolation; “Death, death, death! They had always treated him as a man of no importance. All the world had been in a conspiracy to keep him under. He would teach them yet what it is to isolate a man.” After drinking the vial, he gets out of his cab and shouts melodramatically to the Bacteriologist: “Vive l’Anarchie! You are too late, my friend. I have drunk it. The cholera is abroad!” In becoming a monster, the Anarchist expresses himself in overblown, French pronouncements. The bacilli will indeed turn him into the monster of a “mad scientist,” a blue monster but not a dangerous one.

The repudiation of the “mad scientist’s” glamour is complete when Minnie catches her husband and forces him to put on his shoes, calling him “absolutely mad.” Hen-pecked, conventional, and harmless, the bacteriologist aspires to become a dashing, sinister doctor-as-monster-maker; however, he succeeds in becoming a “mad scientist” in quite a different manner. His failure reveals the attraction of this role: the doctor-as-monster-maker is a hero because of his power to redraw boundaries and because of his self-induced refusal to do so. However, this doctor seems unable to redraw social boundaries in any meaningful way, and his failures render him a comic rather than a glamorous figure.

Similarly, the scientists in Arthur Conan Doyle’s “The Los Amigos Fiasco” aspire to the glamorous mantle of the doctor-as-monster-maker with bizarre results. Better known for his Sherlock Holmes stories, Conan Doyle parodies the creation of a monster in this 1894 story from Round the Red Lamp. The story opens with the clearly defined extremes of Romance: Los Amigos is a land of giants and pygmies. Their generating station is the largest in the world, and their crime rate is the lowest. When they learn of the “puny” shocks administered in the electric chairs of the East, they immediately decide to build the most powerful electric chair in the world:

They vowed in Los Amigos that when an irreclaimable came their way he should be dealt handsomely by, and have the run of all the big dynamos. There should be no reserve, said the engineers, but he should have all that they had got. And what the result of that would be none could
predict, save that it must be absolutely blasting and deadly. Never before had a man been so charged with electricity as they would charge him. He was to be smitten by the essence of ten thunderbolts.\textsuperscript{21}

In this passage, we again have the overblown language of the "mad scientist:" the "ten thunderbolts" reminds us of the Biblical imagery common to this genre and also of other monstrous creations, such as Victor Frankenstein’s, which involve electricity. The scientist’s gross ignorance and keen desire to break ‘new’ ground invites the reader to laugh at the obvious potential for disaster, a potential that is the hallmark of this genre.

Unlike Frankenstein’s nameless and hideous monster, the test subject in this story, Duncan Warner, is an attractive criminal, although like Frankenstein’s monster he has an unusual physique:

- a powerful, muscular man, with a lion head, tangled black locks, and a sweeping beard which covered his broad chest.
- When he was tried, there was no finer head in all the crowded court. It’s no new thing to find the best face looking from the dock.\textsuperscript{22}

Far from being monstrous in appearance, Warner is a handsome man who indeed becomes monstrous in the end but lacks the anti-social, malevolent nature of the monster. Before Warner’s death sentence can be carried out, the scientific committee must build the electric chair; however, their plan is based on analogy:

- In New York a strength of some two thousand volts had been used, and death had not been instantaneous. Evidently their shock had been too weak. Los Amigos should not fall into that error. The charge should be six times greater, and therefore, of course, it would be six times more effective.\textsuperscript{23}

The sole German engineer dissents, claiming that, like whiskey, electricity reverses its effect as the voltage increases; “When I used to take whisky, I used to find that one glass would excite me, but that six would send me to sleep, which is just the opposite. Now, suppose that electricity were to act in just the opposite way also, what then?”\textsuperscript{24} Because based on analogy, both types of reasoning are laughable, a mockery of the pseudo-scientific theorizing and overuse of analogy common to the genre. Expressed in the word “evidently,” the doctors’ confidence in their own abilities to reform society based on new execution technology seems excessive and capitalizes on the well-known trope of the boundary-breaking scientist.
The electric chair itself is replete with pseudo-scientific detail: there are wires and metal plates and other gadgetry. When the moment arrives, the most powerful electric chair in the world springs to life:

He [Duncan Warner] had bounded in his chair as the frightful shock crashed through his system. But he was not dead. On the contrary, his eyes gleamed far more brightly than they had done before. There was only one change, but it was a singular one. The black had passed from his hair and beard as the shadow passes from a landscape. They were both as white as snow. And yet there was no other sign of decay. His skin was smooth and plump and lustrous as a child's.25

Just as the German engineer predicted, the huge voltage fails to kill Duncan; on the contrary, it restores him to health. He praises the machine's curative properties; “That jint,” said he, “has puzzled half the doctors on the Pacific Slope. It's as good as new, and as limber as a hickory twig.”26 After several more jolts, the desperate Warden hangs Duncan, who uses his perch on a high hook to comment on the doings of the downtown; “Old man Plunket goes too much to the Arcady Saloon,” said he. ‘Three times he's been there in an hour; and him with a family.’”27 Unable to kill Duncan by hanging, the Warden finally shoots him six times, only to have Duncan complain about the damage to his coat. The parade of execution technologies reminds readers that many technologies have promised to remake society, yet crime continues. Similarly, Warner’s comments remind us that he is far from monstrous, although a criminal. He retains his good manners and respect for social norms.

As the German engineer explains, electricity is a vital element, and Duncan Warner is so invigorated by the shocks that he may live for hundreds of years. Having created this monster, the doctor on the committee calmly notes, “It was rather a fiasco and for years we didn't talk more about it than we could help, but it's no secret now.”28 Unlike Victor Frankenstein, the scientists of Los Amigos trifle with the laws of life and death and view their mistake with equanimity. The doctors and engineers seek to create the largest and best, and in doing so to assert the greatness of the West and the power of science. They unwittingly succeed through blundering rather than genius, highlighting the limitations of the doctor’s supposed power to redraw the boundaries of life and death and mocking the glamour of the well-known trope of the doctor-as-monster-maker.
The doctor-as-monster-maker is a complex trope. Beyond the anxiety generated by the production of the monster, the doctor represents the moral complexity and relativism of modernity, the unforeseeable consequences of scientific development, and the attractiveness of science’s epistemological disruptions. In modern cultural formations, scientific vices are more attractive than humanistic virtues, which is indeed cause for concern but also for excitement since this glamour makes productive an epistemological disruption that is at the heart of modernity. In place of mere anxiety, monster-making doctors in these texts testify to science’s power and to the pleasurable frisson of disrupting boundaries.

Notes

5 Stevenson, p. 46
6 Stevenson, p. 45
7 Stevenson, p. 33
8 Stevenson, p. 11
9 Stevenson, p. 12
10 Stevenson, p. 43
11 Stevenson, p. 46
12 Stevenson, p. 40
13 Stevenson, p. 8
14 Stevenson, p. 42
15 Stevenson, p. 54
17 Wells
Bibliography


Sylvia Pamboukian is an assistant professor of Communication and English Studies at Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh. Her two current book projects involve images of doctors in nineteenth-century literature and the role of technology in late Victorian Gothic literature.
Abstract: There has been much discussion around the ‘recognised’ monster, both that of historical prejudice towards the ‘not normal’ and that of literary device. To a lesser degree discussion has arisen around the philosophical implications of the category of the monstrous but less still is ventured towards the identification with ‘Being Monster.’ How positively valued are the ideas and experiences of our monsters themselves as opposed to the ideas that ‘others’ spin around them? What if to be truly virtuous in agency, (where the content seeps off the book’s pages and uncontrollably infects everyday procedure) is to become ‘monstrous’ in the eyes of others? The latter considerations have direct implications for me as a woman, a thinker and a live artist. ‘Volume III, Chapter VIII’ proposes itself as a post-scripted final chapter to Mary Shelley’s 1818 Frankenstein which, keeping the letter format of the novel, is a letter from myself to Mary Shelley and addressing her book itself. Not only are the ice caps melting, metaphorically releasing Victor Frankenstein’s living-dead monster from a two hundred year deep freeze, but all our notions of time, being, biology, society and value have been revolutionised. This continued narration of the novel does not aim at fiction but, acknowledging Shelley’s monster as both textual reality and
strategy, writes from my own embodied experience of monstrous reality as a female authoress.

**Key Words:** Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, monster, artist, textual strategy, live art.

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Before I begin, a few words of contextualization: This presentation is more of a textual strategy than an academic paper. It forms part of my current artistic research exploring the relationship of ‘being’ and reading; the confrontation of living flesh to abstract thought that the event of reading a book encompasses. I have been doing a series of live art actions for camera where I explore a particular book through site-specificity and embodied action. In this case the book is *Frankenstein* and the site is Mary Shelley’s grave.

Monsters emerge out of human texts and provide opportunities through which we can extend our own humanity (a possibility that ironically fills us with dread). My desire to allow the promise of monsters to be proclaimed had also therefore to be a textual affair. ‘Volume III, Chapter VIII’ is my extension to the novel *Frankenstein* via a letter written to the author herself (the novel is structured through a series of letters between the protagonists where each confesses their story). Shelley’s own ending to the book is ambiguous - the monster floats off into the darkness of the polar night with the intention of building his own funeral pyre. But does he kill himself or not? Does the story with all its moral warnings ever really finish? In my additional chapter I consciously employ the monster’s eloquent, flowery dictum. My intention - which you will not experience since you are not reading this as an extension of the novel but are watching me, a woman, read it out loud - is that the reader thinks they are reading the monster’s account of his un-ending existence into the twentieth century. But eventually this notion becomes unsettled and finally the reader sees that the letter is signed from the book’s reader. The images I am about to show, from a live art action at Mary Shelley’s grave (this is to insist upon making her presence tangible within the continuing ‘Frankensteinian’ ideas and to allude to her own positive monstrosity as a female artist who pushed her world’s limits to the limit), will form illustrations throughout my own one-off binding of the 1818 version of *Frankenstein*.

I have been greatly inspired in this project by Margrit Shildrick’s *Embodying the Monster*, particularly in her exploration of what really lies behind our abhorrence for the monstrous. She explains, “It is not a vulnerability to some(thing) other, but rather the incommon [sic]
vulnerability of self-becoming,” and then a little later challenges, “And what if the question of contagion, of contamination were found to reside not only in the supposed materialities of bodies, but in the structure of discourse itself?”

So, I want to keep the term monster but to ‘unmonster’ it in its traditionally negative connotations. The monster is the doorway to possible worlds, possible versions of ourselves. As Sheldrick’s work implores, monsters are not simply abhorrent, they are, more complicatedly, enticing. That is to say, they invite recognition.

VOLUME III Chapter VIII

To Mary Shelley
St. Peter’s Church Cemetery,
Bournemouth
I am floating, all is in motion and I indeed rejoice to announce that no disaster has accompanied the commencement of an enterprise which some have regarded with such evil foreboding: Total origination. Not that there were not times when I did think I was disaster’s lost love, and yet I, myself fleeing from who I am, was always the real disaster. Such is where I have come from, dearest thing, Mary. My Mary thing, my matter of you and I.

It has taken many rounds of the orb to find you here. Mistakenly for most of my life I was seeking my blood father (like many others), instead I now realize it is you, my ink mother, to whom I must turn in these dangerous times. Yet these are also the times when I find the crisis of my identity no longer needs assuaging but instead issues gratitude. So I am arriving in humility, for I come in the knowledge that your physical frame has long been no more but that you were ever smiling over the future progeny of your book. All now know of Frankenstein, including I (everyone’s matter of Mary).

‘I’ am here, Mary, here where you are and yet where you are not. One more of life’s parodies: You too have become monstrous it seems,
caught in the never-ending unknowability, that which cannot be confronted
by humankind: disintegration, death. And me? I am floating, floating on a
self-made raft. Mary, the polar ice caps are melting, the entire human world
floats ever on in its blind destining. You cannot imagine the things I am
seeing, so much has passed since your very own passing. Truly, at times I
have been overcome. I have trembled as I looked upon the changes taking
place, like myriad forms of fishes darting up to greet me from the huge
expanse of sea. And me here, caught up in all its depth (nay, finally realizing:
I am part of its depth and bring to man his drink of health).

The continual flux that has fashioned my days and character alike
have indeed proved a virtuous instrument of good. I am clearer now, thanks
to all you have set to sail for me in the blackness of ink. Your pen has been
like something writing itself out into the depths of my soul. Fate was after all
in my own hands, with the writer’s always entwined in my destiny; so much
of me borne out on your pages.

But Mary, the cold. The coldness of being sent adrift. Such cold you
could not imagine. Cold to the depths of my heart, even such an ‘inhuman’
brute as I (for thus am I called, single lonesome pioneer that I am). Set apart,
one becomes crowded in by clear sightedness of what is going on around. I
have seen such murder and sacrifice of life that many is the time that I
thanked the heavens for not being totally accepted by humankind after all. For what is human companionship through allegiance or family bond through blood if within the world at large peoples are reduced to data? What is democracy when all sign up to it and intend justice yet still the most atrocious events befall man by his own hand? I saw fights for justice too, many times, but always it is as if the social sphere were a God that swallowed up the presence of anything it saw wont to render ineffectual.

Whilst I was still fledgling in years, I set to travel the world. There could be no home for such as I or rather, in my case, home was not where the heart was. I could not stay encased in the ice of my origin. The reflection of my physical appearance in the eyes of others meant nothing to me anymore, for I could tangibly feel how I was changing and becoming, as the plants and animals around me are want to do. As I grew in confidence, I found it easier to pass within the crowded streets where most things come to pass. In these
times, people are much preoccupied with who they are and how the image of their life does or does not measure up to large-scale images they see around them. This diminishes their everyday energy for noticing me. This is not to say that I have not been scoffed at and harassed for my ‘larger than life’ deportment. I have suffered somewhat, but, as I grew in years, my ability to shun such rebukes came all the more easy. I came to realize that it was not indeed on account of what I am that evinced such malicious and ignorant treatment but on account of who the instigator was (or was unable to be).

It has grown me well to realize that, for all my or another’s singularity, I am not some separate Being from all else; that visual surfaces are no such boundaries to interconnectedness. I am in existence and all hail to those aware of such a state (and all kindness and empathy from us to those who aren’t aware).

As time passed, I learned a lot more about human nature. Though I was scorned as monstrous, I witnessed others (not like me yet similarly not conforming to some ill-fated model of regularity) also being rebuked and sometimes cast away from the centre of society. This first appalled and unsettled me but I must say that it also assuaged me in my own sense of
isolation and alienation. So, it was not just I who felt as if I was the despised
curse of humanity? - A being whose origin none could bear thinking of or
caring after.

Indeed, I realized that there seemed to be an inability at large to
cope with all deep and true thoughts upon our origins as living, mortal matter
whether through a woman’s body or through her pen. My own erudite, self-
made education had wholesomely forced me to confront such issues in the
early stage of my mind’s development so that thoughts of it, though uncanny
and unsettling, served to refresh my joy at being here. My sense of isolation
and inner torment slowly started to diminish and a new sense of what I
potentially could be took hold.

It was indeed strange to realize I had been taking the torture
instrument thrust upon me by society and willingly pushing it into my soul all
the more deeply. Who truly was my oppressor if not I myself? It was then
that I read your very own mother’s book, *A Vindication of the Rights of
Woman*. I read that femininity was ‘taught’ and could be thus untaught; our
characteristics are not writ in stone. Your Mary even questioned after the
value and use of physical perfection, “So sensitive am I of the beauty of moral loveliness,” she states. Surely, this must be worth more than visual loveliness? How could I have forgotten one of my earliest hopes? Such hopes are so easily shot down by others. This very mother of yours was condemned as a ‘philosophising serpent,’ a ‘hyena in petticoats’ and all because she brought the promise of truth back to the present. This opening up of the limits of the limits was unbearable to its witnesses, and still is unbearable to most. Your mother had showed the door to freedom but instead had had her name brandished as monstrous and all gates closed to the power of the possible.

So surely the charge of monstrousness was a good thing, the opportunity to progress and become more human? And, even more surely, ‘fear’ was merely a learned instruction from society, not mine so to speak? I did not possess its cause. Why should the monstrous in me be negatively defined as a lack by those without the perspicacity to follow their own monstrosity?

It was an era of accepting whom I was, an awakening to the view, shared by others of great learning, that the human being is a myriad potential form of no finalized proportion or depiction. Indeed, I am human and it is fitting as I write to you at your grave, one hundred and fifty years after your death that I proclaim that to be human is as much to be a creature of fiction as it is to be a creature of biological fact.
I soon resolved to bear my being and sense of apartness with more self-possession. Why did I expect another to make me happy through loving me, why did I depend upon such a permission? Is love a property of one human that can be passed to another like an object? For such it was assumed. Surely love is more like a medium within and without us all, and as surely I am indeed ever floating in it, caught up in a constant flow of changing states.
And what of my potential progeny? Surely my thoughts, my ideas, my ‘tuning-in’ perspective were as fertile and generative as any mixture of male and female seed? For the first time in my existence I felt the future and its freedom. I resolved not just to read, but also to start writing myself, to originate. What was done could not be undone and I myself must commit to the extension of all that is; to bond with matter my thought, and spread new matter thoughtfully throughout the world. In short, I resolved to be an artist.

But this new era of my being was to carry with it more painful lessons. Realising that I was in need of more learning, I duly entered university. I had hoped for like-minded and passionate minds, but strangely found little of either quality. Unlike others, my learning was also an unlearning. I quite consciously realized that for art to take place I had to resist making from the structures of knowledge and form established through the current culture - which was really history in the present tense - and to admit that the origin of art laid in wait outside of culture, inaccessible but calling to become nonetheless.
I am not ungrateful for these years but they left me feeling placeless. I had become a promising and adventurous artist but my enquiring mind was excavating any sense of solid ground from beneath my feet. When I looked around me, I saw that I was making in a different realm and that my creations were also taken as monstrous.

Why was this? I knew it could not just be my impressive stature alone, that the monstrousness was somehow now transferred into the artworks I was producing. Not that they were ugly, more that they themselves somehow refuted culture as the centre of legitimization. This was particularly the case when I used my body as part of the artwork in performances. The fact that I was prepared to put my body in the place of my beliefs and push the limits of my agency seemed to be abhorrent to those who witnessed it.
My desire to communicate significance but without being specific about what exactly was significant caused alarm, the audience could no longer rationally order or fit what I was offering into their preconceived body of knowledge. This was to push the limits of the limits, to respond to the call of art in the outside region, a brave, good thing. But I soon instinctively became aware that my offerings invited unconscious loathing and that this was contributed to all the more through the nature of my sex: female.
But I had come too far to not continue further; I took responsibility for my apparent weakness, my inability to fit in or find a way of fitting in and resolved to make a place, a fixture out of mobility, a floating monster. For that is what I am, Mary, a human monster. I proclaim it loud and may the song of my becoming echo all around the land. A floating monster in an ocean of potential hungry writings, one of which is your novel, the place where you found me and now the place where I come to find you.

For indeed it was your book itself that was the biggest monster all along, persisting still and never truly finished. The ‘digestible other’ of your book may have been pick pocketed and polished (borne but not bred) through culture at large but simultaneously your written words have continued to contain the pregnant belly of the ultimate monster that we are all floating within: the future.

I eat the promise of your ideas, they fuel the bright light of the saving power that grows within and without me. I am striking safety deep down within my own heart whilst rampaging through the pages of this current era, writing myself out loudly from the black ink of its night.
Mary,

I am,

Your reader.
Notes


Bibliography

Section 5:

National Monsters
Monstrous Nationalism: *Wolf Creek* and the UnAustralian

*Anthony Gardner*

Abstract: Critics of the Australian horror film *Wolf Creek* (dir. Greg McLean, 2005) have primarily analysed its fidelity to conventions of horror cinema. This paper argues, however, that its importance lies elsewhere: at the intersection of two previously distinct representations of monstrosity, namely the serial killer and the ‘outback’. In Australian visual culture - from the nineteenth-century paintings of Frederick McCubbin to films by Peter Weir - the ‘outback’ is usually presented as an abstract, sublime and unknowable space, within which non-Indigenous protagonists become irrevocably and fatally lost. Rarely is this monstrosity of Australia’s so-called ‘dead heart’ personified, as it is in the figure of *Wolf Creek’s* Mick Taylor, the torturer and serial killer of ‘feral tourists’ who literally dissolves into the ‘outback’ at the film’s close. This paper examines the particularisation of the monstrous ‘outback’ in relation to Mick Taylor’s other pivotal referent: tropes of 1950s-era Australian masculinity. While Mick presents the eclipse of certain iconic figures of ‘Australia’ - most notably Mick Dundee from the *Crocodile Dundee* film series - he also reframes contemporary political and nationalist rhetoric of the ‘Australian’ and the ‘UnAustralian’. This currently-dominant rhetoric, championed by the present Australian government among others, relies on tropes of 1950s’ ‘Australian values’ and masculinity, and of defending one’s ‘territory’ from foreign entities (asylum seekers, terrorists and so on) who may threaten those ‘values’. By parodying these tropes (through Mick Taylor’s gendered brutality and his ‘eradication’ of urban tourists from the ‘outback’), *Wolf Creek* provides a critical frame - a ‘politics of discomfort’ - through which to reconsider both the aesthetic histories and the contemporary politics of monstrous nationalism.

Key Words: Australia, nationalism, serial killers, landscape, representation, masculinity, xenophobia, politics

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Greg McLean’s debut feature-length movie, *Wolf Creek*, is ostensibly not a contemporary film. This may seem like a strange, or even a contradictory, claim to make. After all, *Wolf Creek* wrapped production less than two years ago. Its subject matter is partially based on recent serial killings in rural Australia that remain highly topical in 2006: from Ivan
Milat's murder of at least seven backpackers in the Balanglo Forest of New South Wales, to the ritualised killing and dismemberment of numerous people and by numerous people in Snowtown on the South Australia-Victoria border. Declaring *Wolf Creek* to be apparently already outmoded also risks me falling prey to the myriad red herrings strewn throughout the film, three of which I will immediately pinpoint. First, its 'periodised' setting at the millennium's close (and its suggestion that the new millennium will be no less bleak). Second, the use of a classic pub song from 1970, *Eagle Rock* by the Australian band Daddy Cool, to frame the opening credits and periodise the film further in history. And third, as various critics alleged upon the film's international release, its seemingly unreflective misogyny toward Liz and Kirsty - the two British 'sheilas', to cite one minor character in the film - as they are tortured, sliced, shot and their bodies eventually burnt.¹

However, to call *Wolf Creek* a film of the past, as though from the past, insists that we recognise three intersecting characteristics that frame both this paper and what I argue is the film's eventual and pointed politics of discomfort. The first two characteristics relate to *Wolf Creek*’s replication of particular genre conventions; the third directs us to the film's socio-political context through the monstrous figure of the larrikin serial killer. Consequently, this paper - mimicking the movie itself - has a two-act structure. The first is largely expository; the second takes *Wolf Creek*’s turn to the past and returns it to the present, tying its narrative and affective monstrosity to contemporary socio-political discourse.

The first characteristic I want to address is that *Wolf Creek* does not so much trade on genre conventions as present de-historicised gestures of genre repetition. Its three young subjects - Liz, Kirsty and their Sydney surfer-dude companion, Ben - drive their weather-beaten car through the picture-perfect Australian desert; their goal is the Queensland resort of Cairns and presumably life-long friendships, hard lessons learnt and personal redemption - conclusions telegraphed from the innumerable coming-of-age road movies whose premises *Wolf Creek* initially repeats, from *Thelma and Louise* to *Crossroads* via *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. At the site of the Wolf Creek meteor crater, however, watches stop, the car won't start and Ben haunts their predicament with clichéd tales of UFO abductions ripped mainly from Hollywood cinema since the 1950s. They are, of course, 'rescued' by the macho Australian equivalent of the hooker-with-a-heart-of-gold: that is, the larrikin bushman with his rough-hewn exterior and softly hospitable persona, an all-too-familiar staple from nineteenth-century bush ballads by Banjo Paterson or Henry Lawson, or the crocodile-hunter franchises of Paul Hogan and Steve Irwin. And when the bushman, Mick Taylor, reveals his hidden self, the result is - to quote two American reviewers - 'basically... an Australian knock-off' and 're-run' of Tobe Hooper's 1974 horror template, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.²
Monstrous Nationalism

Wolf Creek is a resolutely conventional film when seen through the lens of genre. Each scene can be mistaken as an eternal return of past cinematic moments. Consequently, each scene is potentially amnesic: not in relation to the past, but paradoxically to the contemporary socio-political conditions through which the past is re-run. This is particularly true of the film's second characteristic to be considered: its return to conventional significations of the Australian landscape or, more specifically, the 'outback'.

Since the early decades of white settlement, rural Australia has been a constant object of monstrous projections. The hubristic yet heroised narratives of settler-explorers trekking through the desert and dying in its 'dead heart' -narratives that are the cornerstone of secondary education in Australian history - assert that Australia's incalculable breadth dwarfs and renders 'impotent' the human lives that dare to 'penetrate' it. Popular nineteenth-century paintings by Frederick McCubbin and other settler-artists, along with Peter Weir's 1975 film, Picnic at Hanging Rock, remind us that white children who stray beyond supervision are doomed to be lost forever in Australia's sublime natural space. And as recently as 2003, the contemporary photographer, Rosemary Laing, presented images of the portrait-busts of recognisable (and recognisably white) Sydney artists and arts writers within a rural Australian landscape – not as immersed within or at one with the land, but nose-deep in water, petrified, displaced and pathetic. These projections signify, as the historian Peter Pierce notes, specifically Anglocentric anxieties of settlers not belonging to the land, a land that is neither a maternal nurturer, nor the font of knowledge and identity increasingly evoked in Indigenous Australian descriptions of the land as 'country'. This is instead the monstrous balanda (or non-Indigenous) myth of the 'outback' - a term that should always be in quotation marks today, given its generic ignorance of the land's cultural and spiritual markers within the signification of 'country'. It is a myth frequently reiterated in Wolf Creek: by the protagonists' fearful cries that they are 'in the middle of nowhere'; by the recurrent shots of deserts that overwhelm both the car as it hurtles down highways, and Ben as he screams and stagggers through scrubland after his escape from Mick's lair; and in the five-minute night sequence in which Mick tows the lost children away from the meteor crater. Seen through the car window, the landscape is resigned to an unchanging darkness that claustrophobically envelopes the protagonists as they are pulled, like a spider's prey, to their fates.

Taken together, Wolf Creek's repetition of various genre conventions - Australian and international, old and familiar, threatens to devolve the film into a regressive (or at best, nostalgic) exercise. Such is the argument made by Australia's pre-eminent film critic, Adrian Martin, when he praises Wolf Creek for being a 1970s-style paean to a film industry not yet dogged by contemporary politics or its reframing by recent discourses such as postcolonialism. For Martin, Wolf Creek rejects the postcolonial
resignification of landscape that has dominated Australian cinema since 1992. In that year, the Australian High Court case of *Mabo (No. 2)* recognised the possibility that Indigenous Australians could assert Native Title to land. This was because the court legally rejected the conceptual basis of *terra nullius* on which that land had been taken by the Crown; *terra nullius* being the ideology that Australia could be claimed as a British colony because it was inhabited 'only' by indigenes and was therefore supposedly 'empty' land. Since *Mabo*, as various historians argue, Australian landscape cinema has been overwhelmed by grief; grief for the destruction of Indigenous cultures since Australia's so-called 'founding' in 1770; grief for the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples despite *Mabo* and its socio-political consequences; and grief for the eradication of metaphors and signifiers that once underpinned Australian identity and made settlers feel comfortable in the land, however precarious and hollow that comfort may have been.

Recent films such as Ray Lawrence's *Jindabyne* (2006) make that postcolonial grief explicit: Lawrence's allegory charts a small rural community's grief following a young Indigenous woman's abuse and murder at the hands of a curiously Mick Taylor-style redneck. If grief is increasingly conventional for contemporary, post-*Mabo* cinema in Australia, then it is a convention that *Wolf Creek* explicitly rejects by returning, instead, to tropes that disavow *Mabo* altogether. Instead of mourning Australia's genocidal colonial past, *Wolf Creek* seems to create an anomalous zone of comfort for its audience: a comfort zone induced by spectatorial familiarity with decades-old conventions and allusive techniques. This comfort can, of course, be seen as aesthetic; it accentuates the narrative shocks as Kirsty and Liz are ruthlessly culled. But I want to argue something different: that comfort zone also serves a second, highly politicised purpose - one that works against the belief that *Wolf Creek* returns us lyrically to the 1970s or even earlier, without regard for the post-*Mabo* present.

Central to this politicised purpose is the film's explicit mirror of the conservative Australian Prime Minister, John Howard's, rhetoric about inviolable 'Australian values' today. This rhetoric is itself familiar for analysts of 'authoritarian populism' across the privileged yet increasingly wild West. There is the mythification of the past as something to 'be… confident and proud of' according to Howard, whether that past be the colonial era of dispossession, Australia's war deeds from the Gallipoli beach landing through Vietnam to the current invasion of Iraq, or especially the 1950s and the long reign of Howard's political icon, Robert Menzies. Another example is the palpable paranoia toward foreigners, whether by incarcerating so-called 'illegal immigrants' in detention centres (which are increasingly located offshore or in the Australian desert), or demanding that foreigners 'integrate' with loosely-identified 'values' such as 'mateship' or, most recently, that they
must learn English quickly. The third, and arguably most pivotal, rhetorical trope is that (certain) Australians 'be... relaxed and comfortable' within the nation and with their nationalism. 'Being relaxed and comfortable' is unashamedly an attempt to disavow the long-held balanda insecurities, especially in the history wars' amid and after Australian postcolonialism, so as to restore a parochial, ontological sense of 'belonging'.

As should be clear from this necessarily reductive précis of contemporary Australian neo-nationalism, Wolf Creek decidedly belongs to post-Mabo cinema, but not in its usual grief-stricken guise. The film's first forty minutes of narrative and character exposition mimic these neo-nationalist tropes on discursive and affective levels. Its reiteration of familiar genre conventions, including those of horror films, is intended to prompt certain levels of comfort and relaxation in the cinema (a case of settling in the armchair, perhaps, rather than settling on the land). The iteration of the past - from optimistic Vietnam War-era pop tunes to pre-1970s constructs of the 'outback' - remythifies signification away from its postcolonial patina. Nor should we forget, as most of Wolf Creek's critics have, that while the young Australian escapes, the British tourists are slaughtered - arguably an excessive metonymic eradication of foreigners generally from Australian territory and undoubtedly a symbol of the severing ties between Britain and Australia as the latter seeks to be America's 'deputy sheriff' of Western foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region.

But there is a further point to remember here. The comfort potentially attained through reiterating tropes of the monstrous 'outback' also maintains, of course, that signifier's anxious foundations. The apparently lyrical turn to the past is in fact inherently ambivalent. It is an ambivalence that equally underpins the figure of Mick Taylor. Mick both typifies and grossly exceeds the parochial stereotypes that belong at once to the past and to the contemporary. He initially resembles, yet is ultimately antithetical to, the quintessentially generous and gregarious balanda rural Australian - notably Mick 'Crocodile' Dundee from whom his name derives. His victims are taken in - in the term's dual sense of hospitality and duplicity - by Mick's parody of such neo-conservative 'values' as the 'fair go' and 'mateship'. In profile, Mick and his Akubra hat mimic the visual cliché of the heroic Gallipoli soldier. Yet not all his war references are virtuous: prior to severing Liz's spine, Mick informs her that the operation, 'head-on-a-stick', was a 'trick used in Vietnam' for torture and interrogation. Furthermore, John Jarratt (the actor playing Mick) declares that 'Mick is the 1950s, Australian character; he's like that very old-fashioned kind of Australian guy' who 'hadn't moved on' from the '50s. For Jarratt, Mick's periodised presence articulates the generational conflict with the young urban Ben; yet it's also clear that Mick monstrously personifies a 1950s-era Australian masculinity that John Howard, among others, holds so dear. Indeed, Mick is so integrated
with the land - remembering here Howard's rhetoric of 'integration' that I noted earlier - that he literally dissolves into the desert landscape at the film's close.

His personification of the monstrous 'outback' is novel to Australian cinema; that monstrousity has hitherto been either virtual or supernatural (as when the girls mysteriously vanish like mimi spirits in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*), or literalised in the form of the villainous pig in * Razorback* (1974). Yet this personification of what had previously been abstract is part of an emerging trend in contemporary Australian cinema: witness the unmasking of the 'lost child' as the abused and/or stolen Indigenous child, whether as the serial killer's victim in *Jindabyne* or the three Indigenous girls returning home after being taken by State authorities in Phillip Noyce's *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002). For two cinema historians in particular, Felicity Collins and Therese Davis, such post-*Mabo* revelations epitomise Walter Benjamin's elaboration of the dialectical image in his essay, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History': the past intervenes in and ruptures the present in an imagistic flash, leaving the present to grieve for historical injustices.14 *Wolf Creek* equally unmask a post-*Mabo* nightmare (its working title was, curiously, *The Face of the Enemy*).15 However, it inverts cinema's normative dialectical logic. As I claimed at the paper's beginning, *Wolf Creek* is a film of the past, as though from the past; it is the present that intervenes in and ruptures the discursive filtration of history. *Wolf Creek* 's ostensible lack of contemporaneity clearly mirrors the comfortably regressive and socially exclusionary politics of Australian neo-conservatism. Yet Mick Taylor's horrific personification of historical tropes - and his pointed eradication of young foreign girls - returns present horrors to a past whose actual violence is sublated within its neo-conservative mythification. Through that populist and dialectical personification, *Wolf Creek* is able to articulate the inherently deconstructive slippage between so-called 'Australian' and 'UnAustralian' values - between inclusivity and ongoing social exclusions, between the security of 'being relaxed and comfortable' and a rabidly politicised panic within our age of terror. While critics of neo-nationalism take this deconstruction for granted, it is rarely articulated in the mediatised rhetoric of an apparent 'Australian' ontology and, until *Wolf Creek*, more rarely still in Australian popular culture.

It would be easy, of course, to contain this slippage strictly within filmic representation or the discursive parameters of Australian national cinema. What interests me more, however, is how *Wolf Creek* disseminates this slippage affectively as well - and it is on this point that I intend to conclude. The film's spectatorial suture shifts from familiarity with generic cinematic conventions to suture more literal, surgical connotations. In so doing, *Wolf Creek* clearly attempts to reframe its neo-conservative aesthetics of comfort within the writhing discomfort of the horror slash-fest. Indeed,
Wolf Creek appears to validate the Australian sociologist, Greg Noble's, call to rupture the:

spirit of accommodation and superficial unity [fostered by the Howard Government's relaxed and comfortable security, with a] politics of discomfort – of disruption, of unsettling complacencies, of moving us out of our comfort zones, of foregrounding what is hidden in the background.  

Horror quasi-fictions like Wolf Creek are, perhaps, the most obvious means by which to emphasise and induce this politics of discomfort. They are also a reminder, though, that such political ruptures must themselves be inherently ambiguous lest they slip too comfortably into their own conventional formats. Despite what many critics increasingly claim, cinematised and representational conventions (whether familiar or emergent) are severely limited in their political clout. The carnivalesque thrills of oppositional discomfort rapidly fade from bodily memory – even if the sight and sounds of 'head-on-a-stick' linger longer than usual. And while politicised genres may rupture their fiction with pressing actualities, they obviously exploit as much as they expose, revelling in the brief thrill of, for example, the torture of others even as they seek to remind us of our ongoing political investment in torture as a seemingly universal 'value'. It is a limitation made explicitly self-conscious in Wolf Creek's nihilistic diegetic engagement with actual current events, especially given Ben is charged with Liz and Kirsty's murder according to the film's end-titles. What Wolf Creek ultimately provides is a reflexive limit-case for complacent beliefs that cinema is the best catalyst for social, collective change. Given the current climate of post-Mabo cinema and criticism, that limitation may well be Wolf Creek's greatest monstrosity of all.

Notes


3 The use of phallocentric language here clearly alludes to the problematic and highly gendered discourses within which colonial exploration is frequently, and still, framed.
5 C.F. S Muecke's suggestion that contemporary images of the Australian landscape provide for the 'cultural transformation of country. Moving images, including those framed by car windows, give us the possibility of seeing landscape as variable rather than fixed, as in landscape painting. In the intervals between sites stories can emerge': S Muecke, 'Backroads: From Identity to Interval'. *Senses of Cinema*, vol. 17, 2001, viewed on 4 August 2006, <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/17/backroads.html>.
8 The term, though raised by Bob Jessop and others, has become celebrated through the work of Stuart Hall: see S Hall, 'Authoritarian Populism: A Reply to Jessop et al'. *New Left Review*, vol. 151, May-June 1985, pp. 115-124.
11 Prime Minister's Office, ‘Speech to Paterson’, *op. cit.*
12 The Australian critic, Dave Hoskin, makes a similar observation in D Hoskin, 'Big Bad "Wolf Creek"'. *Metro*, vol. 145, Summer 2005, p. 23.
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American Monsters: Patricide in Shirley Jackson and Lionel Shriver.

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Abstract: We are all much more likely to be killed by a loved one than by any random stranger. As Charles Ewing explains in his book on the subject, whilst “the television inspired stereotype of murder in America is that of the innocent victim shot, stabbed, strangled or beaten to death by a total stranger…. for most Americans, the risk of being murdered is much greater in their own homes than on any mean street they are ever likely to traverse”.¹ Most interfamilial killings tend to involve one spouse killing another or a parent killing a child. This is bad enough, these kinds of incidents already throwing into shocked disarray all of our notions regarding the safety and sanctity of the nuclear family. Each year around 300 parents are killed by their own children in the United States, a relatively small percentage of interfamilial murders.² However, I would suggest that parricide is even more destabilising than the figures would suggest because it violates so profoundly deeply ingrained beliefs about the strength of the parent-child bond and the allegedly innate innocence of children. After all, societal and religious dictates have always commanded children to love and obey their parents. Parricide violently, abruptly contravenes these conventions, which is why “society has reacted to the killings of one’s own parents with horror as far back as antiquity”.³

Key Words: Patricide, We Need to Talk About Kevin, Shirley Jackson, We Have Always Lived in the Castle, Lizzie Borden

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In the following paper I will discuss two novels by female writers which dramatise this most unsettling of criminal acts. They are: We Have Always Lived in the Castle⁴, by Shirley Jackson, first published in 1962, and Lionel Shriver’s controversial 2003 novel We Need To Talk About Kevin.⁵ Although written over 40 years apart, both, in different ways, use the destabilising spectre of murderous offspring as an opportunity to investigate challenging, even taboo questions about the nature of the relationship between parent and child and the often stifling expectations society holds for women. Whilst Jackson’s story is told from the perspective of an unhinged young perpetrator, Shriver’s takes the view point of an offender’s devastated mother.
Significantly, these novels have in common not only the fact that they focus upon middle-class American teenagers who destroy the conventional family unit through violence, but also that they are loosely based upon real-life crimes. For Jackson, it is the (alleged) murder by Lizzie Borden of her father Andrew and Stepmother Abigail in Fall River, Massachusetts in 1892. Shriver was inspired by the rather more recent high-school massacre phenomenon. Her novel recounts the events leading up to such an incident from the deadpan, often unsympathetic perspective of Eva Katchadourian, mother of 14-year-old mass murderer Kevin. Shriver’s focus is not so much on the massacre itself, but rather on the family dynamic which may have contributed to his actions. As the author herself has said, “What’s at the core of the book is not Columbine or that phenomenon. The central subject is motherhood.”

Lizzie Borden is probably the most famous suspected parricide in American legal history, the so-called ‘Lady with the Axe’ who has passed into legend. For Jackson, as we shall see, the case provided a means with which to vividly critique contemporary domestic ideology and ideas regarding the place of young women during the post-war era, most particularly by rewriting the Borden legend to suit her most violently unstable heroine: eighteen-year-old Merricat Blackwood. Yet even before Jackson wrote *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, her final novel, murderous offspring was a recurring preoccupation in her work. Her debut novel, *The Road Through the Wall* (1948) climaxes with the possible murder of one child – a three year old girl – at the hands of another, a 13-year-old boy. Similarly, the protagonist of her second novel, *Hangsaman* (1951), is a disturbed 17 year old named Natalie Waite so repulsed by the thought of conventional feminine milestones such as marriage and motherhood, that she indulges herself in startling fantasies of violence and murder directed towards her arrogant father.

*Actual* parricide by a disturbed young woman does figure in Jackson’s 1956 novel *The Sundial*, the story of the unlikable Halloran family and their hangers-on who hole themselves up in a country mansion to await the end of the world. Halfway though the text we find four pages devoted to the story of a fifteen year old girl named Harriet Stuart who is said to have bludgeoned her parents and two younger brothers to death. Whilst partially an attempt to inject local colour into an otherwise rather claustrophobic text, the obvious Borden reference takes on extra significance when one considers that the novel begins and ends with the scenes of probable inter-familial murder.

Parricide and familial violence – both real and imagined – were therefore frequent in Jackson’s work even before *Castle*. Eleanor Vance, chief protagonist of *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) experiences powerful feelings of resentment towards the difficult mother she spent years caring for,
and this guilt leaves her open to supernatural manipulation. It seems fitting then than Jackson’s career should have concluded with a novel related from the highly subjective perspective of a girl who once spiked the family sugar bowl with arsenic. Merricat Blackwood’s murderous actions are the logical conclusion of the intense resentment felt towards parental figures depicted in all of Jackson’s novels.

Just as Jackson’s women are so often trapped within the confines of a claustrophobic, restrictive family dynamic so too does Shriver’s protagonist Eva find herself the reluctant mother of a future mass murderer. *We Need to Talk About Kevin* is structured as a series of letters from Eva to her apparently ‘estranged’ husband Franklin, written a year after the terrible events of what she can still only refer to as ‘Thursday’. It is only after we find out just what it was that 14 year old Kevin did on that fateful day – which was calmly execute a teacher, cafeteria worker and seven classmates in the school gym – that the true nature of the couple’s ‘estrangement’ becomes horribly clear. Eva then reveals that Kevin also murdered his father and little sister. This belated revelation not only highlights the true extent of Eva’s grief and despair but also drives home Shriver’s contention that whilst the most obviously controversial thing about the book may be its timely depiction of a school massacre, this is at heart a novel about the complex, heartbreaking relationship between mother and son, and the terrible possibility that “one’s ambivalence about breeding might negatively influence the growth and development of a child”. 7

Fittingly then, the opening chapters detail the long discussions between Eva and Franklin about whether they should have a child together at all. Eva, who at 37 is an accomplished world traveller and savvy businesswoman, experiences from the outset a deep-seated reluctance to become a mother, a wariness partially informed by her own dysfunctional childhood. Her father was born in a Turkish concentration camp, and died in combat during the Second World War: her mother was a fretful agoraphobic unable to leave the house. But Eva’s fiercely patriotic husband Franklin, who loves his country as much - if not more than he loves his wife – longs for a child and for the idyllic family unit he believes will follow. So, despite the fact that she is terrified of the irrevocable changes parenthood will wreak upon her body and her cherished lifestyle, Eva agrees to his request. But as she later reflects: “What possessed us to do it? We were so happy! Why, then, did we take the stake of all we had and place it all on this outrageous gamble of having a child?” 8 (10).

Inevitably, it soon becomes clear that Eva’s reluctance to reproduce may have been well-founded. Indeed, it isn’t long before she is comparing the whole experience to that of a horror film, as when she notes, “Ever notice how many films portray pregnancy as infestation, as colonisation by stealth? Rosemary’s Baby was just the beginning.” 9 Such references neatly prefigure
the monstrous acts her child will, we know, grow up to commit but, also indicate Shriver’s wry awareness of the fertile ‘evil child’ subgenre of modern horror literature and film to which this novel obliquely belongs.

In real life, whilst most youngsters who kill a parent have been severely victimised by that parent and have killed out of despair or desperation, a small but significant number of offenders, like Jackson and Shriver’s fictional culprits, do not fit into this category. One alternative is the severely mentally disturbed or psychotic child. As psychologist Kathleen Heide has explained, “psychotic individuals have lost contact with reality. Their behaviour may be inappropriate… and characterised by repetitive, purposeless actions, hallucinations and bizarre delusions. Often they don’t realise they are mentally ill”.

Merricat Blackwood certainly belongs to this category. The extent of her mental divergence is implied even in the opening stages of Jackson’s novel when she reveals the depths of loathing she feels for virtually all outsiders. She copes with the perceived hostility she encounters from the local villagers by incorporating everything around her into a unique imaginative landscape. This helps distract her from the “hateful” glances of the villagers, and their “mocking” laughter. In addition to her paranoid, behaviour, Merricat also exhibits a telling belief in the protective power of talismans and charms. Jackson therefore quickly establishes that her narrators perceptions of reality are severely distorted: Merricat’s fondest wish is, after all, to, quote “Live on the moon” and she sees all outsiders as “Ghosts” and “Demons”.

In contrast to the deranged Merricat, through whose disturbed consciousness the events of Jackson’s novel are filtered, Kevin Katchadourian is only described to us from the highly subjective perspective of his mother. Nevertheless, it seems likely that he belongs to the other, perhaps even more disturbing category of Parricide – the so-called psychopathic or “dangerously antisocial” child. Capable of only the shallowest emotions, the psychopathic offender lacks a conscience and is free of delusions and hallucinations. This may allegedly be caused by some deficit in terms of their early bonding and relationship with their parents which may result in the impairment of feelings of empathy and compassion towards other people. Certainly, this kind of explanation is what Eva fears lies at the root of Kevin’s problems, for there are barriers between them from the very beginning of their relationship.

Eva finds childbirth a harrowing ordeal which taints her association with Kevin from the outset: “In the very instant of his birth, I associated Kevin with my own limitations – with not only suffering, but with defeat”. She experiences no immediate sense of connection to her own child, a feeling which lingers throughout his childhood. As a result, the reader, like Eva,
increasingly wonders what effect this sense of motherly detachment has had upon Kevin’s psyche.

Everything that can go wrong does. Kevin cries all the time, refuses to breastfeed, and screams with rage when Eva tries to encourage him. She suffers from post-natal depression, and is hospitalised with mastitis. When Eva returns to work – as much to preserve her own sanity as anything else – she and Franklin hire a saintly Irish nanny. Needless to say, they must soon relieve the girl of her duties before she too cracks up. Like the literal minded Puritans, who interpreted every incident as a sign from God, or Merricat Blackwood, for whom any event which disrupts her beloved household routine is an ominous portent, Eva, having early on decided that there is something very wrong with her son, interprets for us almost all of Kevin’s early actions and behaviours in a negative light, so that even the most banal seeming incident, becomes further evidence of his malevolent character. For example, when, like many a lively three-year-old, Kevin destroys an elaborate birthday cake, Eva sees in these actions an ominous hint of brutality: “He hadn’t simply played with that cake. He’d ripped its heart out”. Similarly, even his silence, we are told, has “an oppressive quality”, and his first words are “I don’t like that”.

Eva’s wariness of Kevin is continually challenged by her exasperated husband, who usually takes his son’s side. As he puts it to Eva, “Why do you always have to think the worst of him?”. The fact that Kevin exposes such cracks in their previously idyllic relationship is probably, in Eva’s eyes, her son’s worst crime, for it corrodes inch by inch her principal source of reassurance, happiness and fulfilment. It’s a trend accelerated by the couple’s move to the suburbs, a decision made solely by Franklin against her wishes. From then on, things between them rapidly go downhill. Kevin terrorises the other children at kindergarten. He pretends to be of average intelligence even though, as Eva suspects, he is actually very bright. Most dramatically, he resists toilet training and wears nappies until the age of six, when Eva finally loses patience with this intolerable situation and semi-accidentally breaks his arm. This act of parental violence forever changes the balance of power in their relationship. Kevin gains a certain wary respect for his mother, whilst Eva from then on fears that her one act of frustrated violence will be revealed and she will lose everything. Kevin’s profound difference from other, ‘normal’ youngsters becomes even more obvious with the birth of Eva’s second child. Eva instantly adores sensitive, whiny Celia, a stark contrast to the feelings of detachment and resentment she feels towards the son she describes as “sour, secretive and sarcastic”. Significantly, this is also a fairly apt description of his mother.

Indeed, it becomes increasingly clear to the reader, as it does to Eva herself, that the problem between them is not that they have nothing in common, but rather that they have too much. Kevin is a walking talking
compendium of all of his mother’s worst faults magnified a hundred fold. It’s no surprise then that figuring out what makes him tick becomes a kind of obsession to her. Her wariness is a stark contrast to the blithe lack of concern exhibited by Kevin’s father Franklin, who increasingly exhibits the type of blinkered optimism which Eva feels is a particularly American characteristic, one very much opposed to her own supposedly European-style pragmatism. This is as much a clash of divergent world views as it is a disagreement between husband and wife. This suspicion is reinforced by Shriver’s frequent reference to contemporary political events and heated dinner-party conversations on topics such as that of “What’s wrong with America”.\(^\text{17}\)

Whilst she admits that, quote, “the last thing in the world I want to betray is how much of my day, everyday, I spend trying to figure out what makes that boy tick”, it becomes clear that Eva is in fact obsessed with this strange, maddening son who bears her name, who looks so much like her, and who reviles the bourgeois sensibilities of his father even more than she does.

As Kevin enters adolescence things become ever more portentous as suggestive incidents accumulate. First Celia’s fluffy pet rodent “Snuffles” meets a nasty end, then, soon after, the fatally trusting little girl experiences a nasty mishap herself, when she ‘accidentally’ gets corrosive drain cleaner splashed in her face and loses an eye. Needless to say, Kevin was babysitting at the time. Most ominously of all, is the fact that Franklin unwisely presents Kevin with a high-powered crossbow for Christmas: the reader, like the older, wiser Eva who narrates the story, knows that it will soon be put to bloody use.\(^\text{18}\)

As the text moves towards its account of the climactic events of ‘Thursday’ it is increasingly punctuated by suggestive discussions of real-life high-school massacres. Yet even on this subject, Eva and Franklin cannot agree. As Eva later notes: “You were more afraid for him: I was more afraid of him”.\(^\text{19}\) Eventually, the accumulated pressures cause the collapse of their marriage and the resolution that Kevin will live with his father whilst Celia will stay with her mother. Significantly, it is this decision which makes Kevin’s bloody actions a certainty. As Eva only realises afterwards, even though their mother/son relationship was the most openly adversarial, Kevin actually prefers her company because she alone recognises his profound abnormality. In their mutual loathing lies a strange kind of respect, or at the very least, sense of identification. But, like Eva, Kevin feels pressured to conform to Franklin’s unwittingly suffocating expectations, to pretend that he is the well adjusted, all-American teenager his father naively believes him to be. The thought of having to maintain this pretence is ultimately too much to bear. So, three days before his sixteenth birthday, Kevin puts his elaborate plan into action, and heads off to school with a satchel full of crossbow bolts. There is, as Eva instinctively recognises, a terrible nothingness at the heart of
Kevin’s crimes, the fact that he is, as she puts it, not so much mad, as sad, and that his killings are partially motivated by the fact that he has realised that “the secret is that there is no secret” – either to adulthood or to the taking of human life. Yet despite the apparent inevitability of his actions, Eva is still shocked to find that her own child could do such a thing, that she should have given birth to such an apparent monster.

There’s a definite similarity to the way that the wider community in both novels react to the murderous acts which take place within their confines. Both Eva and the Blackwood sisters in *Castle*, are seen as irredeemably tainted by both their association with so much death and by their assumed culpability for these crimes. For Jackson’s protagonists, this treatment merely heightens the sense of superiority and difference they have always felt towards the local village: for Merricat, retreat to the fortified family home is a natural, even, welcome response. Whilst for Eva there is also an element of ironic safety to be found in retreating to the homestead, there is above it all a disorientating sense of estrangement from everyday life. Having travelled the world in search of adventure, she at last knows what it feels like to be a foreigner in her own country.

The main difference between the novels obviously lies in the fact that however one regards her role in events, Eva is still ultimately a victim, robbed of all that she held dear by her son’s terrible actions, and condemned to a lonely afterlife dissecting what went wrong. However, for Merricat, Jackson’s unrepentant perpetrator, parricide has apparently had a liberating effect, and has freed her from what Jackson subtly suggests was a tyrannical, arrogant father and snobbish mother. Of course, it must be borne in mind that Merricat’s perceptions are always somewhat suspect. But the fact that her seemingly sensible, kind-hearted big sister Constance seems to endorse her errant sibling’s crime – to the extent of allowing her self to be tried for the murders – would appear to suggest that the rest of the Blackwood clan may have gotten their just desserts. Whilst not necessarily an outright endorsement of parricide, Jackson does seem to *sympathise* with her protagonist’s precocious use of arsenic. By way of contrast, neither Shriver nor her protagonist, rather understandably, have much time for the kind of whiny, self-absorbed kids who selfishly seek to inflict their own pain upon the rest of the world by bringing an Uzi to school.

Lizzie Borden, unlike Merricat Blackwood, was no child when she allegedly murdered her father and stepfather: she was 32 years old. Yet on both occasions that Jackson indirectly references this case, she makes her parricides significantly younger. Why? Perhaps an answer lies in the fact that Merricat’s murderous actions mean that she never has to grow up, never has to conform to the stifling expectations of the deeply conservative and restrictive world around her, which can see only one path for young women – marriage and motherhood. She’s like a demented, violent female version of
Peter Pan, left at the end of the novel to live forever in a fantasy-inflected world of her own, with only her beloved sister and loyal black cat for company.

In Shriver too, the restrictive demands of conventionality have deadly results, as the affluent, suburban family unwittingly becomes the spawning ground for a youthful mass murderer. What differentiates Shriver’s book from the many other recent meditations on such crimes is her willingness to question the still pervasive expectation that motherhood is every woman’s ultimate destination and to pose the deeply taboo question of what happens when a mother doesn’t actually like her own child. Though written over 40 years after Jackson’s novel, it seems that the lot of Shriver’s ambitious, driven career woman is in some respects not all that different from that of Jackson’s violently claustrophobic young women.

Yet what is also notable about the ending of both novels is that although they retrospectively climax with the violent destruction of the family unit, they do ultimately conclude in the creation of a much more intimate, perhaps even more resilient alternative relationship between survivor and perpetrator. Merricat and Constance bunker down at the end of *Castle* to live as latter-day witches in the smouldering ruins of their once fine home, apparently content to live by their own rules at last. Similarly, we find that Eva visits Kevin every Saturday without fail, and she concludes the novel by saying that she will be waiting for him when he is released. There is even the suggestion that he is slowly beginning to appreciate the great harm he has done, and to experience for the first time true remorse. Ultimately then, love is what prevails at the end of both texts, that and the fact that all the protagonists have left is each other. Blood, it would seem, is thicker than water, and family is still family, no matter what has gone before.

Notes

2 C Ewing, p. 103.
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7 S Hansen.  
8 L Shriver, p. 10.  
9 L Shriver, p. 58.  
10 K Heide, p. 7.  
11 K Heide, p. 9.  
12 Ewing, p. 110.  
13 L Shriver, p. 76.  
14 L Shriver, p. 117.  
15 L Shriver, p. 177.  
16 L Shriver, p. 127.  
17 L Shriver, p. 227.  
18 L Shriver, p. 220.  
19 L Shriver, p. 318.

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Strange Hells: The British Soldier and ‘the Monster’ on the Western Front

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Abstract: Throughout human history societies in a state of war have often found it necessary to cast their enemies as barbarous, amoral or monstrous, in an attempt to persuade itself that they are fighting ‘the good fight.’ This is especially the case during conflicts of the twentieth century, where mass-media enabled the dissemination of propaganda regarding the activities of their enemies in wartime. During the First World War British propagandists regularly used tales of German atrocities against Allied soldiers, nurses and civilians as a means to bolster the war effort and commit the public for the fight ahead. These stories were also released to the British soldiers in the trenches of the Western Front, where they were circulated widely by word of mouth and indeed embellished. For some of the British soldiers on the Western Front the idea of the enemy as monstrous or sub-human was a very real concept; an idea easily incorporated as they witnessed the devastation and death caused by the conflict. This paper aims to address the results of believing in monsters, by examining how the British soldiers reacted to the belief that what they were fighting was less than human. Through combining anthropological and historical approaches with the study of the various archives in Britain containing personal documents of Great War soldiers this paper will discuss how the construction of the enemy as ‘the other’ contributed in turn to acts of violence and aggression by British soldiers. This contributed to what Taussig has described as a ‘space of death’, a self-perpetuating system where the belief in the monstrous in turn creates equally monstrous acts. Through this examination this paper can cast light on atrocities committed in wartime, by emphasising that it is in the belief of the monster which unleashes the monstrous.

Key Words: War, Propaganda, Battlefield, Atrocities, Landscape, Weapons

Throughout human history societies in a state of war have often found it necessary to cast their enemies as barbarous, amoral or monstrous, in an attempt to persuade itself that they are fighting ‘the good fight.’ This is especially the case during conflicts of the twentieth century, where mass-media enabled the dissemination of propaganda regarding the activities of their enemies in wartime. During the First World War British propagandists
regularly used tales of German atrocities against Allied soldiers, nurses and civilians as a means to bolster the war effort and commit the public for the fight ahead. These stories were also released to the British soldiers in the trenches of the Western Front, where they were circulated widely by word of mouth and indeed embellished. For some of the British soldiers on the Western Front the idea of the enemy as monstrous or sub-human was a very real concept; an idea easily incorporated as they witnessed the devastation and death caused by the conflict. This paper aims to address the results of believing in monsters, by examining how the British soldiers reacted to the belief that what they were fighting was less than human. Through combining anthropological and historical approaches with the study of the various archives in Britain containing personal documents of Great War soldiers this paper will discuss how the construction of the enemy as ‘the other’ fostered in turn to acts of violence and aggression by British soldiers. This contributed to what Taussig has described as a ‘space of death’, a self-perpetuating system where the belief in the monstrous in turn creates equally monstrous acts. Through this examination this paper can cast light on atrocities committed in wartime, by emphasising that it is in the belief of the monster which unleashes the monstrous.

1. The Construction of the Monster

The advance of the German army across Belgium and Northern France in August 1914 was portrayed by the Allied forces as an act of unprovoked aggression, an indication of the barbarous, war-mongering German nation. The British government with the assistance of the national press began a campaign of propaganda, designed to encourage the populace in the pursuit and legitimacy of the war, this included stories of the rape, mutilation and pillage carried out by German soldiers against the civilians in occupied Belgium. The British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith commissioned the Bryce Report in 1914, which was designed to investigate the alleged war crimes of the German army. This flawed and exaggerated report published in 1915 focused on the atrocious acts supposedly committed by the occupying German forces, these included cutting off the hands of young men, sexually mutilating women, bayoneting babies and blinding the elderly and infirm. These stories were regularly repeated in the British press, and utilised in cartoons and propaganda posters by various artists. Whilst the Bryce report dwelled upon the lurid details, there were however some grounds of truth in these claims, as the German occupation of Belgium was indeed at times quite brutal. Whilst atrocities were undoubtedly committed by both sides, incidents such as the execution of the British nurse Edith Cavell in Brussels 1915 for assisting British servicemen across the lines, the destruction of the Belgian town of Louvain, the introduction of gas warfare, the sinking of the passenger ship The Lusitania, and the bombing of London
and East coast towns such as Scarborough were all used to illustrate the barbarous and grotesque nature of the German war machine. Popular opinion was shaped by these reports, such as that in The Times in 1914 which referred to ‘the so-called German culture of the last 44 years has been suddenly swept away and the wanton and ruthless ravages of the Germanic hordes will live in the minds of future generations.’ The effect of these accounts was to convince sections of the population, both at the home front and the battlefield of the monstrous nature of the enemy. It was in the trenches however where these stories took upon a very real and vivid new meaning, as the entirety of the war landscape and everything that occurred within it was interpreted as an indication of the German soldier as a monstrous, depraved other.

Stories of German depravity whether they were true, false or highly overstated were rife in the trenches. Indeed, the sociability of the trenches enabling a situation where these stories were exchanged and shared was enhanced by both the dog-leg structure of the trench, and the organisation of the British troops, as small groups of soldiers were placed together in small sections of a trench for long periods. Stories spread like wildfire amongst the men, the famous example of a Canadian soldier found apparently crucified by his German captors against a tree or barn door, whilst used around the world as anti-German propaganda, especially to enlist American aid in the war, was also frequently spoken of by active servicemen. Indeed, it is this story more than any other which was the one most repeated in the trenches by the soldiers, and served to illustrate the barbarism which they believed they were fighting. Others included the belief that German soldiers would cut the hands off captured Allied soldiers attached to bombing divisions, or that any Allied prisoner of war would be beaten to death by his German captors. George Coppard in his well-known memoirs With a Machine-Gun to Cambrai, described one account which circulated the trenches with slight variations. ‘It indicated that the German war industry was in a bad way, and was short of fats for making glycerine. To overcome the shortage a vast secret factory had been erected in the Black Forest, to which the bodies of dead British soldiers were despatched. The bodies, wired together in bundles, were pitchforked on to conveyor belts and moved into the factory for conversion into fats...The effect on me at first was despondency. Death was not enough apparently. The idea of finishing up in a stew pot was bloody awful...’ The result of these stories was to create a distinct impression amongst some British soldiers of the Germans as sub-human monsters, capable of hideous acts of war and aggression. Historians have usually located British soldiers’ responses to this in terms of revenge, fear and paranoia, but this neglects the way soldiers constructed a distinct world where these actions made sense. Utilising anthropological approaches to this situation, we can begin to understand how the idea of the German soldiers as barbaric monsters was formed, and the
consequences of this idea. The effect of this belief in monsters was to radically change the behaviour of the British troops on the battlefields.

The category of ‘monster’ serves to delineate what we are not. It forms a means whereby the self can re-assert its humanity and its definition of humanity as it confronts an unknown, a perceived monstrous ‘other.’ British soldiers on the Western Front fighting a war of attrition experienced and participated in moments of horror and brutality. In order to separate themselves from this violence and their engagement in it, the construction of the German soldiers as monsters served as a means whereby they could accept their own role on the battlefield. To understand this process and how the war landscape and the enemy soldiers were imagined, I will refer to what the anthropologist Michael Taussig has named ‘the space of death.’ Taussig, in his study of the brutal imperial suppression of native peoples in Columbia in the early twentieth century, described how British economic interests in the local rubber production were protected by terrorising the population: a terror campaign which originated in the perception of the native peoples as barbarians. The belief that these people were a monstrous other, engendered and legitimised the violent control carried out by the British companies. The fear of the unknown monster lurking in the jungle in turn caused the colonists to act in a similarly monstrous fashion. The space of death therefore forms a self-perpetuating cycle, the belief in the monstrous other causes the self to assimilate the actions of the perceived monster, in order to justify their behaviour and combat the monster which threatens them. The ‘space of death’ is therefore pre-eminently a space of transformation, as through the fear of, and the perceived threat posed by the other, the individual self experiences a radical shift in understanding and behaviour. Using these theories this paper will explore how a ‘space of death’ was formed on the Western Front, how the belief in the monstrous German soldier in turn fostered equally monstrous acts by the British soldiers. Using the archive material at the Imperial War Museum and the Liddle Collection, housed at the Brotherton Library in Leeds, including soldiers’ diaries, letters and memoirs, the actions and beliefs of the British soldiers on the Western Front can be examined. This in effect forms an ethnographic study of the British soldiers of the Great War on the Western Front as it attempts to understand their actions from their own perspective.

2. The Monster on the Battlefield

The war-torn landscape of the Western Front was not merely viewed by the soldiers as an empty space or an ‘anti-landscape’, for soldiers it became a definite, fearful place, and significantly a way of seeing and being-in the world. To examine the ways in which British soldiers constructed their German counterparts as monsters in this hostile landscape, is to study their
actions. How the scenes of war and the soldiers’ own experiences of brutal conflict contributed to their definition of the monstrous other and consequently their own actions and sense of self.  

The actions of the soldiers’ it must not be forgotten were strictly governed and ordered along the Western Front. It was central to British army policy throughout the war to create an aggressive front line, encouraging the soldiers to attack and harass the enemy at every available opportunity. Fighting in the trenches and the battlefields was therefore believed to require an army steel, disciplined and inspired by the idea of the attack, capable of ‘crushing the enemy…armies…in the open.’ The orders of the military hierarchy shaped the actions and the perceptions of the war landscape for the soldiers. Through these orders they were encouraged, and largely accepted their roles to act brutally and to kill. Some relished the opportunity to participate, Private W.H. Gardner wrote in 1916 that, ‘at last I have achieved my ambition, I must also say my main aim, during the last 18 months, i.e. I have got to the trenches.’ In the landscape that had been created by war, a new concept of identity was demanded by the authorities, and assimilated by the soldiers. Through the performance of these orders, the soldiers were expected to come to possess the qualities of the aggressive soldier demanded by the military authorities. This maintained that above all the soldiers of the British army were to sustain what the War Office defined as the ‘fighting spirit’. These actions, legitimized by the authorities, forged a new perception of the surroundings; soldiers were encouraged and adjusted to act in a brutal and violent manner. J.C.B. Wakeford in April 1918 wrote how through the experience of death and violence ‘one gets curiously callous in this country.’ Whilst these violent and hateful attitudes were also encouraged by war propaganda distributed to the soldiers in the trenches through newspaper and journal reports, which emphasised the ‘barbaric’ acts of the enemy, the actions of the men were also created and conditioned through their own perception of experiences. Captain R.L. Mackay in his diary in October 1916 referred to a German gas attack, which ‘made me wild. Don’t want to take prisoners after this.’ Private J. Gerrard in his memoirs recalled how, ‘the Germans asked for it and Proctor gave them what they asked for.’ He described this as ‘getting a bit of my own back.’ This harsh and brutal environment created a set of understandings for the soldiers. The war landscape can be claimed to be an ‘extension of the social self’ providing a series of principles for living and going on in the world. It is through this frame of reference, this ‘space of death’ that the soldiers’ acted and recreated the violent, monstrous landscape which they occupied.

The desolated, wrecked landscape acted upon the soldiers, as the scenes of devastation and brutality began to be mirrored in the soldiers own actions; Private McEvoy stated a widely-held sentiment concerning the ruined countryside ‘if only we could make the Boch pay for these things.’
The British Soldier and ‘the Monster’ on the Western Front

The soldiers on the Western Front were confronted with an ‘otherworldly landscape’, containing ‘a bizarre mixture of decayed bodies, spent ammunition and the presence of the dead amongst the living.’ Although some sections of the battle zone were not as badly affected, the soldiers arriving at the main areas of fighting, Ieper and the Somme, were confronted with a ‘panorama of devastation.’ Robert Graves later recalled these scenes, describing the horror of corpses in no man’s land, ‘after the first day or two the bodies swelled and stank.’ Private H.L. Carrall wrote in September 1917, that ‘this war defies description...no words or photographs can picture the awful scenes.’ The desolation of the battlefields framed the ‘space of death’, as intense moments of brutality and violence were witnessed within the destroyed landscape. These war ravaged scenes acted to instil the violent and brutal values, the monstrous actions and associations within the soldier. This ruined landscape deeply affected the soldiers. Private R.G. Ashford described the battlefield at Trones Wood, France, as ‘there was no green anywhere. The meadows were just seas of brown craters, there hardly remaining a square yard anywhere without a shell hole.’ The visual impact of the battlefields mirrored the ‘monsters’ the British soldiers believed they were fighting. Private J.C. McLeary wrote that in the Ieper Salient, ‘shell hole was touching shell hole, all with water in, duckboards were blasted all over the place, and men were lying about dead.’ Private, later Corporal D.F. Stone described the soldiers’ perception within the war landscape, when he wrote in his diary in October 1918, that ‘death seemed to lurk in every yard of the ground.’ This wasteland was captured by the war artists such as Nash and Nevinson, who accurately depicted images of intense anxiety and uncertainty. These features of this hostile space formed understanding and meaning for the soldiers, which in turn influenced their behaviour and actions. The battlefield therefore held a programmatic status for the soldier, as the horrifying events, acts and images, which were witnessed and acted out by the soldiers served to create and maintain the space of death. While the soldiers’ actions assisted in the creation of this war landscape, the landscape acted recursively creating the soldiers’ who belonged to it. Private Hall, who was killed in action, wrote in August 1916, ‘I am able to stand almost anything now that its possible to stand.’ A further letter in May 1917 describes how his company made a raid on the enemy’s front line, ‘though it was hell while it lasted I felt happier than I have ever felt since being in this God damn country, you ought to have seen (me)...throwing bombs and rapid firing.’

Inhabiting the trenches, threatened by shell and sniper fire, and experiencing the brutality of the ‘torn and vile’ battlefield, could instil within the soldiers the same brutality, violence and monstrous behaviour in their own actions. E.G. Bates described how the ‘Germans wanted to surrender but Geordies weren’t having any, it was kill, smash, kill...I got
three of the swine with my revolver.’

This ‘space of death’ created a set of understandings for the soldiers. It is through this belief in the monstrous other that the soldiers’ acted and recreated the violent landscape in which they occupied. Attacks and bombardments by the German army escalated the hatred and anger felt by soldiers towards the enemy. Atrocities were repaid with atrocities; Wilfred Owen subtly refers to these acts when he speaks of ‘immemorial shames’ and ‘superhuman inhumanities.’

Private T.B. Gresham revelled in the loss of German life; ‘Glad to read 7,000 Prussian pigs had been slaughtered at Loos.’ Second Lieutenant J.H. Butler stated ‘I can quite understand how men stick prisoners and wounded when they get the chance…I was quite mad with fury for a bit.’ R.M. Luther described one raid on the enemy trench. ‘When we tumbled in, I fell on top of some of the enemy, and one put his teeth in my cheek and held on. I was dragged close to him, but my arms were free, and I tried to get my thumbs into his eyes and push out his eyes, but found his throat instead, and squeezed his windpipe. I felt my cheek being released, and my enemy struggled no more. Immediately I grabbed my rifle and clubbed him with the butt.’

British soldiers legitimised these actions by referring to the behaviour of the monstrous German soldiers. Private W.H. Binks witnessed a German soldier who after offering his surrender, ‘threw two bombs at a lad about seventeen years old and killed him instantly.’ British soldiers then ‘absolutely riddled that Hun and cut him up to mincemeat with their bayonets.’

The soldiers entered into this space of death, confronting the perceived monster therein, and acting against this threat. Private I.L Read described the scene after a British attack on a heavily fortified German position. ‘We looked down their dug out steps, choked with shattered and swollen bodies – two of them with their machine gun belts wound around them. We could picture them – knocked – shot or bayonetted into the entrance, and the Mills bombs being thrown among them to finish them off. Finally – in their blind fury – the attacking British had tossed the gun and its stand, together with all the spare ammunition boxes – in upon the top of them.’

Private Harry Old described how enemy trenches captured after heavy artillery bombardments were hideous places; ‘mangled and mutilated bodies, pools of blood, all amidst a most obnoxious smell, were strewn all over the place. The trench itself…was battered about in a terrible manner.’ Private Cooper recalled how ‘after a shell bombardment – dead men lay every few yards in horrible positions…we passed the German posts, in one two Germans lay on the edge, as though they had been trying to escape, on had the whole of his chest out the other his head off. Later I passed just the naked back of a man and no other limb and even now it was steaming.’

These scenes served only to remind some British soldiers of the barbaric nature of the war which the Germans had waged. Rather than causing them to pity the enemy, it merely reiterated their brutality and the enemy’s status as monstrous, something less than human.
This violent and hostile landscape confronted soldiers with moments of brutality, where the regulated use of weaponry was ignored, and the soldiers reacted to the apparently monstrous world in which they inhabited. Weapons such as rifles and bayonets lost their official purpose and were reused by the soldiers as clubs and knives, picks and spades became weapons as well as ‘any physical object which could harm the enemy.’ Captain Watts-Moses illustrates this in his diary entry; ‘We went in with our rifles without bayonets fixed or with bayonets only. Using bayonets in the form of a dagger and rifles as clubs and they were much more effective that way. Although a shorter reach of course. We really got into a tangle, that is the only expression one can use.’ Private Tomkins in his memoirs recalled how ‘Rifles were being used as clubs and a real hand-to-hand set up.’ Captain Burke described in an interview in the 1960s how the rifle was used in these instances; ‘having once plunged the bayonet it was impossible, you had to defend yourself, you probably used it then holding onto the barrel, and using the butt, more than the bayonet.’ Captain R. Cude described the brutality of these situations. ‘Jerry showed considerable fight, and it was a good hand to hand scrap, before we were enabled to advance again. Practically all the Germans here and half their heads knocked in with the Butt of a Rifle…’ Notes for bombing units issued by the General Staff, recommended that soldiers should be ready to use ‘a bayonet or special stabbing knife or weapon for hand-to-hand fighting, such as an axe or knobkerrie (trench club).’ Sassoon recalls in his memoirs, his preparation for a raid on the enemy’s trenches, ‘it was time to be moving; I took off my tunic slipped my old raincoat on over my leather waistcoat, dumped my tin hat on my head, and picked up my nail-studded knobkerrie (sic).’ Private Lewis recalled in his memoirs his own trench weapon, ‘they’d got a leather thong on them…And there was a great big horses shoe nails all around the top and a lump of lead drilled into the top.’ These weapons, some of which were made in the trenches were the result of the fear of the ‘monstrous Hun.’ Fear in the war landscape was certainly prevalent, as the war created a landscape of terror for the soldiers. This awareness of the war environment is described by Rosenberg, who illustrated the anonymous fear and terror present, when he wrote how ‘death could drop from the dark.’ The threat in the landscape from the German enemy was certainly evidential, as even to raise their heads above the parapet in some sections of the front line was to recklessly invite the sniper’s bullet. Private J.C. McLeary recalled how ‘we were all told to keep our heads down. A boy named Prendergast took a look over the top and a bullet hit him on the forehead blowing his brains out at the back.’

3. Conclusions
The space of death on the Western Front enables us to understand the actions of the British soldier on the battlefield. Rather than considering
the conflict in terms of traditional military history and abstract military engagements, this approach seeks to comprehend how the soldiers themselves viewed their place in this hostile landscape. The construction of the German soldiers as ‘monsters’, ruthless and amoral, and even less than human, served to provide the British soldiers as a means to legitimise and comprehend their own actions. If the violence and brutality of conflict, against both soldiers and civilians is to be understood, then understanding how one side comprehends and describes the other is of primary importance. This issue is of especial pertinence if one considers the recent controversies regarding the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal, and the accusations of the murder of civilians by American and British soldiers in Iraq. The term ‘monster’ provides a means whereby an enemy is ascribed a lesser status, a detraction of their humanity, and with it any rights or privileges that accompany it. On the Western Front during the Great War of 1914-1918, some British soldiers believed what they were fighting against were nothing less than barbaric, uncivilised monsters. The effect of believing in these monsters radically altered their understanding of their surroundings and their actions, as they themselves took upon the guise of the monster to combat this perceived threat.

Notes

12 W H Gardner, *Liddle Collection*.
14 J C B Wakeford, *Liddle Collection*.
16 R L Mackay, *Liddle Collection*.
17 J Gerrard, *Liddle Collection*.
19 P McEvoy, *Liddle Collection*.
23 H L Carrall, *Liddle Collection*.
24 R G Ashford, *Liddle Collection*.
25 J C McLeary, *Liddle Collection*.
26 D F Stone, *Liddle Collection*.
28 B Hall, *Liddle Collection*.
30 E G Bates, *Liddle Collection*.
32 T B Gresham, *Liddle Collection*.
33 J H Butler, *Liddle Collection*.
34 R M Luther, *Liddle Collection*.
35 W H Binks, *Liddle Collection*.
36 I L Read, *Liddle Collection*.
37 H Old, *Liddle Collection*.
38 H Cooper, *Liddle Collection*.
41 E Watts-Moses, *Liddle Collection*.
42 H O Tomkins, *Liddle Collection*.
43 U Burke, *Imperial War Museum*.
44 R Cude, *Imperial War Museum*.
45 General Staff, op. cit., p. 20.
47 F Lewis, *Liddle Collection*.
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“Seven Legs My True Love Has” Fantasies of Female Monstrosity in American Horror Fiction

Dara Downey

Abstract: Richard Matheson’s 1956 novel, *The Shrinking Man*, was written at the peak of post-war, GI bill-funded suburbanisation. As Barbara Ehrenreich demonstrates in *The Hearts of Men: American Men & the Flight from Commitment*, neither the pressures of holding down a full-time, often monotonous job to support one’s dependent wife and children, nor the conformity demanded by the suburban milieu, went unchallenged by the American men who found themselves swallowed whole by the phenomenon. Matheson’s novel fits neatly into this subculture of twentieth-century male rebellion, charting as it does one man’s sense of emasculation but also, paradoxically, of exhilaration when he finds himself trapped within his own cellar and growing progressively smaller. My paper will situate Matheson’s text within a tradition of masculine rebellion which seeks to reconfigure the home as “outdoors”, a tradition which culminates in Mark Z. Danielewski’s aggressively postmodern novel, *House of Leaves* (2000). What these two texts have in common is an association (whether overt or covert) between a monstrous presence within the house against which the male central character must wage war, and femininity. By doing so, these texts succeed in giving visible and repulsive shape to the late-twentieth white bourgeois male’s sense of having been “unmanned” at the hands of what they perceived to be a dangerously feminised society. At the same time, however, these monstrous figures provide the male characters with the perfect excuse for indulging in violent, homosocial adventure, even if it is only within the walls of their own homes. What I shall explore in this paper is the inherent contradictions created by such a project of positing the home as a wilderness in which a monstrous version of femininity can be battled on equal terms, thus offering physical solutions to emotional or psychological problems; and the implications of the fact that what these male characters are fleeing is essentially also what they are seeking.

Key Words: Masculinity, Monstrosity, Escape, Emasculation, Domesticity, Wilderness, Hunter, Victim, Beast, Quest

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From the exploration narratives of Columbus, the novels of H. Rider Haggard, and the various incarnations of the Western genre, to action films and accounts of the scaling of Everest and so on, many texts concerned with definitions of manhood partake of the character of myth. Almost invariably, they are structured around a journey into the unknown, far from the allegedly stultifying effects of civilisation, domesticity and women. Indeed, Victorian literature and American popular texts share the assumption that a man becomes somehow womanly from spending too much time in female company, and for many male characters, distancing themselves from women is often the motivating force behind the search for adventure. The man must then prove himself through acts of physical bravery, which frequently culminate in the hunting and killing of a semi-allegorical beast, at which point he can truly call himself a man.¹

Be this as it may, as I will illustrate by examining two very different novels - one, a science fiction novel from the 1950s, and the other, a postmodern horror novel first published in 2000 - the killing of the beast upon which these successful quests for manhood depends turns upon a central paradox - that is, that the quarry, generally a monstrous figure, stands in metonymically for the woman from whom the hero is ostensibly escaping. This is further emphasised in the novels under discussion - Richard Matheson’s The Shrinking Man and Mark Z. Danielewski’s House of Leaves - by the fact that the dangerous “jungle” world in which the quests take place are actually within the confines of the male heroes’ own homes. Taken to its logical conclusion, the implication of these contradictions is that it is through an embracing rather than a rejection of domesticity, and through pursuing rather than fleeing one’s wife, that true manhood is attained. Nonetheless, both novels go to great lengths to ensure that the beasts that their heroes encounter and the women whom they have left behind are kept as far apart as possible, a strategy which, as I shall argue, leaves little or no room for potential feminist readings of the pairing of women with monsters.

When Scott Carey, the hero of Richard Matheson’s 1956 novel The Shrinking Man, is accidentally sprayed by chemicals, he begins to shrink by exactly one seventh of an inch every day. Already under pressure from mounting bills, stuck in an unimaginative job, and constantly arguing with his wife Louise about their future, this could not have come at a worse time. As the shrinking continues unabated, he finds himself unable to enjoy conjugal relations with Louise, to command her or their daughter’s respect, forced to give up his job, dressed in children’s clothes, and at the mercy of paedophiles, delinquent teenagers and the family cat. His predicament therefore functions as an objectification and intensification of problems that were already present, giving graphic form to the emasculating effects of life as that stock character, the hen-pecked suburban drone. All is not lost, however, since the scenes of his rapidly disintegrating domestic life do not
constitute the primary thrust of the plot. Instead, they are related in a series of flashbacks inserted into the main narrative thread, which recounts how, seven inches tall and still shrinking, Carey is trapped in his own cell, fighting for survival against a black widow spider, splinters, giant drops of water and a dwindling food supply. In this context of strenuous physical activity and a constant struggle to remain alive, he soon comes to realise that, in spite, or perhaps because of the hardships which he must endure, he is healthier and happier than ever before.

Emboldened by this fundamental shift in his relationship with the physical universe, Carey begins to feel that, even on the ontological level, he is now able to organise things as he wishes. At one point, he thinks to himself, “wasn’t this his universe? Couldn’t he determine its values and its meanings? Didn’t the logic of a cella life belong to him, who lived alone in that cellar?” This rather despotic impulse, which is also displayed by many heroes of 1950s Westerns, is nowhere more evident than in the case of the increasingly enormous seven-legged black widow spider, which stands in the way of his food supply, limits his freedom to roam, clambers menacingly over his hiding place at night, and generally makes his life a misery. Early on in the novel, he muses, “Black widow. Men called it that because the female destroyed and ate the male, if she got the chance, after one mating act.”

Having established an unambiguous link between it and dangerous female sexuality, Carey’s meditations on the spider take on a distinct similarity to his feelings towards his wife Louise, who he seems to blame almost entirely for his problems. He sees the black widow as “every anxiety, insecurity, and fear in his life given hideous, night-black form,” and as “something he couldn’t coexist with.” At one point, semi-delirious, he even begins to chant, “One, two three, …. Four, five, six. Seven legs my true love has.” Tellingly, this is followed by a flashback account of yet another argument with his wife.

The spider allows Carey to “work out” all of his sexual frustration and sense of emasculation in a simplified, man-against-beast kind of way, and allows the novel to set up a neat signifying system based on phallic symbols and violent penetration. Discovering a pin, which is later described as a “thick, icy shaft,” he manages to briefly impale and then chase away the spider with it, before sinking down in exhaustion, leaning against the pin “in limp, contented depletion.” Even when he thinks anxiously, “It was four times the size of him. What good was his little pin?” the moment of doubt is short-lived, and a few pages later he spears the spider with various sharp objects over and over before it dies, in a figurative rape and murder camouflaged beneath the age-old image of a man battling a monster. Disturbingly, once he has vanquished the avatar of womanhood which had stood in the way of his gaining full control of his environment, Carey also seems to have exorcised successfully all lingering feelings for his wife. Clambering up the now empty spider’s web and out of a window, he escapes
into his garden, where he becomes so small that the fibres of an old sponge turn into a sort of psychedelic, microscopic Eden, and he joyfully sets out in search of new adventures, unencumbered by thoughts of his previous existence.

In case we might be tempted to dismiss all of this as a mere product of 1950s ideology, let us turn to a very different and much later novel, Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*. The book is organised like a set of Chinese boxes, comprising the plot of a film within an unfinished work of academic criticism within the diary of the young man who reads the work within anonymous “editorial” comments, corrections and amendments. At its heart lies a film entitled *The Navidson Record*, the story of Pulitzer Prize-winning filmmaker and photographer Will Navidson, his partner Karen Green and their two children, Chad and Daisy, who move into an apparently ordinary suburban house. Overnight, a door inexplicably appears where there was never one before, which turns into an equally inexplicable corridor. This in turn becomes a frightening labyrinth, which constantly and unpredictably reorganises itself, growing endless and endlessly shifting corridors, chambers and staircases. Navidson and a small, all-male group of hardened mountaineers and professional explorers set out on an expedition into its depths, armed with an über-manly array of survival gear, none of which, however, manages to prevent the expedition from ending in death for several of the party.

In contrast to the situation in *The Shrinking Man*, where the spider is ever-present and very corporeal indeed, the indications that Navidson’s house might be inhabited by some sort of beast or monster are few and altogether inconclusive. The most concrete of these comes when the fluorescent markers left to mark the explorers’ path are found ripped to shreds, as if by a wild animal. Other hints include the deep scratches found next to the dead but uninjured body of Zampanò, the author of the academic book about the film; the “growl” that reverberates sporadically through the labyrinth, which may or may not merely be the sound of the walls shifting; and the claw of darkness which Zampanò describes as sweeping across the camera at once point, taking with it the dead body of Holloway, the self-appointed leader of the group. Itself a cipher for uncertainty and instability, it is unsurprising that the Beast’s femininity should reside on even more distant and tentative a figurative textual level than that of Matheson’s black widow spider does. Near the end of the book, Navidson’s partner Karen puts together a short film composed of snippets of fictional interviews with a variety of celebrities and experts (including Stephen King, Anne Rice, Hunter S. Thompson, Stanley Kubrick and Jacques Derrida), all of whom have seen *The Navidson Record*. The interviewees return again and again to the subject of the Beast, which they associate with the house’s tendency to consume or destroy anything left there for too long. Harold Bloom describes the house as, “‘Bit like Dante’s
house after a good spring cleaning.” Similarly, the lecturer Andrew Ross comments,

‘You know, when I first saw the monster, I thought it was a Keeper. I still think that. It’s a very mean House Keeper who vigilantly makes sure the house remains void of absolutely everything. Not a speck of dust. It’s a maid gone absolutely nutso.’

More explicit still is the following exchange, “‘It looks like it’s impossible to leave a lasting trace here,’ Navidson observes. ‘The woman you never want to meet,’ quips Reston, […]’

Figured as an overly zealous housewife, the kind who makes a house uninhabitable for the sort of man who prizes the uninhibited freedom of the great outdoors, whatever inhabits Navidson’s house is associated by the male characters with an exaggerated version of perceived matriarchal domestic tyranny. Moreover, when Holloway, a professional hunter, vanishes into the labyrinth in frenzied pursuit of the potentially non-existent monster, the text connects his reaction with the memory of a former lover whom Holloway described as being “beautiful like a doe”. Thus, just like in The Shrinking Man, a male character undertakes a dangerous adventure with the intention of perpetrating quasi-sexualised violence against a hunted monster which is figuratively linked to an actual woman. On the other hand, Beast or no Beast, the house provides a means of escaping domestic tyranny into an equally exaggerated version of the chaotic, unmapped wilderness of the nineteenth-century American landscape. This is certainly how it functions for Navidson, who originally bought the house in an effort to reunite his crumbling family, only to discover that the pressures of moving in have widened the rift between him and Karen. Described as being “joyful, even euphoric, as he sets out” to explore, he remarks in a rather drunken and much-corrected letter to Karen, “Guess I’m just another bastard abandoning woman and kids for a big adventure. I should grow up, right?”

Just as Scott Carey escapes the stultifying atmosphere of his home by becoming trapped in his own cellar, and reverses the emasculating effects of a failed marriage by facing off with a gigantic spider who stands in for his wife, Navidson runs gleefully away from the ruins of his family life and into what is, figuratively at least, a nightmarish inflation of imprisoning domesticity, and which appears to be inhabited by a monstrous avatar of overbearing femininity.

House of Leaves is not the sort of book to pass up a good paradox when it sees one, however. The connection between Navidson’s partner, who he is running away from, and the feminised monster-haunted house which he flees into, is hinted at when, after the house’s volatility has forced the family
to move out, Karen enters it in search of Navidson, who fails to emerge after going in alone. In their children’s bedroom, she finds his pack, which contains a video camera. We are told,

The angle from the room mounted camcorder does not provide a view of her Hi 8 screen. Only Karen’s face is visible. Unfortunately, she is slightly out of focus. In fact the only thing in focus is the wall behind her where some of Daisy and Chad’s drawings still hang. The shot lasts an uncomfortable fifteen seconds, until abruptly that immutable surface disappears. In less than a blink, the white wall along with the drawings secured with yellowing scotch tape vanishes into an inky black.

Since Karen faces the opposite direction, she fails to notice the change. Instead her attention remains fixed on the Hi 8 which has just finished rewinding the tape. But even as she pushes play, the yawn of dark does not waver. In fact it almost seems to be waiting for her, for the moment when she will finally divert her attention from the tiny screen and catch sight of the horror looming up behind her, which of course is exactly what she does do when she finds out that

Here, the chapter ends abruptly, the book goes on to talk of other matters, and the sentence is not finished until over one hundred pages later, when a new chapter begins,

nothing more now than the mere dark. The tape is blank.

Finally when Karen does turn around to discover the real emptiness waiting behind her, she does not scream.¹⁷

This schism in the narrative flow means that the moment when woman and associated monster confront one another is delayed and displaced. Indeed, it never really happens at all, since it is not something toothed or clawed that is waiting for Karen: it is simply the darkness contained by house itself. It doesn’t even growl a little.

As Linda Williams argues in her article, “When the Woman Looks”, relationships between female characters and monsters can have positive implications. Examining mid-century Hollywood horror films, Williams argues that, “the woman’s terrified look at the horrible body of the monster” permits the establishment of a “surprising (and at times subversive) affinity between monster and woman, the sense in which her look at the monster recognizes their similar status within patriarchal structures of seeing”.¹⁸ Such
is the interaction between the female protagonist and the eponymous Creature from the Black Lagoon, and between Fay Wray’s character and King Kong. In both cases, the women seek - albeit in vain - to protect the monster from destruction at the hands of men who believe that they are protecting the woman from the monster. The woman’s reaction to the killing of the monster allows the audience to understand the brutality with which patriarchal discourse excludes and seeks to annihilate those who are seen as different to the male, smooth-skinned “norm”. The films thereby succeed in making covert reference to the fate of women in a male-dominated society. Better still, it does all of this without having to resort to the now all too common image of a victimised, dead or mutilated female body.

Central to this relationship, however, is the moment when woman and monster gaze upon one another. As we have seen, House of Leaves gestures towards such a moment of specular exchange, halts the narrative just as it is about to happen, and then fails to produce the monster altogether. Instead of “catching sight of the horror looming up behind her”, Karen comes face to face with “nothing more now than the mere dark”. Moreover, what this allows us to see is that The Shrinking Man performs precisely the same move. Indeed, Louise and the spider never encounter one another at all - each belongs to a separate phase of Carey’s evolution from emasculated husband to pin-wielding hunter, and each occupies a different part of his house. What this means is that the black widow is an utterly isolated narrative unit. Never permitted to form a bond with the woman who it stands in for, it is cut off from everything in the book except for Carey himself, and exists in a purely adversarial function, the purpose of which is to establish Carey’s heroic, ultra-manly status, and nothing more. Evidently, this is also how the Beast functions in House of Leaves.

A potential explanation for such assiduous separation is provided by critic Richard Slotkin, who sees the popular narratives and myths surrounding various pioneer heroes such as Daniel Boone, and literary heroes such as James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking as positing a man’s quest into the land beyond the American frontier as springing from a desire to grow closer to nature (and, by implication, farther away from civilisation) through a semi-mystical hunt. In these narratives, which tend to borrow heavily from native American mythology, the hunted animal becomes, “an object of love, a woman (perhaps the goddess of the place) to whom the hero is wedded in symbolic sexual violence.” For example, Slotkin quotes a native American “love chant” which recalls Holloway’s association of the Beast with his doe-like girlfriend,

Early I rose
In the blue morning;
My love was up before me,
It came running up to me from the doorways of the Dawn.

On Papago Mountain
The dying quarry
Looked at me with my love’s eyes.21

The problem with this is that such native American thinking, while present in many nineteenth-century American novels and stories, is in conflict with the popular construction of manhood in American culture, which involves what Leslie Fielder terms the “flight from Woman”. To an extent, the problem is solved by demonising the hunted animal, making it dangerous and predatory, rather than an object of love. It would appear that this is not enough, however, and so such texts tend to involve an almost hysterical insistence upon the celibacy of the hero. Once the hunt is successfully completed, Cooper’s Leatherstocking tales frequently end with the intrepid frontiersman refusing a woman’s hand in marriage and heading off once more into the wilderness, a wilderness consistently coded female through multiple references to “penetrating” the dark mysteries of “virgin forests”. This is also the thinking behind the iconic image of the Western hero riding off alone into the sunset at the end of the film. The American hunter-hero thus manages to have his cake and eat it, escaping the deleterious effects of “real” women by immersing himself in the purely figurative femininity of the great outdoors.

It is for this reason, therefore, that the assignation of feminine identity to figures of monstrosity must not transgress the borders of the realm of the figurative. By ensuring that wife and monster are kept at least spatially distinct, these men do their best to avoid confronting the uncomfortable fact that what they are running away from is also what they are running towards, and that, even in killing the beast they are symbolically joining with it in sexual union. This has, moreover, a most convenient side effect, in that it prevents woman and monster from forming a potentially subversive bond outside of the system of meaning ascribed to them by men, a bond which would place them in relation to one another rather than simply to the men whose purposes they are supposed to exist solely to serve. Nevertheless, the lengths to which these two novels must go in order to ensure the continued stability of this system exposes the fragile nature of a definition of masculinity that both asserts and attempts to deny that women and monsters are the stuff that men are made of.
Notes

3 See Susan J. Rosowski, *Birthing the Nation: Gender, Creativity & the West in American Literature*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln & London, 1999, p. 166.
4 Matheson, p.16
5 Ibid, p. 156 & p. 167
6 Ibid p. 102
7 Ibid, p. 52
8 Ibid, p. 50
9 Ibid, p. 167
10 See Appendix 1
12 Ibid, p.357
13 Ibid, p.162
14 Ibid, p.328
15 Ibid, p.389
16 Ibid, p.417
17 Ibid, p.522
19 See Mark Jancovich, *American Horror from 1951 to the Present*, Keele University Press Staffordshire, 1994, p.15
20 Slotkin, pp.156-57
21 Quoted in Slotkin, p. 299

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**Appendix 1: Formal Layout of House of Leaves**

1. Will Navidson & family’s experiences in the house on Ash Tree Lane  
2. *The Navidson Record*, film made by Navidson about those experiences  
3. *House of Leaves*, by Zampanò, academic text on The Navidson Record  
4. Johnny Truant’s editing of *House of Leaves* & his own narration  
5. The “editors’” amendments to Johnny’s text  
6. Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*
Monsters of Distorted Vision:
The Poetics of Flannery O’Connor

Ilana Shiloh

Abstract: Monstrosity is usually defined as a grotesque deviation from the norm. But what if the norm itself is deviant? This apparent paradox is at the core of Flannery O’Connor’s world-view and fiction. O’Connor, a religious author writing for a secular audience, a devout Catholic living in the Protestant South, an ailing and physically deformed human-being surrounded by the healthy, was a perennial misfit. So are her fictional characters. The gallery of her protagonists conjures up ‘an image of Gothic monstrosities and the idea of preoccupation with everything deformed and grotesque.’

Her preoccupation with the deformed and the grotesque cannot be accounted for only in terms of her affiliation with what she ironically calls ‘the School of Southern Degeneracy,’ whose notable members include William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers and Truman Capote. O’Connor’s sense of the grotesque derives from her conception of the norm, and the norm, for her, is man’s Redemption by Christ. Everything she sees in the world she sees in relation to that. From this absolute perspective, the normal and the aberrant exchange places – the grotesque is domesticated and the mundane is revealed as monstrous. This is the case in O’Connor’s short story ‘A Temple of the Holy Ghost,’ which is the focus of the present paper.

Key Words: norm, deviation, perception, Christianity, the South

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Many years ago a group of people became trapped in the mountains of Ecuador. They settled there, completely isolated and cut off from all civilisation. Over time they developed a genetic disease that caused the blindness of all the inhabitants. The inhabitants also lost all memory of sight, and the entire population lived as if blindness were normal, organising all aspects of their existence around the senses of hearing, touch and smell.

Fifteen generations later, an outsider arrives in the remote valley. Nunez, the guide of a mountaineering expedition, lost his footing and is now stranded in the Country of the Blind. When he realises that none of the people around him can see, Nunez at first thinks he has an advantage, trusting in the old proverb ‘In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.’ But
he is profoundly mistaken: in the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is a monster. The doctor of the blind believes that in the case of Nunez ‘those queer things that are called the eyes, and which exist to give an agreeable depression in the face, are diseased…in such a way as to affect his brain.’ And the community decides to surgically remove Nunez’s eyes, the source of his aberration.

H.G. Wells’s story, ‘The Country of the Blind’ (1927) memorably illustrates the relative nature of monstrosity. Monstrosity can be defined as a grotesque deviation from the norm, and norms are socially conditioned. Even though they may lay claim to universality and objective validity, norms reflect neither biology nor a transcendent reality. All they reflect is our perception of how things are or how they should be. ‘The Country of the Blind,’ where perception is both the allegorical purport and the explicit theme of the story, strikingly dramatises this point. Normalcy and aberration do not exist out there in the world – they are culturally constructed.

The implicit belief in the relative nature of monstrosity informs the fiction of Flannery O’Connor. O’Connor, a religious author writing for a secular audience, a devout Catholic living in the Protestant South, a female intellectual rooted in a society valorising feminine gracefulness over intellect, an ailing and physically deformed individual surrounded by the healthy, was a perennial misfit. So are her fictional characters. The gallery of her protagonists conjures up ‘an image of Gothic monstrosities and the idea of preoccupation with everything deformed and grotesque.’

Her preoccupation with the deformed and the grotesque cannot be accounted for only in terms of her affiliation with what she ironically calls ‘The School of Southern Degeneracy,’ whose notable members include William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers or Truman Capote. O’Connor’s sense of the grotesque derives from her perception of the norm, which is, due to her four-fold marginalisation (as a believer, a Catholic, a female and a disabled), radically at odds with the central tenets of her social community and her reading audience. In O’Connor’s fiction, the normal and the aberrant exchange places, so that the grotesque is domesticated and the mundane is gradually revealed as monstrous.

This paradigm shift underpins all her fiction, destabilising the perception of her fictional characters as well as that of her readers. One of the works that symbolically foregrounds this altered perspective is ‘A Temple of the Holy Ghost,’ a short story first published in 1954. The story’s protagonist and centre of consciousness is an unattractive, smart and irreverent twelve-year-old girl, who is visited by two fourteen-year-old cousins. The cousins, convent girls sent to a religious school to shelter them from males, address each other with hilarity as ‘Temple One,’ and ‘Temple Two,’ quoting a nun who had used the term while cautioning them against encounters with boys. The nun’s warning unsurprisingly achieves the opposite effect, and the two
girls are preoccupied with the subject of boys, their changing bodies, and their self-proclaimed sophistication.

The child helps her mother entertain by suggesting local dates for the visiting cousins. Her first suggestion, a fat and elderly farmer by the name of Mr. Cheatham, is rejected by the mother. The child is more successful with her second attempt at matchmaking, and Wendell and Cory, the two country yokels she suggests, take the two cousins out to a country fair. The child stays behind, daydreaming and fantasising about possible futures for herself. When the cousins come back from the show, they tell the child of a ‘freak’ they had seen: a hermaphrodite who exposes his/her secrets to the audience. The child is profoundly impressed by the description and in her imagination the freak-show assumes the pattern and rhythm of Mass. The mother and daughter attend Mass the next morning, when they return the girls to the convent. It is then that the child looks out of a window and perceives the huge red ball of the sun as an elevated Host drenched in blood.

‘A Temple of the Holy Ghost’ is an initiation story, tracing a young girl’s passage from childhood to puberty. But the story departs from the traditional narrative formula by dramatising a double initiation – the protagonist’s discovery of sexuality and her realisation of Christ’s mystery. The two rites of passage converge in the figure of the hermaphrodite. Their convergence subverts customary distinctions between the sacred and the profane, the sublime and the debased, and redefines the concepts of normalcy and of monstrosity.

The conflation of contrasts is suggested in the opening sentence, which establishes the tone and the thematic purport of the story. ‘All weekend the two girls were calling each other Temple One and Temple Two, shaking with laughter and getting so red and hot that they were positively ugly, particularly Joanne, who had spots on her face anyway.’ The sentence coalesces sanctity and ridicule, ugliness and the implied beauty of budding sexuality. This reconciliation of traditional opposites informs all levels of the narrative. Thus the two visitors, Joanne and Susan, are at once homely and attractive. Joanne talks through her nose and turns purple in patches when she laughs, but her yellow hair is naturally curly; Susan is very skinny but has a pretty pointed face and red hair. Similarly, the child’s reaction to the two older girls is a mixture of contempt and envy. On the one hand, she decides that they are ‘practically morons’ and is glad that they are only second cousins, so ‘she couldn’t have inherited any of their stupidity.’ On the other hand, she is intrigued by their practices of self-embellishment and seduction and feels ‘out of it,’ excluded from the mysterious rites of puberty.

The convergence of apparent opposites also functions on other, more thematically meaningful levels. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist is consistently referred to as ‘the child,’ an epithet suggesting her basic innocence and purity. In spite of her irreverence, sassiness, and unattractive
physique and demeanour, the child is innocent in matters of the body and pure in matters of the spirit. When she wants to impress the older girls, she shares with them the secret of procreation: a rabbit has rabbits by spitting them out of its mouth. When the cousins make fun of the nun’s cautioning that their body is a Temple of the Holy Ghost, the child sees nothing funny in the claim. She regards the phrase as an unexpected present.

But the term ‘child’ is also gender-neutral and thus conveys one of the story’s central concerns - the conflation of the feminine and the masculine. This theme is symbolically suggested in one of the protagonist’s daydreams, in which she fantasises about being a soldier in World War II. In her dream, she is the hero who has five times rescued her subordinates, Wendell and Cory, from Japanese suicide divers. The fantasy of empowerment humorously subverts the Southern ideology of female passivity and reverses customary gender stereotypes. Thus, when she visualises the overwhelmed Wendell and Cory proposing to her, and thereby attempting to re-instate her in the traditional role of a marriageable woman, the child turns both of them down, indignantly threatening to have them court-marched.

The most radical embodiment of the convergence of opposites is the hermaphrodite. He is the freak in the story, scandalising the fictional characters and the reading audience alike. But his freakishness is a matter of perception; and the protagonist’s perception, like that of her creator, Flannery O’Connor, casts the hermaphrodite in a role that ironically questions our deeply entrenched notions of both monstrosity and normalcy.

The theme of perception is already introduced in the first paragraph, through the motif of the mirror, in which the two cousins admire themselves. A mirror, as Lacan teaches us in his account of the subject’s entry into the imaginary order, may offer an inaccurate version of reality. What we see in the mirror depends on what we look for. Here, the cousins’ perspective is undermined by the perspective of the protagonist and of the omniscient narrator. The girls see the hermaphrodite as a freak, but the story’s consistent imagery suggests that freakishness is situated in the world outside the country fair. Thus, when the child inquires whether the cousins have seen the monkeys and the fat man in the show, her question echoes the description of the characters outside the show. Wendell and Cory, the girls’ suitors, court the cousins sitting ‘like monkeys, their knees on a level with their shoulders and their arms hanging down between.’ And Mr. Cheatham, the first prospective suitor, is the fat man, whose ‘protruding stomach he press[es] tenderly from time to time with his big flat thumb.’

The thematic significance of this symbolic correspondence is clarified in the story’s climactic scene, in which the child falls asleep and dreams about the freak-show. Profoundly impressed by the cousins’ description of the creature who ‘was a man and a woman both,’ and who pulled up its blue dress, the colour of divinity, to expose its double sex, the child imagines the
circus performance as a religious ceremony and the hermaphrodite is another Temple of the Holy Ghost. In her mind’s eye, the freak becomes Jesus and Jesus turns into a freak.

The logic behind O’Connor’s apparently preposterous analogy, the common ground between the figure of the Saviour and the figure of the hermaphrodite, is their reconciliation of seemingly irreconcilable contrasts. In the same way that the androgy nous body conflates the masculine and the feminine, Christ’s body on the cross conflates the human and the divine. The hermaphrodite’s carnality evokes the Saviour’s incarnation. In contradistinction to the traditional Christian dualism valorising the soul over the body, the Southern writer accepts Christ’s example literally. The body is the soul. The soul partakes of the body’s imperfection. And the body partakes of the soul’s sacredness.

‘The main concern of the fiction writer is with mystery as it is incarnated in human life,’ writes O’Connor in her collection of occasional prose, *Mystery and Manners*. Both the freak and the Saviour embody a mystery, what I term an inverted paradox. While classical paradoxes prove as true what we know to be false, the example of Christ proves as false what we believe to be true. Zeno demonstrated that Achilles would never overtake the tortoise and this proof, although perfectly logical, is a fallacy. Christ demonstrated that the Son of God could take a human form and be crucified like a thief, and this demonstration, although perfectly illogical, is the truth.

For O’Connor, mystery is the norm, and the reduction of reality to reasonable phenomena is an aberration. As in Wells’s *Country of the Blind*, so in O’Connor’s textual, and extra-textual South, monstrousity is a matter of perception. The hermaphrodite may be perceived as an outrageous anomaly, but it can also be regarded as a manifestation of wholeness and perfection. That was indeed the hermaphrodite’s symbolic meaning in antiquity, as we can learn from the figure of the bisexual prophet Theresias, or from Aristophanes’ account of the origin of desire in Plato’s *Symposium*. In Wells’s story, the norm was defined in terms of lack – those who lacked sight condemned the one who had it. This is also the case in ‘A Temple of the Holy Ghost.’ Those who ridicule the freak would equally have stoned Jesus, for their vision is basically distorted. The Son of God who died on the Cross, a hermaphrodite exposing himself in a country fair, a child who is also a combat pilot - these are embodiments of the norm. All the others are monstrous exceptions.
Notes

4. Ibid., p. 236.
5. Ibid., p. 240.
6. Ibid., p. 237.

Bibliography


Ilana Shiloh received her Ph.D. in American Literature from Tel Aviv University. She is currently lecturer and Head of English Studies at the College of Management, in Rishon Lezion, Israel. She is the author of *Paul Auster and Postmodern Quest* (Peter Lang, New York 2002) and has published a range of articles on contemporary fiction and film.
Section 6:

Modernity and Modernism
The Sublime Monstrosity: C. Baudelaire on Modernity

Loretta Vandi

Abstract: Modernity, for Baudelaire, provides the artist a most valuable and spiritual feature, monstrosity, made up from two absolutely interconnected subjects: woman and metropolis. Both have to be aged, artificial, and challenge the normal ideas and behaviour on life and death. He goes on to distinguish between absolute and ordinary monstrosity, joining the former to the sublime, creative comic (grotesque) and the latter with the ordinary, imitative comic (comedy). The modern woman is that who paints herself, wears eccentric dresses, exhibits instead of concealing her deformed body and feels her personality alive only within the modern landscape of the metropolis—that dark and majestic collection of people and monuments with which no man could refrain from being deeply fascinated. The beauty of these forms (of women and cities) consists in their moral fruitfulness. They offer for consideration plenty of suggestions, but of a cruel and bitter sort. The artist—we may bear in mind that Baudelaire is always speaking about the artist as a total personality independently of representational means used—is involved in a constant pursuit of the vertigo that monstrosity affords him. This is the source of pure art, an art which displays the beautiful that is firmly rooted in the horrible. Here we may detect the artist’s warm approval, and understand with him the necessity of the artifice against naturalness.

The aim of my paper is to demonstrate that Baudelaire’s true appreciation of monstrosity implies on the one hand his uncompromising refusal of life as it is normally lived (an important implication of it is the impossibility to have true long lasting emotions) and on the other his unflinching willingness to risk, by a close acquaintance with the abnormal, life for a continuous transformation of his soul.

Key Words: C. Baudelaire, Monstrosity in art, Art and artifice, Spirituality in art, Woman and metropolis in 19th century

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Suppose there were a man on the top of a high mountain looking at a huge city down in the plain. Meanwhile he is attempting to encompass with just one glance the city’s boundless and craggy extension, his imagination eyes start to scan it as a multilayered whole, being at once hospital, brothel,
purgatory, hell, and penal colony. But the devil came and said unto this man: ‘What are thou watching my city for? It is mine and I shall give it thee if only thou worship me’. And the man answered: ‘I cannot, because I love it such as it is and instead of worshipping thee I shall worship thy city and it will become mine!’ The man is Charles Baudelaire and his city is Paris of the 1850s, the place where every abnormality bloomed like a flower. Was his answer to the devil not also a spelling out of the reason of his attraction? He did not submit to any kind of worship because for him the ever growing Paris, the city par excellence, demanded the commitment of a free and daring soul in which there is no room for passiveness, self-pity or indulgence. He conceived of his relationship with the city as an exploration of the artistic soul, of his own soul craving for being relentlessly intoxicated by wonder, by the mystery of what is hidden in the shadow and flashed but at the artist’s beaming sight. The urban bowels that nourish numberless obscure and shifting existences energise the artist’s nervous system longing for intersections and hybridization and, at the same time, challenge the too simple lyric movements of the soul. Both the ever changing form of the metropolis and the kindred woman constitute the brick and mortar of modernity that reflects by sympathy the artist’s soul hurled in an unbroken pursuit of vertigo. Both are aged, artificial, and far from expected behaviour providing the artist a most valuable spiritual feature, monstrosity.

Baudelaire’s rejection of life as it is normally lived carries a sui generis individualism. Here the keyword is creativity. The individual creations are the only ones endowed with life because, in contrast to matter, they spring out of the living principle which is the man’s soul. In fact the life of a real artist—or generally the life of a human being who came to conceive it as an artistic enterprise—is guided by the quest for inspiration, the only source of sublimity. If there be any true progress (true, because moral), it may be attained to but by the individual himself since the true civilization is not gas, steam, and revolving platforms but the attempt to purify the original sin’s stains. How this could be brought about is an apparent paradox which bears but a superficial resemblance to the Heraclitean doctrine of the identity of opposites. Baudelaire held that in modernity the only way out of original sin is to recast it in terms of artistic devotion which, in its turn, is no other than the sincere, self-imposed, investigation of the road to damnation. How is it ever possible this alchemy of purification by means of damnation? For Baudelaire the only one moral way left leads by necessity to damnation because the bourgeois society annihilated morals by blotting out the good/evil alternative, for it grew to adore exclusively the Canaanite Moloch, a principle based on externality, a mere material-bound good which is thought of as the only human value, the evil being whatever is cast out by way of the latter’s application.
Thus the artist’s duty is to re-create evil, but contrary to T.S. Eliot’s belief, which saw in him great strength, but merely to suffer and a great sensibility but only to study his own suffering, Baudelaire did not convert his desire for damnation by a passive anatomy of his own suffering. His soul’s reality is at odds with the portrait of a belated martyr Eliot was forging of him, seeing in his suffering a positive state of beatitude, nor is he as Adorno—and many a critic in his wake—wanted him to be, a forerunner of Expressionism.

First, he does not seem just a pawn of his own deranged will for he brings to light of the human drama the marvellous, the whimsical and the unaccountable by a powerful ironic super-naturalism and he cannot be—strictly speaking—an Expressionism’s forerunner for the simple reason that his grotesque vision is a far cry from being a parody of bourgeois society: one could not fail to notice in it an appreciative evaluation of all those things that that society censures as shameful, such as the unpredictability of encounters, obscenity, deformity and avoidance of positive pleasure together with intensification of unsettling feelings that may heighten the soul’s awareness.

Baudelaire’s Lebensphilosophie yielded a continuous need for comprehension of the down-and-outs and the unfamiliar as if in him the principle of exclusion he saw performed by the bourgeois was metamorphosed into the true Christian principle of love. And the fact he contrived to throw off from his art the all too natural and human is the unmistakable sign of his purposiveness. He was seeking after the moment of revelation when time runs deeper and the feeling of life tends to infinity. For Baudelaire revelation cannot be severed from some or other sort of damnation because the energising inspiration lies wherever normality fears to tread. The selfish materialism of bourgeois society strives with all its might to exclude the monstrosity of difference for fear of infection and final death; death that becomes for him the sublime causation of modernity unifying in a single stroke darkness and horribleness, city and woman.

Concerning the dichotomy Nature/Culture Baudelaire is a monist, for he resolutely avows his predilection for the artificiality of the second. In a letter of 1852 to Fernand Desnoyers, who was asking him some verse on nature, he confesses his inability to be moved by woods, plants, insects, and even by sun, neither believing in some sort of hylozoism nor caring about their splendour and luxuriance. He belittles nature clothed with blossoms and shining a furious light because he detects in her ‘something able to torment, something harsh and cruel, something which borders impudence’. The only inspiring natural experiences he admits are those which remind of the human soul. In the deepest part of woods, when the prodigious music played by the top of the trees resemble human lamentations, one feels like being imprisoned.
under imposing vegetal vaults similar to sacristies and cathedrals and startled begins to think about the astonishing cities of man.

Baudelaire does not feel at all lonely in his preference, there are three artists who share with him the ‘religious intoxication of the big cities’: Honoré Daumier, Constantin Guys, and Charles Meryon. Daumier’s fantastic and rapturous reality shows all the living urban monstrosities, all its dreadful, grotesque, sinister, and ridicule treasures, while Guys captures the restless movement of people in the streets, and Meryon the natural solemnity of the cities. Though Meryon devotes himself to the representation of old buildings, towers, chimneys of factories resembling obelisks, scaffoldings embracing monuments, Baudelaire is able to imagine in them majesty, paradoxical beauty, challenge to nature and, more significantly, a depth of perspective resulting from the human dramas, both sorrowful and glorious, that should have been played within their walls.

Yet Baudelaire is not anxious to stop at the threshold, just thinking what might have taken place in the private apartments. He wants to see and feel what is actually happening in the mansion of all mansions. So he comes across the fascination of the night, when the rituals of the big city are directed to re-create the vital energy which was dissipated by day’s toil: demons are awakening and prostitution works its way like a secret enemy or a worm through the very centre of the turbid city; kitchens are snorting, theatres filled with shouts, orchestras rattling, taverns are waiting for harlots and spongers to occupy their places and thieves are about to ‘open gently doors and coffers,/in order to live some days and dress their mistresses’. Baudelaire’s gaze does not fix the city’s nocturnal life once for ever as a picture does but with his soul’s eyes is approaching infinitely the sublime that the night’s veil discloses for him alone. His thickly peopled metropolis, where fervent human souls are mingling with extravagant creatures, may be seen also as the result of a deep-seated anxiety about the soul’s fate in a society the only pregnancy of which can bear no more than a stillborn spirituality. In the old faubourg, a sort of muddy labyrinth, crowded with a stormy rabble, a junk dealer, notwithstanding age and ill health, is endlessly crying out his glorious existential projects. It is Eliot’s misjudgement that Baudelaire’s prostitutes, mulattoes, Jewesses, serpents, cats and corpses formed a machinery that failed to stand the test of time. Instead Baudelaire was trying to investigate artificiality, the very nature of modern cities, and, especially for him, of modern women, hoping for something extra-temporal and universal, something that could also baffle death, playful as it be with it at the same time.

Baudelaire is an anti-imitative champion for he holds that art strives hard by amplification, complexity and strangeness for being relieved of all nature and materiality. Only primitives, children and women, unlike ordinary
people, comprehend the truth of dresses and ornament, the ‘high spirituality of the toilette’; its extreme and far-reaching artificiality. Fashion was for him a symptom of the fight for ideals, an effort to prevail over all that natural life gives us, a sublimation by misshaping nature. Here Baudelaire has a surprise for us: his unquenchable fondness of women that could be thought of as sublime monsters.

True, in his poetry and essays he does lavish many an insight on the beauty of young women, but his most remarkable pages are devoted to aged and deformed ones, sincerely appreciated as soon as he was able to understand the obscure threads of the big city. The praise of artifice is brilliantly expressed in ‘La femme’ included in ‘Le peintre de la vie moderne’ of 1863, a landmark in the construction of modernity. The last part of it is dedicated to feminine make-up. The black that encloses the eye and the red that marks the cheek’s upper part, precisely because employed for surpassing nature, have as ultimate consequence the representation of what is supernatural and excessive in life. The black frame renders the gaze more profound and changes it into a window open on to the infinite. The red that flames the cheek increases the clarity of the eye and wraps the beautiful face up in the mysterious passion of a priestess. But this is just one side of the artificial. The other one, the less known, has to do with the ‘femmes damnées’—virgins, demons, monsters, martyrs—great souls despising reality and looking after the infinite.

The ‘perfect monster’ is created in 1866 as a caricature of an aged woman. In it, Baudelaire weaves together the usual imagery of love—playful moments, joy of senses, tricks of youth—with the features already transformed by age which produces an unexpected reading of the human relationship. Something we are accustomed to is not to be considered as a sign of routine but of deep interest, because of its different levels of meaning which a new thing cannot ever have—I prefer your fruits, Autumn/to the trivial flowers of Spring—. He goes on to focus his attention on every particular of woman’s body, discovering strangeness, hardness, sadness, bitterness, and enduring willingness to follow evil as the reasons that may justify human existence. Since Baudelaire was seeking after the essence of evil, is there any unsoundness in falling in love with the infernal features of the perfect monster?

In the poem ‘Le Jeu’, old prostitutes are sitting up on armchairs, pale, enticing, eyebrow signed, eye tender and fatal, while all over the floor like a green carpet are scattered faces without lips, lips without colour, jaws without teeth, and the fingers as possessed by an infernal fever are probing either the empty pocket or the throbbing bosom. In this silent cave, the poet is struck with a sincere envy for ‘the strong passion of those people, the funerary cheerfulness of those prostitutes’, because it dawned on him that
those people, running with fervour towards the abyss, drunk with their own blood, would prefer ‘suffering to death and hell to not being’.

I will end my paper, a kind also of conclusion, with a brief discussion about the concept of ‘sublime’. Everyone familiar with Kant’s treatment should be uneasy on account of the use it was made of it in defining not just how we judge Baudelaire’s creations to be but, also, how Baudelaire himself actually thought of what he was then describing. As a matter of fact he was throughout his life re-conceptualizing ‘sublime’, endowing it with a moral turn which though it were contained in Kant’s theory, Kant himself did not actually expounded it and I am doubtful if he could ever have developed his thought in that direction. Probably it was Baudelaire’s lot to bring into light the ‘modernity’ that the Kantian notion dimly implied. Let us first have a look to Kant’s theory. The morality of sublime, for Kant, lies mainly in the fact that the imagination involved here is referred to reason, instead of being referred to understanding which is the case of the beautiful. What may this mean? Kant’s argument put it in a few words is as follows. The idea of sublimity comes from the recognition of the failure of one’s own imagination to conform to reason’s law of wholeness or absolute unity. This failure is both the feeling of sublime and a moral feeling as well. It is the feeling of sublime because it allows the subject to acknowledge in himself or herself a super-sensible faculty independent of senses and it is a moral feeling because it is imagination’s self-deprivation of its empirical employment—its use according to the laws of association—being now submitted to the law of reason, that is adopting as measure of magnitude’s estimation the absolute great which is but the reference to the law of reason alone as the measure of greatness.

It seems to me of paramount importance the shift that Baudelaire gave to the above. For him real imagination is only artificial and it is independent of nature, both external and internal. In this way Kantian reason is almost identical with Baudelairean imagination. What Baudelaire means by imagination is the creation of spiritual ideals and in so doing he does not look out of himself, unless he is in search of what has already encountered within him. Artificiality, monstrosity and evil constitute one and the same ideal, that of limitless spiritual communion. What he discovered while looking in himself was the universal law of freedom in self-sacrifice. He sacrificed all his material interests in order to identify his own existential value with that of an unlimited community, this existential value being raised to the status of supreme measure for human action. And how could it be ever doubted that this dynamic union of love and self-sacrifice is charity in the pristine Christian sense?
Notes

10. Idem, p. 137.

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Loretta Vandi, who earned a Ph. D. in Art History (University of Lausanne, Switzerland), interests include theory and history of ornamental art (to which she devoted a book in 2002, Peter Lang, Bern), medieval and Renaissance illumination (on which she published many essays in international journals and a book in 2004, Fondazione Oliveriana, Pesaro), and modern literature. She presently teaches Art History at the Liceo Scientifico Statale ‘A. Serpieri’ in Rimini (Italy).
Knowledge and the Monster: 
An Unfair Epistemological Marginalization of the Creature?

Sonia Ouaras

Abstract:

“For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow.”
Ecclesiastes 1:18.

At a time of revolutionary breakthroughs such as the nineteenth century, the community concerned by scientific discoveries is by nature forced to bring about an ethical questioning of our new acquired knowledge of natural laws. The popular belief - still valid nowadays - that is anchored in the collective unconscious is that science answers to a basic human need to explain - and even rationalize - Nature, which is supposed to be bound to entail with an advance in knowledge, an advance in humanity, having the Darwinian chain of evolution in mind. The question of ethics emerges, for the more we manage to figure out the “tricks” of Nature, the more man seems to be attracted by its mastery. In fiction, these questions are tackled by pushing to their extreme the limits of natural laws so that the readership can visualize and understand the stakes of scientific knowledge. The fields of natural philosophy, metaphysics, and epistemology are gathered in order to show that the act of understanding is not a pure positive step but has an immense potential to bring about lethal drawbacks. Science was taken seriously, almost as a sort of cure that would help men to go against the Victorians’ fear of regression. The world of knowledge is not idyllic; the very notion of “experiment” prior to the discovery itself is the border line between an acceptable use of natural laws and a first move towards evil. One needs to engage in knowledge from a scientific outlook in order to come up to the epistemological process of creating and confronting monsters. Nineteenth century fiction is not only influenced by this wave of successive discoveries, but one has to remember that this was also the golden age of the freak show; these two elements confront each other resulting in a distortion of the image of the scientist that drifts away from the image of the healer and changes for a more threatening conceptualization. It appears as a well-known fact that the scientist, thanks to the knowledge he acquires, is superior to the average man, having control over Nature. The result in the classic literature dealing with that genre was an otherworldly ugliness of monstrous creatures that aimed at being human, in vain.
The concept of monstrosity is so rich that we will restrain to the category of the "creature", especially as being a prodigy, as defined by Marie-Hélène Huet as “things that happen entirely against Nature.”

The idea of a prodigy is somewhat polysemic per se, since both the scientist and his creature comply with the definition of this word. Indeed, the monster is a prodigy, challenging natural laws by its very existence; and the scientist is one in that his knowledge of natural law is so extreme that he goes against Nature by this misused and excessive knowledge. Confronting Nature is not devoid of a strong spiritual implication, as men of science - in a century of growing nihilism that accepts the death of God - usurp the latter’s part, exposing themselves to extreme side-effects, resulting in metaphysical punishments which symbolism is comparable to Biblical divine retribution, following the example of the episode of the Tower of Babel. That is why when Victor Frankenstein in the 1931 film adaptation of Mary Shelley classic novel says “Now I know how it’s like to be God!”

To understand the moral stakes of the evolution of scientific knowledge, one should probably start with the etymology of the word “monster”. The most common source derives from the Latin monstrare - i.e. to point out, to exhibit. Jeffrey J. Cohen relates to this way of defining monstrosity as the creature needs to be sufficiently visually astonishing to exhibit something: “The monster commands, ‘Remember me!'”. There is another etymology close to the act of pointing out, as it can also derive from monere, “to warn”, associating even more closely the abnormal birth with the prophetic vision of impending disasters. Hence the creature, often considered as an intellectually lower being, has in fact a complexity that the visual aspect, instead of bringing about a simple symbolism, makes it hard for the reader to understand the reason for its complex existence. The questions aroused are thus the followings: what does the scientist’s creature, being the archetypal monster that the collective unconscious has integrated, exhibit?
Indeed, is it a reified prolepsis of the possible outcomes of science, or is it prodromic of contemporary questionings?

The developing of knowledge in particular regarding natural philosophy has generated a conflicting thinking of what science could offer, having on the one hand the admiration of the community that benefited from discoveries in various fields, and on the other hand the same community is aware of the often mortifying outcomes that the risk of an experiment entails. And literature craftily exploits this fear. Strangely enough, at a time of a collective and monomaniac form of interest in science as a step to shape the future, literature turned to the past in an uncanny way. Writers used what became an archaic understanding of natural laws that generated a cognitive dichotomy in contemporary conceptualizations of knowledge, past beliefs confronting modern scientific breakthroughs. The supernatural is not purely fictional and is part of the natural, which an archaic form of knowledge seems to accept. This attraction for a past form of understanding of nature may seem paradoxical, for science - and more specifically the notion of experiment - is all about being a visionary, but in literature, it becomes a backward step towards an outdated knowledge. The scientist’s mistake lies in this paradox that explains his systematic failure that goes against the nineteenth century movement of Positivism. Even in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story “The Birthmark”, Aylmer expresses his belief in the actuality of alchemy, although with a touch of scepticism:

Aylmer appeared to believe that, by the plainest scientific logic, it was altogether within the limits of possibility to discover this long sought medium [of turning vile material into gold]; ‘but,’ he added, ‘a philosopher who should go deep enough to acquire the power would attain too lofty a wisdom to stoop to the exercise of it.’

Aylmer is thus admitting that wisdom - and by extension all forms of knowledge - can become “too lofty”, i.e. useless and even dangerous. Experimenters with aims comparable to alchemy, in retrospect not considered as an empirical science so dear to the Positivist movement initiated by Comte, turn their research into a pseudoscientific forerunner of chemistry from a bygone past, an early and retrograde protoscientific practice combining unreasonably chemistry and astrology, medicine and mysticism. This archaic approach is related to black magic, books full of spells that should remain hidden and kept secret in Pandora’s Box. Aylmer in “The Birthmark” admits as a watershed that he is not a prosaic scientist: “It is dangerous to read in a sorcerer’s books,” referring to his own notebook of research. Milton Millhauser explains that in spite of the scientist’s utopian desires, he involuntarily produces dystopian consequences:
Old books suggest, as they did to Hawthorne, arcane knowledge - who knows what long-forgotten powers and potions might be discovered? And chemistry, the child of alchemy, wears for a moment the family look; research wears a Mephistolean air of meddling with forbidden mysteries.\(^7\)

A past pseudo-knowledge that failed miserably has nevertheless had an influence that should not have been taken into account for they have proved “wrong”\(^8\) from a prosaic outlook by more recent scientific studies, and also “wrong” from a moral viewpoint with the evolution of natural philosophy and ethics. In fiction dealing with the monstrosities of science, the dystopian is tightly related to the demoniac, since this admiration for archaism implied a mixture of prosaic and spiritual elements. The choice of the image of Satan is not fortuitous, in particular as far as the problematic of knowledge is concerned, for this biblical character is presented in The book of Genesis as the one who tempts men to Know, as one can read in the episode of the Tree of Knowledge. Knowing too much from a Judeo-Christian outlook on the history of humanity is a repressible desire that doomed humanity to sufferings.

Through this parallelism between scientific knowledge and Satan, the reader is confronted to the notion of Evil, which in fact should not be taken into consideration in a Manichean way but on the contrary as an extremely complex notion. John Milton in *Paradise Lost* reminds us that Satan is a fallen angel and thus is not purely an embodiment of evil but is rather an extremely upset angel frustrated by God’s punishment. Frankenstein’s Monster himself realizes that his situation is similar and dares a frightening parallel: “Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition.”\(^9\) He even admits that when he killed William, Victor’s brother, “[his] heart swelled with exultation and hellish triumph.” But this is not his initial nature. At first, the Monster surrendered to Victor’s will of power and authority: “I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king (...)”\(^9\) But it he is now lead by revenge, which is a human feeling that he learnt through the behaviour of men themselves and the injustice they live in, then transferred and inflicted to the creature. But more surprisingly, literature presents more men of science as the expression of the devil on earth by his unearthly will to control and go beyond natural laws. In Hawthorne’ story “The Birthmark”, Aylmer’s secret lab is turned into a “furnace”; this word punctuates the whole story so that the reader easily visualizes a hellish setting. But these satanic parallelisms in relation to the character of the man of science are less frequent - or at least less obvious and impregnated in the collective unconsciousness - because aesthetically the monster-creature generates a direct strong antipathy and its unearthly
ugliness becomes an obvious sign of hellish bounds. But still any reader of nineteenth century fiction dealing with science cannot help conceptualizing the scientist with much scepticism; a Manichean acceptation of the seeming dichotomy in the relation between the scientist and his creature does not seem satisfactory, and a form of antipathy develops towards the alleged healer. The aversion experienced by the reader towards men of science lies in the tension resulting in having two conflicting modes of learning through the two archetypal protagonists: indeed, on the one hand the scientist has a monomaniac relation to knowledge and loses his mind in books and theories, which makes him more likely to be idealistic and disappointed because he’s not learning from his own actual and empirical observations. That’s the case for instance in Le Fanu’s short story “Green Tea”10 where the homodiegetic narrator admits right from the incipit that he has a limited and incomplete knowledge of science for it is still purely theoretical: “Though carefully educated in medicine and surgery, I have never practiced either. The study of each continues, nevertheless, to interest me profoundly.” This lack of experience may generate easily a feeling of fear of doctors among the readership that realizes they may not be fully reliable. On the other hand, the creature has an entirely opposite relation to knowledge and its acquisition, being intensely observant. Science in fiction presents knowledge, its acquisition, mastery and fascination, not as a step towards the progress of humanity, but as generating fear of advancements, which may convince some conservative spirits to worship intellectual stagnation - even regression.

This fear also derives from the marginality and madness of the scientist once his knowledge becomes too great and uncontrollable. Living in a Victorian era where contemporaries praised anyone with a well-established and rich social life, the scientist appears as a stain in this portrait of the Victorians, for his quest for a greater and unreasonable knowledge isolates him from any community, including scientific circles. This priority given to knowledge instead of devoting himself to his true nature of social being leads the scientist to a doomed and irreversible madness, a statement that Seneca epitomized in the famous maxim: “Nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae fuit” - there has been no great genius without a mixture of madness in it. This unreserved attraction towards knowledge generated by a will of power, and initially by a genuine will to improve the world as it is, does not seem reasonable in a society still drenched in a religious unconditional faith in God’s power to heal men’s sufferings Himself.

The scientist is obviously not the first victim of this epistemological marginalization since he deliberately positions himself as an outcast, whereas monsters - who generally seek normality and communal life - are treated as a threat to established order. But the monster-creature in reality is not the character that launches this subversion of social codes but the scientist himself; the creature is just a victim of a non-deserved marginalization. The
latter’s claim of humanity and normality presents it not as such a subversive character but on the contrary as an entity that wishes to integrate a community of people leading pattern lives. Christopher S. O’D. Scott engages with scientific knowledge as being potentially a marginal field itself, for he writes that very often, scientists who are not satisfied with the result of an experiment think that “the material was impure, or make some equally ad hoc excuse. We then repeat the experiment until it goes right; we certainly don’t take the anomalous result as a new natural phenomenon.” 11 The creature seems to understand this better and claims through its very existence a redefinition of Humanity and its criteria so that the new creature can fit in.

This injustice that in these stories only the reader seems to realize creates some sort of pathetic aura around the monster that becomes even wiser and open-minded than “real” humans, because creatures feel there is an antagonism between the prima facie confrontations to the monster and “the beauty in the beast” if one may say. In “The Birthmark”, Georgina impersonates the part of the creature, surprisingly in its most complex form, for she is an absolutely beautiful and delightful woman, who is undermined to the status of a monster because of an anaesthetic birthmark on her cheek. This defect, that her husband Aylmer wants to treat as an illness, is in the eyes of the young woman’s friends regarded as “a charm”12. She is downgraded merely because of the mark: “those small stains which sometimes occur in the purest statuary marble would convert the Eve of Powers to a monster.” Monstrosity hence is not actually a universal attribute shared by a whole community, but is rather a question of personal perspective.

The main feature that engenders fear towards the creature is that surprisingly, in spite of the stereotype of the brainless and dense monster, it represents an imminent intellectual threat through a new form of knowledge and approach of the world. That’s the case of Frankenstein’s Monster who learns the ways of the world thanks to an accurate sense of observation. After learning about human behaviours, he starts learning their language, to the extent that he becomes for a while the story-teller of Shelley’s novel, showing off his impressive linguistic skills, using a lexical patrimony equivalent to a Shakespearian level of English. Besides, the Monster thus proves that he knows how to organize his thoughts and can converse and argue about men’s codes. That’s what the reader can see for instance in his narrative, where he takes an anthropological step while studying the De Lacey family: “(…) perpetual attention, and time, explained to me many appearances which were at first enigmatic.”13 And in the same chapter he learns how to speak and read at an incredible speed. Thanks to his grasp of the complexity of language and human behaviour, his reflection sharpens, and even attains extremely rapidly a surprising level of wisdom: “I ought not to make attempt [to establish communication with the De Lacey] until I had
first become master of their language; which knowledge might enable me to make them overlook the deformity of my figure.” Not only does he learn a subject but he is so industrious that he wants to “master” his newly acquired knowledge, this word being relevant of the potential intellectual threat he represents because more than his physical superiority, he seeks intellectual hegemony.

Because of the creature’s efforts to mould itself with the most human form possible, can the monster be human? Frankenstein’s Monster never refers to himself as a human being, but always as “an unfortunate and deserted creature.” But there has to be at least a fraction of humanity in the creature for it remains a composite of several human beings or derives from one man. The creature is more self-conscious and is more aware of that social survival relies on one’s ability to become “mainstream” and to be in the end unnoticeable. But in the eyes of the community, the scientific creature is unclassifiable as Noel Carrol points out:

Many monsters of the horror genre are interstitial and/or contradictory in terms of being both living and dead: ghosts, zombies, vampires, mummies, the Frankenstein monster, Meltmoth, and so on. (...) Indeed, the frequent reference to monsters by means of pronouns like ‘it’ and ‘them’ suggests that these creatures are not classifiable according to our standard categories.

The creature’s status is torn between the “interstitial” (Deity) and manhood, which is somewhat reminiscent of the Nietzschean concept of the Übermensch, the “overman” or “higher man”, which hence proves that the creature, instead of being a failed human being, is in fact an improved one; which is epitomized by Frankenstein’s Monster as follows: “Remember, thou hast made me more powerful than thyself.” But in these stories dealing with scientific monsters, both man of science and the creature are potential Übermensch, since both of them are extremely atypical, may it be physically and/or intellectually.

This will to compete with God, in a century where nihilism and Nietzsche’s declaration that “God is dead”, raises the scientist above the level of mankind, replacing this dead God, hence reaching that status of Übermensch. The level of “overman” is to be attained through a constant will of power manifested both creatively - through a re-evaluation of the established order and knowledge - but also destructively, drawing from and resulting in self overcoming. And both scientist and creature seem to comply with these criteria. The fact that both can be potentially Übermensch may explain what often emerges in the kind of fiction we are dealing with: both of them are superior to the average man, but they are equal to each other in their
superiority - even if they express themselves in different ways - which may explain this constant and relentless shifting power relation between the two of them.

The hermeneutic of the “supernatural science” is in reality a means to draw society’s attention on an introspective level of self-awareness and questionings. Drawing from an Aristotelian conception of man as a social being, community life is the basis of our human behaviour, and seclusion goes against this philosophical position. In The Bride of Frankenstein, the creature learns from the hermit that “it is bad to be alone.” And the monster integrates this new motto in a simplified equation: “Alone…bad” in order to remind us how basic this is.

Being an outcast originates from the religious history of man, as the Bible presents it, where seclusion is a divine punishment, starting with Satan the fallen angel, Adam and Eve, Cain… This marginalization often entails a strong metaphysical and philosophical introspective reflection, and these biblical outcasts are linked because they all disappointed God by going against His will and power. Hence, in this Victorian society whose moral codes are strongly influenced by a Judeo-Christian background, what has the monster done spiritually to deserve such a punishment? The morphogenesis of the wandering and lonesome creature entails an unfair seclusion, for, as Jeffrey J. Cohen points out, it is unfair in the sense that in actuality, the monster is a mirror to humans, our Doppelgänger.

The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its function as dialectical Other of third term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond – of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within.

The creature, remaining a composite of human beings, is bound to be at least partially human too. Hence the question of its marginalisation becomes all the more difficult to justify, particularly when one realizes that the readership seems to be able to potentially understand the creature thanks to its pathetic aura, thus the latter appears to integrate a community in the end: that of the readers.

The Victorian mentality was torn between spiritual beatitude and metaphysical pessimism resulted from a growing nihilism. This dichotomy regarding our epistemological conceptualization of knowledge and social behaviour was exploited as a watershed through the now archetypal scientist and his monster-creature, who easily became the embodiment of all form of aesthetical and intellectual subversion. Strangely enough, distorting knowledge in order to renew and update our understanding of natural laws was considered as inflammatory in a century that witnessed a succession of
major scientific discoveries. This image of the rebellious scientist that goes against a classical cognitive step outlived Shelley and Stevenson, and remains nowadays the way we visualize and conceptualize the scientist and his "art". The requisite attribute in fiction is still that of the over-achiever whose passion leads to any form and degree of eccentricity. The creature is a necessary feature of the supernatural science, offering an amazing introspection to the public, for "He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you long gaze into the abyss the abyss gazes also into you."  

Notes

1 Huet, 2004, 127.
2 Whale, 2005, video recording.
4 Cohen, 1996, ix.
5 Hawthorne, 1954, 185.
6 Ibid, 188.
7 Millhauser, 1873, 295.
9 Ibid, 77.
10 Le Fanu, 1993, 1.
11 Scott, 1962, 149.
12 Hawthorne, 1954, 178.
14 Ibid, 90.
15 Ibid, 180.
16 Carroll, 1987, 55.
18 Whale, 1999, video recording.

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**Filmography**


Eschatology, Etymology and Estivation: The Last Will and Testament of the Last Monster

Phil Fitzsimmons

Abstract: This paper is an exegesis of the monster or beast motif as found in chapter thirteen of the Bible’s last book, the ‘Revelation of St John’. This paper used the hermeneutic tools of the grammatico-historical form in tandem with the interpretation format of ‘chiastic distribution’ and rabbinical thought to cast light on this symbolic monster. Determining whom this beast represents has arguably spawned more theological misunderstanding than any Biblical concept. Reflecting some of this confusion as well as the dominant themes found in the theological sphere, the man-monstrous binary and the associated mythical number of 666 found in this chapter has become one of the most recognised symbols of evil in the Western World. This paper argues that the monster in this chapter, also cast as the ‘number of a man’, is not the typical antithesis of the Christian church or a demonic political entity as depicted in the movies. Rather this paper will contend that the monster represents ‘the epitome of deception’.

Key Words: ‘The Beast’, Revelation, sea monster

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1 Introduction: The Concept of the Alpha and Omega Monster

This paper had its genesis in the language use of several of the past delegates attending this conference project. In regard to the overarching concept of the monster they referred to this ideal as having an Edenic beginning within the human psyche and interaction with monsters. As I saw it, this term was underpinned by a logic flow that was laden with a nested array of metaphors and concepts that was vastly different to the notion that I suspect they were discussing.

Firstly, the use of the term itself reveals how deeply imbued the English language is with Hebraic metaphors. As Akenson claims, “European society (and its derivatives in the Americas and Australasia) is the joint product of Semitic and Hellenistic roots.”1 Secondly, he also believes that these Biblical metaphors have become the very basis of our conceptual system and everyday use of language. They are the means by which we “perceive, how we get around in the world, an how we relate to other people, …and play a central role in defining our everyday realities.”2 This leads me
to a third point and the foundation of this paper. Given the first two axioms, as I had always believed that the Judaic text reflected a world view that was circular, unlike the Western view concept linearity, I wondered if these could be extended into a third position regarding monsters in that, to continue the Semitic-Hellenistic underpinnings, could there be an ‘alpha-omega’ connection. In other words, could there be a link or connection between our concept of where and how monsters began in our cultural capital as an Edenic beginning, and a final concept of monstrosity as revealed in the Christian canon?

2 Methodological Appropriateness: From Testament to testimonio

Using the threaded notions detailed previously as guiding set of truisms, I turned to the Bible’s major discussion and description of all things pertaining to the ‘end’ and monstrous, the Book of Revelation. In particular I began to focus on the apparent monster as detailed in chapter thirteen of this book using the focus of monstrosity and not theology as the primary focus. While the latter was used a means of informing the first, I chose to focus on historicity and not elements of faith. It was at this point I became acutely aware of methodology issues.

As I seeking out the nature of primary narrative-linguistic connections, I initially turned to the current array of Christian and Jewish hermeneutical approaches for direction. While these five possible interpretative slants discussed their views on what constitutes the Beast in Revelation Thirteen, none offered any forms of linguistic linkage that I was undertaking. While the Historicist approach was the only focus attempting to use a similar connectedness that I was seeking it lacked specificity and so for a brief period of time I became methodologically stymied. However, taking the up the ‘grounded approach’ of reading by seeing and not simply looking, I realised two key issues.

The first issue was the impediment of using numbers as chapter divisions. These were not present in the original Greek and cause the reader to artificially divide the text into separate chunks almost as if they are unrelated. Turning to the theological literature is seems that while some exegetes actually do this, there is still a tendency to focus on individual chapters instead of seeing the bigger picture. When the chapter numbers are ignored the ideals of parallelism and juxtaposition become much clearer. That is, in this instance it becomes much more clearer that the concepts of the beast in Revelation thirteen are related to the ideals of Satan and attack as detailed in the previous chapter, “so closely that they are virtually one.” However, in the same manner, this chapter runs parallel to the next in which the beast is juxtaposed by focus on Christ in Revelation Fourteen. Indeed the language use of the ‘beast chapter’ utilises many of the elements ascribed to Christ, especially in the use of the ‘lamb’ and sacrificial symbology. It would
appear that when one stands back and looks at the bigger picture in the eschatological span between chapter twelve to fourteen there is a blurring or blending of the Dragon metaphor, into the attacking beast which in turn retains the facets of the former but melds into a set of Christ motifs.

This realisation lead me into the second insight in that chapter thirteen of Revelation had all the hallmarks of a ‘testimonio narrative’ in that it:

- was an emergent narrative that dealt with repression, political enmity, hegemony and marginality.
- although prophecy, its primary focus was an eyewitness account.
- was based on life experience.
- contained the presence of a powerful voice.
- addressed a larger, more global set of issues than the surface narrative.
- while it was encased in and utilised metaphor, it focussed on a delineating a ‘reality effect’.

As one of the key analytical tools of unpacking testimonio narrative, that of unearthing the author’s key ‘raw material’, tracing the meanings of the key lexical items in this text was further legitimised.

3 Making Connections

Revelation Thirteen has become so deeply embedded in the psyche of the Western World that many airlines operate planes that do not have a row thirteen and hotels quite often do not have a thirteenth floor. Despite being associated with the Devil’s chapter only three elements in its eighteen verses are really only vaguely known in the world beyond theology: the Beast, the man motif and the number 666.

In the research discipline of theology, while the term ‘Beast’ in this chapter has been dealt with exegetically for millennia, the key problem of unpacking the meaning of these connected motifs would appear that theologians have viewed the entire New Testament “through their own philosophical and cultural glasses rather than according to the historical and intellectual matrix form which that book emerged.”

In the following paragraphs these themes and motifs are viewed in light of their original meanings and how they were embedded in their primary narratives.

Following immediately after the description of the Dragon in Revelation twelve, the ‘beast arising from the earth’ is seen almost universally by theologians as representing Satan. This figure is continued on in the chapter but a bifurcation in which the Dragon now has two allies typified as two beasts. The latter however is also cast with figures and types typically associated with Christ. As stated previously, when the chapter
headings are removed and the text read holistically, the Dragon morphs into these beasts but retains elements of the Christ experience as paralleled in the ensuing Biblical chapter. An investigation into the etymology of the word ‘Beast’ also reveals that there is also a great deal of linguistic morphing taking place.

Although translated as beast in most translations, the typical Greek word therion (which denotes a wild beast) is now considered not used in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts, or does not fully delineate the actual meaning. As Stefanovic points out, the word is either connected to or is stated to be the Leviathan, a multi-headed sea monster with a coiled or twisted tail that inhabits the western seas. This concept is also found in some of the oldest Christian artwork such as the *The Little Garden of Delights* compiled in the twelfth century. As Campbell points out, the concept of the Leviathan in this illustration draws heavily on the narratives of surrounding cultures and previous oral and pictorial metaphors where the ‘Lord of the Abyss’, ‘the great deceiver’ is a scaly sea beast from which mortality arises.

“… in the classical mythologies he was Hades-Pluto-Poseidon; and in the Christian mythology he is, exactly, the Devil.”

Just as numerous ethnographers and archaeologists have come to understand this symbolic figure, several Biblical researchers and commentators also make reference to this sea beast having coils or twists. This directly relates to the derivation of the word itself. With seventy percent of the book of Revelation either a direct quote from the Old Testament or a paraphrase, this particular monster and its associated concepts of twists and coils are also found in many earlier Biblical narratives.

Conty in particular has found these elements in numerous narratives across several continents and several epochs. All are linked to the notion of coils, symbolising the cosmic ideal of the universe as being a labyrinth, as well as clear links to dragon figures. Conty believes that in fact a key facet is the common motif in which the dragon gives birth, out of its mouth to the twisting serpentine Leviathan figure. This linkage symbolises the creation of the universe, mortality of humankind and its final demise.

A From Dragon to Beast

The dragon is of course an ambivalent figure. For some cultures it is the epitome of evil and destruction, while in China it represents virtue. Jones has also noted this apparent contradiction but through his cross-cultural research has reached the conclusion that the concept of the Leviathan in Christian cannon can be interchangeable with the dragon figure and represents a high degree of counterfeit of truth. He also contends that it is the Leviathan’s death, as described in the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha and other Mediterranean narratives, is the precursor and cause of the end of the world. For Jones the notion of coiling and rebirth is linked to the finality of the
apocalyptic monster and that of the serpentine figure of the Genesis fall. As he sees it, the beast-monsters in Revelation thirteen are one of the same creature and represent absolute deception and demise couched in a veneer of truth. In other words, the beast arises from within the church itself.

Current Rabbinical scholars have reached similar understandings. Goldwurm believes that a more focussed summary of this Biblical section lies in the other apocalyptic-eschatological Biblical text, the Old Testament book of Daniel. He asserts that the antichrist of Daniel 7:26 (written in Aramaic) translated in Jewish and Christian canon as “his dominion is annihilated” should actually be translated as the “beast is slain.” The term ‘his dominion’ represents Satan arising from within concept of Christianity. Ford has made similar exegetical connections believing that the two ‘Beasts’ in Revelation is a metaphor for, … the double conflict with Satanic power, in the first the church overcomes, while in the second it is overcome. That is, overcome from within.

B The Number

The epitome of evil in the Christian sphere and as understood, or misunderstood, by the general population at large is crystallized in the three-fold number of 666. While there have been numerous theories put forward purporting to be able demonstrate the meaning of this tripartite numerical metaphor, few meet stand up to any rigorous investigation. Even the use of numbers as a means of transmitting understanding is a hotly contested issue in the theological discipline. The general consensus is that:
- few if any biblical numbers beyond the use of seven, twelve and the numbers in the book of Revelation are used as symbols.
- while the individual letters of the alphabetic systems in antiquity had a corresponding numerical and symbolic system attached, only the Biblical 666 has a genuine corresponding alphabetic relationship. However, the precise understanding and correspondence has a vast array of meaning depending on the hermeneutic viewpoint.
- at the contextual level the number 666 represents a form of an unholy trinity. Six represents the number of man, with 666 corresponding to a form of false man made worship that is close to the truth (seven being the number of perfection) but is actually a counterfeit.

In the narratives of the cultures that surrounded or pre-dated the compilation of Christian scriptures the number six has significant importance and relates directly to concept of the monstrous. One of the primary connotations is related directly to the worship of Saturn. More commonly known as Stur, this name has had along held numerical value of 666: “S=60, T=400, U=6, R=200”
As Campbell points out, Saturn was originally the Neolithic god of the earth. This was the central and most important of the earliest seven celestial deities. Coomaraswamy further explicates this cosmic array believing that one of the six arms of the ‘Cross of Spiritual Light’ by which the cosmos is at once created and supported was the light that penetrated the earth. Thus Saturn was more than likely seen by human kind’s earliest ancestors as the primary link between heaven and earth and both the spiritual and literal foundation of the universe.

However, other entities eventually took over the centrality of worship while through a gradual process of evolutionary religious paradigm shifts, Saturn became a darker and more devious figure in the overall religious pantheon. This shift is more clearly seen with his name becoming irrevocably linked to the architectural and mythical ideals of Crete, which in turn appear to be the archetypal narrative for the creation stories in this area of the world. In particular several key researchers in this field link make explicit links with Saturn and the concept of the Cretan mythologies that surround the Minataur, the bull-monster of Knossos. In his seminal text, Man and His Gods, Smith reveals that while all of the previous elements were part of the rich mythical milieu of the Mediterranean and beyond, there is a preponderance of evidence to suggest that the overwhelming religious conception was that Saturn was seen to be the actual Minataur.

While seen as a gift from Poseidon (already linked to the Christian concept of Satan) this bull was the centre of human sacrifice for Crete and several other cultures. However, just as the Minataur’s conception was characterised by a mixture of lust, betrayal and bestiality so to its final demise at the hands of Theseus is viewed in a similar light. As Conty further points out it was this concept of the monstrous that underpins all current narratives, and can be defined and understood as a decent into hades. Thus for the first century Christians reading St John’s Apocalypse, there is every chance that they would have seen the Beast in this chapter within the framework of the narratives of the Minataur-Saturn myth. While in this instance it arises from within the earth, or from hell, this monster has the trappings and metaphoric elements of the Messiah they worshipped. It was to be feared not because it appeared in it true guise, but because it has the appearance of a Lamb, the beast from within.

4. Gaining Meaning from the Monster and the Monstrous

The explanation put forward in this chapter has major implications for the eschatological understandings of Christian readers. It would appear that rather than facing an external monster, this beast arises from within the church itself. Perhaps the key facet of which is that the concept that the monster lies at the very heart of human identity and has done so from the earliest attempts to explain and explore religious and worldviews. Certainly
from time immemorial the monster has been a spiritual icon and a means of defining morality, ethics and otherness.

Interestingly, it would appear that Christian converts and writers had no problem appropriating pagan ideals into the new religion. Robertson has clearly demonstrated that the church of the first century merely borrowed and “sanitized” the numerous and mostly symbolic “human sacrifice” rituals of traditional pagan religions. While this was initially to allow a smooth transition of pagan converts, this also suggests that the early Christians also understood that the concept of the monster was a transtextual. In other words, both the author of Revelation and its readers understood that the Beast concept was apotelsmatic. That is, it could have multiple applications across cultures and time. It is through the monster symbol that humans have been able to express and idea of an end, a finishing off of the monster that lives within themselves, and a finality to the apparent capricious forms of decay that appears to dominate the physical world and cosmic elements. If nothing else, humankind has always been honest with itself, the monster symbol was created in that the hope that that which conquers us will finally be conquered.

Notes
1. Akenson, 1998, 3
2. Lakoff and Johnson, 1981, 3
3. Mauro, 1925, 20
4. Ford 1982, xiv
5. Campbell, 2001, 17
6. Ford, 1982, 155
7. Davies, 1978, 134
8. Ford, 1982, xv,
9. LaRondelle, 1997, 45
10. Hislop, 1984, 269
11. Coomaraswamy, 1997, 197
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Abstract: Resurfacing throughout western history, our monsters embody an ever-present form of threat. Whether as metaphors of anxiety, as narratives of pain and suffering, or as scriptural genres of wisdom, monsters provoke both fear and fascination. As a result, they remain central to discourses of normality. By transgressing the conventional and separating good from evil, human from inhuman, these liminal creatures also make good business. As Beal and Kearney (amongst others) argue, successful Hollywood monster-movies have used our sense of unease to illustrate how monsters as god, or god as monster, are essential ‘undead’ and keep returning. Using Scorsese’s remake of the noir film *Cape Fear*, this paper will explore what defines the monstrous in a world which simultaneously accepts and rejects the abjectness of God’s divine wisdom. Focusing attention on the Ambivalent Body by using Mellor and Shilling’s ideal type approach, I argue that Scorsese’s film incorporates an ever present element of threat. Not necessarily because an innocent family is stalked by a deadly psychopath, but because the bodily interaction in this film can be read to question dualisms that surround the monstrous.

Key Words: Christianity, pain, chaos monsters, Ambivalent Bodies, *Cape Fear*
monstrous and in particular monstrous pain. Using an ideal-typical approach to extrapolate from the Book of Job, I explore the ambivalence inherent in negative (demonised) and positive (deified) responses to chaos monsters and embodied pain in the so-called secular film Cape Fear. I argue that the normative negative response to pain inhibits the creative potential monsters try to reveal.

2. The Book of Job

The Book of Job suggests an intimate relation between bodily experience and understanding the world. In this narrative, a righteous Job has been singled out as the subject of a wager between God and Satan. As Gordis notes, Job’s story “is concerned with one of the oldest problems known to man [sic], the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked.” Job suffers catastrophic events such as the loss of wealth, social position, severe health deterioration, and the death of his children. Job’s body, marked and wounded by God, is torn open to the world as he experiences an “exhaustion of wisdom.” As Job’s “skin cracks and peels away” his voice of pain becomes an eruption of monstrous chaos within the divine order of creation. And so, under the “panoptic gaze of God”, Job’s theological quest begins.

Because of this embodied volatility and disruptive uncertainty Job can be classified within Mellor and Shilling’s ideal type the Volatile Body. Mellor and Shilling argue, in Re-Forming the Body: Religion, Community and Modernity, that there are hegemonically dominant religious forms of Western sociality that change over time. Drawing upon existing scholarly work, Mellor and Shilling’s ideal-types include three re-forming “bodies in time” and associational patterns of sociality: the Volatile Catholic Body, the Sinful Protestant Body and the Baroque Modern Ambivalent Body. Fundamental to this conceptualisation is the changing character and location of the sacred in relation to the lived body as it produces forms of embodiment and accounts of knowledge making. Accordingly these ideal types offer one way of exploring what is demonised and what is deified over time.

3. The Volatile Catholic and Baroque Body

The Volatile Catholic Body interacted on a daily basis with God, spirits, monsters, devils and angels. Within this enchanted, unpredictable and often dangerous world; identity, consumption and routine were church mediated standards of God’s divine (and sometimes unexplainable) wisdom. The Volatile ideal type is characterised by an engagement in highly sensuous body regimes and the embodied consumption of sacramental relationships. This body was immersed in an intense and passionate physicality that included various levels of bodily wounding that provided the source of religious truth. This ‘opened’ the body to Church ritual that was saturated
As a result, the volatile world of medieval embodiment was characterised by the organisation of carnal knowing and sensuous solidarities in which the close contact senses (touch and taste) were the key components of knowing oneself and one’s world. Embodied knowledge could be achieved through bodily interaction with images, such as emotive icons, paintings, engravings, relics, amulets and morality plays. Words filled this volatile world but were significant when they facilitated contact with the sacred or had power in magical transformation. For example, the power of words in sacraments such as marriage, confession, the Eucharist and in the sensual experience of good and evil, right and wrong. Words combined with trial by ordeal were instrumental in sending bodies to the excruciating pains of Hell. Consequently carnal forms of embodiment, with its excesses, passions, uncontrollable effervescence and contradictions, emphasised the fusion between experience and awareness. It enforced the mind’s location in the fleshy body that shaped, and was supported by, material conditions and social relations.

Mellor and Shilling claim that over time the open Volatile Body re-shaped into Baroque sensibilities that challenged closed systems and manipulated accepted practices. This Baroque Volatile Body demonstrated the creative potential of destabilisation through illusions. These illusions maintained the normative role of transformation and emphasised the inexplicability of the world. It also encouraged an “aesthetic of repetition” and the use of monsters to reveal sameness within otherness.

Seen through this Volatile Baroque Body, Job’s communication with God is directly and inescapably related to his wounded body. The pus in his sores, the poison in his blood, and the buzzing in his ears communicated the “impossibility of nothingness” – a suffering from which there is no refuge or retreat. In this theological horror Job’s speeches are passionate because his theodicy is embodied. Job’s pain steers him towards desiring and identifying with primordial chaos and so Job transforms his relationship with the monstrous.

4. The Protestant Sinful and Modern Body

At the same time as identifying with monsters Job seeks to explain and justify his pain. That is, he seeks to distance himself from monsters and bend them to his will. According to Beal, “in such moments the sufferer cries out for a world of reorientation with God’s universe, a world that can exorcise the monsters and restore the right order of things.” Mellor and Shilling note that a desire for order, rationality and understanding became hegemonic in the Protestant world. In this worldview, knowledge coalesced around a Sinful objectified Body that re-formed the Catholic Volatile Body.

The diverse expression of Protestant discourse, the rise in literacy and the teachings of Renaissance scientists and humanists were all influential
in disinvesting the re-forming Sinful Body of its sensory and sacred significance and emphasising the mind’s ability to receive the Word of God. The Sinful Body interacted in a profane environment prioritising human design, with a vision of disciplined bodies and an ordered controllable world in which a bodily self was isolated in its relationship with God. It was a world of predestination where salvation could never be assured because the body was sinful and mortal. This ‘closed’ the Sinful Body to sacred-communal associations and sought to limit human contact to rational encounters and intervention. Identity, consumption and routine were decided upon by the reflective individual and mediated through linguistic symbols, the Word of God and cognitive narratives of self. The text rather than the body became the source of religious truth. Diaries were the Puritan’s confessional where fear and weakness found in the sinful heart could be offered to God in a self-narrative text, which became widespread and normative.

As a result, the sinful world of Early Modern embodiment was characterised by the organisation of cognitive apprehension and banal associations. Knowledge could be achieved through cognitive factors such as reason, rationality and self-referentially. Cognitive reasoning combined with the distant non-contact senses (sight and hearing) were the key components of knowing oneself and one’s community. “Protestants emphasised the importance of the sacred but rendered it radically transcendent so that everyday life became thoroughly profane”. Profane intervention facilitated a social activism. Yet, even in this world, collective effervescence could not be eliminated. It was merely sublimated to cognitive projects and became manifest in a series of fearful others, such as returning monsters that needed to be controlled.

The Book of Job displays this respect for both rational arguments and the valuing of the word to control the self. Dailey suggests that, before the speech from the whirlwind, Job’s method for seeking wisdom is not through penitent confession, but through evidence and insight. Job’s friends, “wisdom’s guardians”, claim that Job’s sudden change in fortune must be connected to his sinful body and actions. The Jobian dialogues express Job’s struggle to reconcile suffering with a belief in a good and just God. Just as Calvinists in the future were to look for signs of election, such as living in idyllic happiness, Job’s friends looked for signs of Job’s transgression. This evidence-based form of argument and cognitive use of sight was the Sinful Body’s main method of acquiring knowledge.

However this dominance of rationalism begins to dissipate with Job’s disorienting voice of pain. Rather than accepting his misfortune, Job initiates a form of social activism by calling on the Leviathan and demanding destruction to obliterate his suffering body. Mellor and Shilling claim bodily obliteration is a sign of the reshaping of the Sinful Body into the Modern
Body. Modern sensibilities demand the use of control to order the universe, and this can include using monsters for one’s own ends. During the Enlightenment, control was achieved through the use of linguistic symbols in which a system of hierarchical dualisms was articulated. This “violent” hierarchy prioritised light, mind, good, pain-free, and beautiful over dark, body, evil, pain and monstrous. The modern resolution to this tension is two-fold. The first is to contain the threat – such as Job’s attempt to use monsters to contain God. The second is to obliterate the negative side of the dualism, just as Job tried to obliterate his body.

Despite this strategy of obliteration the final resolution of Job’s story, Dailey argues, can only be fully “appreciated through the paradoxical interplay of rational engagement and mystical detachment”. This interplay is what Mellor and Shilling capture in their third ideal-type the Ambivalent Baroque Modern Body. The Ambivalent Body is torn between the competing social impulses of the earlier Christian forms of embodiment and sociality. Ambivalence is created because the body celebrates sensual expression and corporeality and simultaneously exhibits an intense cognitive control that eventually obliterates the body. This ambivalence is found in God’s answer to Job. God, speaking through a whirlwind that symbolises chaos, change, destruction and movement, is the beginning of Job’s theophany. Rather than using the goodness of divine order to quieten Job’s rage, which might be the expectation of Mellor and Shilling’s Modern Body, God engages with both Job and the Leviathan to display the awesome timelessness of chaos and order. God “out-monsters” Job, showing just how awesome chaos and pain can really be. Through this process Job experiences the totality of God’s divine wisdom and goes beyond a sense of disestablishment and unmaking into a “radical inversion of meaning”. The currently normalised hierarchy of light over dark, mind over body, is questioned.

Schlobin argues that the peak of horror in Job’s story is that “the unmaking is followed by an unnatural and unholy making that no one, reader or character, can understand or coerce”. Moreover, as Beal proposes, “in the demolished ruins of the twin foundations of wisdom and Torah lies God’s acceptance of chaos”. Even more disturbing is God’s ability and desire to rouse it and revel in it. This return to valuing chaos monsters communicates bodily fear as well as fascination. Chaos monsters are “envisioned as a necessary prelude to a new, yet unrealised creation – a potential form”. In this way fear of pain re-forms to resurrect fear as awe, with spiritual and physical benefits. As an Ambivalent Body, Job transforms his rational understanding of God and the world. What appeared to be demonic chaos monsters are now valued as deified divine revelation with the potential to remake the world. This has implications for everyday insights into the evilness of monstrous pain.

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Satan’s rationale for inflicting monstrous pain on Job’s skin is that Job’s worldview cannot change until his embodied mind changes. Pain is the catalyst for this transformation. This corporeal perspective destabilises the ordering process in which stability (painless) is good and chaos (painful) is evil. Collapsing and blurring categorical boundaries in this way, disorients the modern reader’s taken-for-granted realm of hierarchically ordered ‘normality’. One could add that a Jobian theme of pain and wounding is also a socio-political metaphor for the monster’s revelation that punctures assumptions of stability that are only skin-deep. The skin, or the hide, is the surface calm of modernity, and the Book of Job reminds us that hidden below the skin are all that is abject, that is, all that is categorised as monstrous. Unpacking this dualism challenges the normative assumption that man should strive to bring order to control the monstrous body and eliminate pain. That is, that the right course of action is always to eliminate and neutralise the monster’s portend. Job’s story and the Ambivalent Body treat monsters that incite pain, suffering and violence as a constitutive element of the body within everyday life. As a result inherent in Job’s narrative is the Ambivalent Body.

Having established the ambivalent nature of sacred bodies and the creative transformation of the pain of chaos monsters, this final section will explore Scorsese’s remake of film Cape Fear. I investigate how the basic premise and resolution in this film is intimately connected with the Book of Job and ambivalent bodies. This film was chosen not necessarily because of its plot, but because it has its share of monsters who, through both fear and fascination, are embodied as the irrational to our rationality. In this exploration I will focus on the painful transformative experience of the two main male characters, Max Cady and Sam Bowden.

5. Max Cady

The worldview of the assumed antagonist, Max Cady is immediately conveyed in his somatic introduction. Cady, primarily a Volatile Baroque Body is visibly associated with the negative side of the dualisms. These include: the confines of a prison cell, tattoos that depict blood curdling pain and wounding by knife as well as a violent and painful death on the cross. These tattoos also revel in grotesque horror through intertextual association with Stephen King’s It, serial killer John Wayne Gacy, and emotional suffering from a torn and wounded heart. Cady does not attempt to obliterate or hide his pain, as is the expectation of Mellor and Shilling’s Sinful Modern Body. Instead he confronts his pain and forces the audience to confront it as embodied in his animalistic tendencies, his tattooed skin and the weight of the cross on his back. In this sense his body can be described using Mellor and Shilling’s terms Baroque and Volatile. He is everything that is monstrous and threatening about chaotic somatic expression.
Simultaneously Cady’s embodied performance, displays internal and surface control. He is an example of the Modern Sinful Body. Cady exhibits the external signs that Puritans used to judge moral goodness: strength, appearance and cleanliness. In addition, Cady used his time in prison to learn to read the Word - both secular and sacred - which demonstrated his commitment to higher learning above carnal knowledge. Cady is everything a Puritan might search for as a sign of pre-destination for the Kingdom of Heaven. This ordered body should put modern sensibilities at ease. Yet the broiling sky on Cady’s release from prison does not allow us to forget what is concealed beneath the ordered exterior of conservative clothing. Worse still, Cady’s surface control is symbolic of the skin’s control of volatile body fluids. The skin hides the potential for chaos and pain. Yet in its monstrosity it reveals the underlying anxiety that monsters are a divine revelation.

6. **Sam Bowden**

In contrast our first impression of Sam Bowden is that his body only displays the signs of election and living in idyllic happiness. Bowden believes these signs are secular achievements of success, but as Weber established they are derived from Calvinist understandings of Godly election. Bowden is contextualised as a respected lawyer. He has a family and dog, a high income and material assets. He is presented as in charge of his body by concealing and controlling it in business suits. He is clean and by implication so is his life. He exercises and is fit. Now the audience can be comfortable that it has found the ‘good’ guy. But what unfolds will challenge these dualistic assumptions.

While we may never sympathise with Cady, he provides an interesting justification for ‘monstering’ the Bowden family through the infliction of pain. This justification is similar to Satan’s attack on Job. Cady claims to be teaching Bowden and it is only because he refuses to listen and learn that the lessons become more personal in that they become more body-focused and painful. Cady claims that until people pursue the messages found in Jobian discourse and take responsibility for pain any creative potential is lost. As the audience gets to know the Bowden family, its opinion of Cady may not change, but the possibility that he may have a point becomes clear.

Despite the Modern Bowden’s denial of Cady’s lesson, the audience watches Bowden undergo a painful transformation from Modern to Baroque – from controlled but out-of-touch family man to chaotic monster. When Bowden sins in the context of his modern life, he becomes more abject; he is seen sweating and his hair dishevelled. But his worldview is only challenged when Cady inflicts pain on his body and the bodies of his possessions (his women). Morgan argues that Bowden’s mask as a lawyer in charge of himself is torn off. In his pain he discovers he has little personal strength
under that mask. He has no framework for understanding his pain, no ability to see it as anything other than wrong, evil and something to be eliminated. Bowden’s response is two-fold. The first is a Sinful Modern Body’s attempt to create surface control through the body’s containment - in this case Bowden decided to confine his family to the house. The second is a volatile project to use painful and abject violence to communicate with Cady. This response is reminiscent of Job’s desire to smash God through use of the Leviathan. Bowden demonstrates Nietzsche’s warning “whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster.”

In the final scene of the film, as the whirlwind dies down, Bowden’s murderous instinct is complete; his wounded body bloodied and punctured, his movements erratic, his focus is on inflicting pain and death. As a result the audience is left to wonder, is Bowden the monster haunting the primordial ooze of Cape Fear?

As Bowden transforms from modern control into bodily responsiveness, Cady transforms from criminal into wounded victim. He medicalises his body, cleansed for presentation to the legal system. The legal system is based on the Sinful Body’s desire for control. This results in Bowden being punished for losing control when he inflicted violence on Cady’s body. Like God’s voice from the whirlwind, Cady does not crush Bowden - instead he ‘out-monsters’ him. Throughout a night of horror, suffering and pain, Cady demonstrates the limitations of modern control in both the constructed area of law and bodily coherence. We may not agree that Cady’s behaviour is right, good, legal or Christian. However, this film asks; should we automatically dismiss the Jobian transformation Cady is inspiring just because the modern hegemony suggests we should dismiss other negative categories like ‘criminal’, ‘monstrous’, and ‘painful’? Secondly, if a lesson is inflicted through chaos and pain, is there still value in the creation it stimulates?

In challenging the hierarchical dualisms of modernity Cape Fear does not resolve ambivalent tension. The audience wants the monster dead and with Cady’s death that desire is granted. However even with Cady’s death his disturbing painful ambivalent revelation is still present. This film not only forces the audience to confront issues of violence and the attempt to anaesthetise pain and suffering in everyday life. It also questions whether good and painless - verses bad and painful - are always useful dualisms - just as the Book of Job did. Disrupting the conventions of how this genre usually works, the monster unsettles because it reminds us that this world (and ourselves) are simultaneously monstrously abject and divinely wise. As a result the audience is left wondering if the monster, which lurks in the primal space between fear and fascination, is the transforming self. That is, is there too much sameness in otherness?

The evidence so far has revealed that a focus on bodily
communication in *Cape Fear* demonstrates how pain stimulates bodily transformation from cognitive control to somatic expression and Modern to Baroque ideal types and vice versa. As mainstream films circulate the ambivalent aw(e)fullness of monsters and monstrous pain, bodies remain arenas of doubt–hide-bound in ambivalence. In the repetition of the dual deification and demonisation of the undead monster from the *Bible* to Hollywood, Mellor and Shilling’s framework makes visible that a demonisation of the monster-inflicting-pain results from the need to control chaos. However I suggest, a practicable alternative is, to hear the monster’s portend and understand chaotic pain as a catalyst for deified creative transformation. Therefore it is time to take notice of this ambivalent presence and resurrect the potentially positive value of monstrous pain - not as a violent replacement for the dualistic hierarchy but as a valued companion.

**Notes**

2 Beal, p. 5-6.
4 Beal, p 36.
5 Beal notes, “in the Book of Job, Job has been singled out as the subject of a wager between God and the accuser or *hassatan* (without a definite article, not proper name Satan), who is something like the prosecuting attorney on God’s divine council” (Beal, p. 39). “The idea of Satan as an embodiment of absolute evil or anti-god is not present in the Hebrew Bible, but rather develops during the intertestamental period. 1 Chronicles 21:1 is the only Hebrew Bible Text in which the noun *satan* (without the definite article) could be taken as a proper name. In that text it may just as well be translated an accuser or inciter.” (Beal, p .205)
8 Beal, p 36.
9 Beal, p. 37-43.


12 In broad terms, Mellor and Shilling argue a Durkheimian inspired Weberian ideal typical study of medieval Catholic and early modern Protestant forms of sociality provide a theoretical lens to examine the development of the Western world. Ideal types are a typological term constructed by Max Weber, 1864-1920. In *Economy and Society* he outlined ideal types and other concepts to develop for studying social action. Ideal types do not exit in pure form but are constructed from various characteristics and elements and arranged into a unified construct that stresses certain characteristic common to the phenomena. They are useful for an analysis of historical comparison. An example is Weber’s ideal types of legitimate authority in which Charismatic authority is used to study revolutionary force, e.g. Jesus Christ (Weber, 1968, 2002). The main criticisms of the ideal type approach are that ideal types tend to focus on extreme phenomena and overlook the connections between phenomena. It is also difficult to show how the ideal types fit into a theory of a total social system. Mellor and Shilling, using the criticism that Protestantism is so diverse that any attempt at generalization would be misleading or inaccurate, dispute this. They argue that although this is undeniable what is important is to focus on the limited nature of this diversity and the general conditions that underpinned it and made it possible. As a result an ideal-typical study of forms of embodiment allows the analyst to account for diversity and social forms at a general level (Mellor and Shilling, 1997) p. 9.

13 Mellor and Shilling stress that forms of embodiment cannot be reduced to thought or Foucault’s concept of discourse. Instead they should be likened to Marxian modes of production (Mellor and Shilling, 1997, p
14 Mellor and Shilling, p 65.
15 Mellor, Shilling, p 35- 97.
16 Mellor and shilling, p 58.
18 Ibid p 33.
19 Beal, p.4.
21 Beal, p 44.
22 Mellor, Shilling, p98-100.
23 Ibid p 10.
24 Ibid p. 125.
25 Ibid, p 43.
26 Ibid p. 55.
27 Ibid p.16.
28 Beal, p. 55. Mellor, Shilling, p. 16
30 Beal, p.37.
31 While the Enlightenment was instrumental in the articulation and enforcement of hierarchal dualisms, the concept was not invented in this era but traces are found in both the Bible and Greek philosophy. See: Kobialka, Michal, *This is My Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages*, Michigan: University Michigan Press, 1999 and Shildrick, Margrit. *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism and (Bio)ethics*, (London: Routledge, 1997),105.
33 Margrit Shildrick, p105.
34 Book of Job 3:1-13, 328.
36 Mellor, Shilling, 5,161-189
37 Beal, p54
38 Ibid.
40 Beal, p 54
41 Ibid
42 Beal, p44-45
43 Dailey, p 56-57
44 Beal, p. 52
Questioning The Negative Value of Pain

47 Cape Fear plot summary: Fourteen years after being imprisoned, vicious psychopath Max Cady (/Robert De Niro) emerges with a single-minded mission to seek revenge on his attorney Sam Bowden (Nick Nolte). Cady becomes a terrifying presence as he menacingly circles Bowden’s increasingly unstable family. Realising he is legally powerless to protect his beautiful wife Leigh (Jessica Lange) and his troubled teenage daughter Danielle (Juliette Lewis), Sam resorts to unorthodox measures which lead to an unforgettable showdown on Cape Fear. Martin Scorsese, ( Scorsese, Video recording sleeve).
52 Beal, p.55
54 Beal, p. 55.
55 Cohen, p.19.

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The Politics of Pornographic Pleasure in the
Legend of the Overfiend Saga

Shelley Smarz

Abstract: Anime, the Japanese abbreviation for animation, is a global phenomenon. Over the last ten to fifteen years, it - and its static, graphic form, manga - have gained popularity outside of its native Japan and have become a popular cultural phenomenon in North America. Anime relies on the same genres to classify narratives as live-action cinema does - such as comedy, action, horror, and pornography. However, anime creates what “a unique aesthetic world. . . . [that] is more provocative, more tragic, and more highly sexualized”.1

Tentacle sex - also known as monster porn, tentacle porn or tentacle rape - is an example of the innovative and fantastic pornography that is produced within anime. It depicts female characters being penetrated by tentacled, demonic, or monstrous creatures. In this paper I argue that, in the Urotsukidoji (Legend of the Overfiend) saga, monster sex in the genre of tentacle porn speaks to the current Japanese cultural anxieties surrounding pornographic sex, social gender, and the body. The increasing popularity of all anime, including tentacle porn, in North America indicates that the genre speaks to similar sensibilities here as it does in Japan.

Key Words: Urotsukidoji, Tentacle Sex, Anime, Pornography, Legend of the Overfiend

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While wandering around the Metro Toronto Convention Centre at last August’s comic book, science fiction, horror, and anime convention, I passed by a number of vendor’s stalls. I came across one particular vendor who was selling anime and had an assortment of DVDs on his table. I barely noticed it at first - I wasn’t looking for anime but the latest issue of Bear (a comic book by the brilliantly postmodern writer/artist Jamie Smart). As I passed by his table, the vendor barked out, “Those aren’t for you!” I paused, turning to see why this man - the same type of creepy sleazebag that my one male friend feared would be behind the counter if he had purchased his
pornography in a shop rather than online - had yelled at me. But he wasn’t
talking to me but a group of three boys around the ages of 13 or 14. As the
man waited for the boys to pass, he held his hand to shield their gaze from his
selection of tentacle porn DVDs. While his statement was an appropriate
response given their age, I was left wondering who those DVDs are for and
(perhaps most importantly) what those DVDs say about the cultures out of
which they are produced and consumed.

I first encountered tentacle sex as a teenager. Several of my male
friends were, and still are, fans of the genre - though their interest has shifted
from the tentacle sex found within the narratives to the narratives themselves.
Tentacle porn was their first experience of pornography of any kind; and they
bonded over it, together, as a rite of passage. Last August was, however, the
first time that I questioned the genre’s wider socio-cultural implications
(other than its role in my mates’ sexual maturation). In this paper, I will
explore the social context of tentacle sex in the Legend of the Overfiend or
Urotsukidoji saga, specifically how it responds to the anxieties about the
changing gender roles in Japanese society. The word Urotsukidoji is a
combination of two existing Japanese words: urotsuki, which means ‘scaled’
and doji, which means ‘child.’ Images of monstrosity - or the scaled child -
abound in the saga but the term also refers to the ‘scaled child’ of
contemporary Japanese society, that is, the metaphorical child-figure
produced from a period of gender role confusion and transition. In order to
complete my analysis, I will first look, briefly, at the medium of anime, the
category of hentai anime, and the tentacle porn genre. I will then move onto
how the social anxiety surrounding shifting gender identities in Japanese
society has affected gendered representations in tentacle porn. Finally, I will
analyse examples of representations of both women and men in the Overfiend
saga.

Cartoon and animated pornography allows more diversity in content
because the form gives greater freedom to the artist. He/she is not constrained
by the limits of either the human body or the technology used to depict it. For
example, animation is the only medium that tentacle sex - complete with its
phallic tentacles, gargantuan penises, and the mechanics of depicting sex acts
with such monstrous creatures - can be depicted. (Even if such fantastic
things were to be included in a live-action film, CGI animation would
account for some, if not all, of the special effects). Animation, in other words,
is a medium of fantasy. Furthermore, since artists do not (necessarily) require
human models, taboo or illegal subjects and sexual acts - such as rape
fantasies - can be depicted within the medium safely and fantastically.
Animation also solves one of the chief problems with live-action
pornography: the visual representation of female sexual pleasure. In her
analysis of hardcore pornography, Linda Williams argues that “the genre as a
whole seems to be engaged in a quest for incontrovertible ‘moving’ visual
Pornography is a genre of and about the body. Its goal is two-fold: it must not only demonstrate the sex act - penile penetration - but it must also represent its culmination in orgasm. In other words, it seeks to make explicit the bodily confession of pleasure for both its male and female participants. The first criterion is fulfilled through the use of close-ups, the hard-core narrative film is able to show the penetrative "meat shot". However, capturing the second - the visual representation of climax - is more problematic. While the "money shot" is visual proof of male climax and ejaculation, there is no visual verification of female orgasm. Therefore, the pleasure of the female protagonists in live-action hardcore films cannot be authenticated because of the limits of the body and the technology used to capture those responses. Animation, on the other hand, becomes a way that pornography can visualize and verify a woman’s orgasm. A scene in the first episode of the Overfiend saga demonstrates the ability of anime to capture the bodily evidence of female pleasure. When Akemi is raped by Miss Togami, a demon disguised as a human, visual evidence of Akemi’s pleasure can be seen on both Miss Togami’s fingers and on the tentacles that she’s penetrated Akemi with. Presented to the audience as sparkly vaginal secretions, anime is able to call attention to the proof of female pleasure by visually colour-coding it.

As the availability and popularity of anime and manga - anime’s static, graphic form - have increased over the last fifteen years so has its journalistic coverage. Journalistic coverage has often associated all anime with excessive violence and tentacled sex. These representations in popular media ignores the complexity and variety of the texts found within anime. Its generic coverage is the same to that of live-action cinema and includes “everything from politics and history to homosexual romance and hard-core sado-masochism”. Both its generic scope and narrative complexity leads Napier to conclude that anime provides a greater level of “psychological probing . . . [that is] seldom attempted in recent mass-culture Western film or television”. In other words, there is more to anime than gratuitous violence and monstrous sex - but even those movies that do contain these elements are more complex than they seem at first glance.

Erotic texts, especially ones dealing with tentacled or monstrous sex, have a long-history in Japan. Classically known as Shunga they date back to the Edo era (1603-1867). Modern Japanese erotic or pornographic texts are known, in the West, as hentai. Hentai differentiates itself from live-action pornography through its use of narrative to frame the sex acts depicted rather than being framed by them. According to Zitomer, the typical hardcore, live-action narrative “consists [solely] of sexual action”. There is “no real story, no characters or character development, [and] no attempt at imaginative camerawork”. The sex in hentai, on the other hand, is only one part of the narrative; it does not comprise it entirely. Zitomer goes on to state that if you
Sex, therefore, is used as a means to an end rather than as an end onto itself. Unlike its live-action counterpart, Japanese animated pornography is, therefore, “both thematically wide-ranging and narratively complex” and is also able to differentiate itself from other narratives within the genre. Hentai artists and animators (therefore) must remain innovative, continually creating more sensationalistic titles to keep the audience’s interest. For example, one way that they can accomplish sustained audience interest is to integrate sex into narratives “that are . . . related to the fantastic, [the horror,] the occult, or science fiction”.

Its focus on plot and characterization as well as the originality and creativity exhibited by its authors and animators has resulted in some theorists describing hentai as “the next step in animated storytelling”. The shift from episodic depictions of sex with very little plot to a plot-centred narrative with some sex scenes marks a dramatic shift in how pornography is presented in Western society. As a testament to the popularity of sex with a narrative storyline you only need to look at the numbers: hentai accounts for anywhere from 15-40% of the anime market in Japan. However, it only enjoys marginalized mainstream success in North America indicating that North Americans still prefer live-action, hardcore pornography. So while anime and hentai are no longer only in the domain of science fiction (and I say this lovingly as I am both) geeks and nerds, “the American general erotic video/TV market does not seem to be interested in tapping into the lode of Japanese animated titles”.

As a genre of hentai, tentacle sex - also known as tentacle porn or tentacle rape - demonstrates the use of horror, fantasy, and the occult to create sensationalized and creative pornographic narratives. Tentacle sex is a form of erotic horror that depicts female characters being penetrated by tentacled monsters and demons. The genre often portrays and explores rape fantasies, bondage fetishes, domination, and humiliation. The earliest instance of the genre is found in Katsushika Hokusai’s Edo-era (1820) woodcut depicting a woman being molested by a pair of octopi titled “The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife”. The rape fantasies that tentacle sex explores are typical of the bodice-ripper genre in romance novels where a female protagonist derives pleasure out of being “ravished.” Coercive sex, therefore, turns into ecstasy for the person being coerced - “her mouth says ‘no!’, but her body says ‘yes!’” In the Overfiend saga, this trope is used. After the Overfiend’s resurrection in a local hospital he rapes a nurse - reminding us of the belief that the best way to affirm that one is, in fact, alive is to have sex. This rape, therefore, represents brute force, coercion, as well as affirming the
Overfiend’s rebirth after three thousand (3,000) years. The nurse’s pleas of “No! Stop it!” soon turn into moans of ecstasy as she climaxes. As he penetrates her, visual evidence of her pleasure drips to the floor, demonstrating her body’s compliance in his coercion. It is this bodily consent that becomes the measure of the female’s pleasure. Her orgasm, therefore, ultimately excuses his coercion, his violation.

Modern tentacle sex was pioneered by Toshio Maeda, a famous manga artist in the 1980s. Overfiend - along with La Blue Girl and Demon Beast Invasion - were developed as a response to and a way to circumvent Japanese censorship laws that prohibited penile - but, strangely enough, not tentacle - penetration in manga and anime. Censorship laws were so strict that until 1991, two years after the release of the Overfiend saga in North America, the entire pubic region, whether shaved or not, was so obscene to Japanese society that representations of it were deemed unpublishable. Though censorship laws have since been relaxed, the genre is still used to explore anxieties of the culture in which it was produced. Tentacle sex is one of the ways in which drastic ideological shifts and the social anxieties that accompany them can be explored and controlled. Changing social roles and the resulting anomic are represented symbolically in “the violent and demonic depictions of both men and women in [pornographic] anime”.\(^\text{19}\) As women have become more independent and powerful in Japanese society, Japanese men have suffered an identity crisis. Though marginal in comparison, the transference of both the medium and the genre to North America indicates North Americans share a similar crisis of gendered identity.

The Overfiend saga is the most famous (and most infamous) example of tentacle porn. It was first published in manga or graphic novel form but was soon produced as an animated series of five episodes. The prevailing belief that all anime is full of sex and violence partly stems from the fact that the saga, which is “the most extreme example of the sex/horror” genre, was the first example of tentacle sex seen by North American audiences.\(^\text{20}\) The narrative is vast and complex - getting more complicated and convoluted as the series progresses - and, like most tentacle sex anime, the sex is surrounded and supported by a narrative. The narrative chronicles the re-emergence of the Overfiend after an absence for three thousand (3,000) years. He is a creature more powerful than any other and who will merge the universes of men, beast, and demon into one giant universe and rule over them all. However, though the Overfiend will bring unity to these three realms he also brings chaos and destruction.

Napier notes that the female body in hentai can be read as one of abjection and submission; of punishment, violation, and mutilation. However, she argues women’s bodies are also “awesomely powerful” forces within the narratives.\(^\text{21}\) An example of this can be found in the second episode of the
The sexually-liberated Megumi has sex with a demon. Their frantic thrusting culminates in Megumi’s orgasm which kills the creature, his lifeless body falling to the ground, harmlessly. She emerges from the sexual encounter sated and smiling, saying that “I haven’t come that good for a long time.” When you contrast this scene with the resurrection of the Overfiend and the subsequent rape of the nurse late in the first episode, it demonstrates that both Megumi and the Overfiend have the power of orgasmic destruction.

The female body is also a place of fear. After his orgy goes horribly wrong, Ozaki is caught and consumed by the demon that has killed the three women Ozaki was having sex with. After a brief struggle, Ozaki is pulled into the creature’s belly through an opening in its pelvic area. This scene of consumption reminds the viewer of the myth of the vagina dentata. According to Freud, fear of a “toothed vagina” signifies men’s fear of castration. Though the demon’s vagina lacks teeth, the creature’s distended abdomen, when combined with its vaginal-like opening, suggests that its belly is, in fact, a womb. The scene, therefore, becomes a scene of abjection, a nightmarish inversion of birth where the monstrous mother consumes her offspring. Ozaki is pulled back into the womb through the demon’s “vagina.”

The uterus is no longer a place of life, but a place of death - the womb is meant to become Ozaki’s tomb.

Williams argues that hardcore pornography is a site of masculine “uncertainty and instability.” The genre of tentacle rape is no different from live-action hardcore films. In the Overfiend saga, the masculine body is a site of contestation and bifurcation, torn between the feminine and the masculine. The two masculine character types in the Overfiend saga are the “comic voyeur” and the “demonic phallus incarnate.” The former is embodied by men who are powerless, weak, and social outcasts. The only “powerful” male - that is, one who adheres to the values and norms of hegemonic masculinity - is the popular basketball player, Ozaki, who is killed within the first 28 minutes of the story. The “infantile, passive” males remain and are continually frustrated in their attempts to “see, touch, and ultimately have sex with women,” specifically Akemi. Their narrative function is to provide comic relief. In the Overfiend, the role of the comic voyeur is filled by the character Amano. When we first encounter him on-screen he is hidden in a closet off of the ladies’ change room at the university. There, he masturbates, watching the cheerleaders change. Amano’s loud climax alerts the women to his presence and he is forced to hide behind some athletic equipment, narrowly escaping detection by Akemi. As the narrative progresses, the audience comes to realize that Amano is the “letch that everyone laughs at.”

After Amano is reborn - he is the Overfiend’s human host - Niki takes over the role of the powerless, yet comic, voyeur. To escape this powerless, passive, and pathetic role, Niki is only given one option to acquire the hegemonic masculinity he so desperately desires to have: he must cut off his
own penis and replace it with a demon’s. He must then shed the blood of two people to reinforce his status as a powerful male. Masculine power and privilege, however, comes at a cost: self-mutilation. Consequently, Niki’s phallic power is false because comes from the transplanted demon penis (a penis that eventually rots off his body) and not from his own masculinity.

Similarly, the tentacled demons also lack masculinity. They are presented as everything the comic voyeurs are not: powerful, active, and penetrative. The demonic “male body [is the one] that constantly gains sexual satisfaction” but it is also an inhuman one. His “origin, iconography, and substance” makes him the “Other”. He is “demonic, made of steel, [and] bulging with [phallic] tentacles”. While the voyeur watches, the demon acts, penetrating his female partner-victim with both his penis and with as many tentacles as is possible. The men in the narrative occupy a tenuous and shifting gender - they are neither male nor female. Literally and figuratively the Other, they are associated with the feminine with their bloated womb-like abdomens, complete with a vaginal-like opening. Both male body types, therefore, demonstrate that there are no “real” men who can access “real” power in the Overfiend saga.

You cannot separate the text from the socio-cultural context out of which it was manufactured. As it is consumed, it reproduces those values, norms, and fears of the culture that informed its production. Going back to the questions I posed at the beginning of this talk (paper), I conclude that both of my questions (“Who are these DVDs for?” And, “What do they have to say?”) are ultimately connected. In general, these narratives are concerned with the postmodern condition: the fluid nature of identity and the fragmented society. They “speak sex” as a way of exploring the resulting anxieties and it is through the “fascination with gender roles and . . . transgressions” that these tensions can be resolved.

Notes
2 My thanks to my co-panelist in Albuquerque, Professor David Hopkins of Tenri University, Japan, for pointing this out to me.
3 Dr. Natsumi Ikoma (from the International Christian University, Tokyo, Japan) also noted that urotsukidoji can also be translated as the wandering child (from urotsuki, ‘wandering,’ and doji, ‘child’). In this case, then, the title not only refers to the metaphorical product of gender role changes but also the state of gender role anomie - the wandering, child-like normlessness - that precipitated it.
Although there are live-action, hardcore pornographic texts that do feature an ejaculating female, this physical response – unlike its male equivalent – is a rare response that occurs in a very small percentage of the population. Female ejaculation, therefore, is not an accurate marker of female orgasm.


10 Napier, pp. 6-7.


12 Patten, pp. 115-116.

13 Napier, p. 64.

14 Napier, p. 64.

15 Patten, p. 116.

16 Patten, p. 118.


18 Williams, p. 164.

19 Napier, p. 80.


21 Napier, p. 65.

22 Williams, p. xvi.

23 Napier, p. 65.

24 Napier, p. 65.

25 Napier, p. 65.

26 Napier, p. 79.

27 Napier, p. 79.

28 Williams, p. 229.

29 Napier, p. 11.
Shelley Smarz

Bibliography


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The Webcam as the ‘Evil Eye’ in Child Internet Exploitation.

Colette Kavanagh

Abstract: The Evil Eye is one of the world’s most widespread beliefs. It has been documented for thousands of years, and is so universal that it must be considered one of the oldest mythologies known to humankind: the petrifying effect of its gaze can transform one into a dehumanized object of fear and shame.

The primary meaning of the word ‘fascination’ from the Latin *fascinatus*, depicts the ‘Evil Eye’. It implies mesmerizing with the eyes like an animal with its prey. It suggests to enchant, to charm, or to entice through seduction, because it is imbued with overtones of sexuality and fecundity. Belief in the Evil Eye is still alive, and appears in myths and symbols cross-culturally. In all languages it portrays one eye, never plural, and has associations with covetousness and envy. It can hide evil under the mask of friendship.

One of the ways the Evil Eye manifests in modern culture is through the perverse use of the webcam: it offers the ability to see the person one communicates with over the internet, but it is also used to exploit children. In the privacy of their bedrooms, this inexpensive camera, in the form of a single eye, results in thousands of children becoming unknowing participants in the twenty-billion-dollar online pornography industry. Webcam predators are sophisticated in manipulating children into undressing, showering, or masturbating online for the person they believe is a single viewer, or their ‘special friend.’ These performances are then posted on for-pay pornography sites without the knowledge or consent of the minors, or their parents, who are unaware of what is happening beyond the closed bedroom door. Many children are petrified by the shame and humiliation of having their acts disclosed to their parents or educators.


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Beauty, it is said, is in the eye of the beholder, but so is evil. Belief in the ‘Evil Eye’ has been documented for thousands of years, and is so universal that it must be considered one of the world’s oldest mythologies. Its persistence and scale is remarkable. It can be traced from Neolithic times to
The webcam as the “Evil Eye” in Child Internet Exploitation

The present day, and its influence is worldwide. It is found in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Africa, the Middle East, India, China, South America, throughout the Mediterranean countries and Northern Europe. The idea of an evil eye has terrorized man since the dawn of history. In all languages the eye is singular: it speaks of one eye, never plural. The belief has also entered many religions including Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

The prophet Mohammed himself firmly believed in the Evil Eye, and the sacred book of the Muslims, the Koran, attests to this. The particular verses (sura) that mention the Evil Eye are included in small scrolls rolled up and enclosed in a leather covering hung from the neck as protection against the Evil Eye.

Even modern day Kabbalists wear amulets to protect themselves against this malicious power.

The Evil Eye is a symbol that forges a link between the mind and the eye: an evil eye reflects an evil mind. It suggests a power that emanates from a one-eyed monster whose gaze can harm the physical or mental state of a person or animal, and destroy crops or objects. Victims trapped in its gaze are held spellbound: they become so paranoid that even an innocent look may be suspected of wishing harm. They see plots everywhere and suspect the worst.

In most cultures the belief has associations with the idea of envy. In fact, envy is such an integral part of the belief system that ‘in some places, such as North Africa, and many of the Muslim countries, the Evil Eye takes on the name of the Eye of Envy.’ There is a wish to harm anyone who is perceived as having more than another, especially when or where resources are limited. Therefore, anything that could provoke covetousness, such as boasting of one’s good health or fortune, had to be avoided. If one felt victimized, some ritual or charm was immediately used to nullify the curse. Christianity, too, adopted the idea of the Evil Eye and it is mentioned in the Bible. Envy is named as one of the seven ‘deadly’ sins, and is also listed in the Ten Commandments: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife; thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s goods. Envy cannot occur without someone being its target. “Infants, children, and those in the bloom of youth” are especially vulnerable to being coveted. Perhaps their purity and perceived absence of evil may evoke the desire in others to possess that innocence for themselves. Also, without children future generations cannot survive. Therefore it is feared that the Evil Eye can cause them misfortune, illness, and even death by a mere gaze. But why the eye, one might ask? Why not the heart, the organ associated with passions like love or hate, or the
mouth with its capacity for gossip and slander? In most cultures, the eye is the symbol of intellectual perception and the discovery of truth. The eye knows because it sees. We may say ’his eyes were opened,’ meaning that a rational or religious truth has been unveiled. To be ’all seeing’ is to be all-powerful, and to have ’second sight’ is like the ’inner eye,’ or the ’eye of the heart,’ so common among mystics. The eye is also the organ of deceit: its impartiality is subject to illusion and delusion. One can look without really seeing and exclude reality when the mind wants to do so.

The expression ’if looks could kill’ contains echoes of the ancient fear of being looked upon by an enemy. To be ’ill’ originally meant to be ’morally evil; causing harm, pain, or disaster’. Even the word ’fascination,’ stemming from the Latin fascinatus, primarily depicts the Evil eye. It describes the act of transfixing with the eyes like a serpent with its prey. In addition, it means to bewitch, to charm, or to irresistibly captivate attention through seduction: an act imbued with overtones of sexuality and fecundity. This may explain why ’virtually all amulets, all gestures, all imprecations that protect against the Evil Eye are sexual in character’. They frequently represent the phallus, the vulva, or the seed. Sexual taboos play a tremendous role in the myths of the Evil Eye. Victims are terrified of anything that can peer into their conscience whereby they may suffer the humiliation of being exposed to the community. Unacceptable, incestuous or adulterous feelings have not been regarded as part of one’s own inner sexual conflicts, but rather caused by ’evil suggestions’ implanted by an external enemy: sexual frustration, impotence or infertility have also been ascribed to some evil spell. Evil Eye beliefs have been transmitted cross-culturally through myths and symbols. Myths influence our worldview, our ideas and ideals, and consequently our judgement, emotions, and actions. They penetrate all areas of life, and can be seen in education and child-rearing practices, sexual attitudes, and our legal systems. They manifest in politics, religion, media, humour, and the arts. Like dreams, myths communicate the contents of the unconscious to the conscious mind. Robert A. Johnson explains:

A myth is the collective “dream” of an entire people at a certain point in their history. It is as though the entire population dreamed together, and that “dream,” the myth, burst forth through its poetry, songs, and stories. But a myth not only lives in literature and imagination, it immediately finds its way into the behaviour and attitudes of the culture - into the practical daily lives of the people.
Symbols, too, have enormous power, yet we take them for granted. We are surrounded by them, but seldom stop to think of how they affect our lives. We are only vaguely conscious they are even there. Yet, symbols are psychotropic and, whether we like it or not, these images influence our minds.

Symbols change over time. They can lose their meaning or no longer maintain their power. Sometimes they even seem to disappear altogether. However, symbols and mythic motifs that are archetypal – that form part of our instinctive patterning or psychic DNA – evolve, and return as new myths and symbols. They are the means by which our culture’s accumulated knowledge and experience passes from one generation to the next. Consequently, the archaic eye image has transformed itself throughout the ages, while continuing to serve as the symbol of evil.

In our present era of science and technology, new images and symbols enabling us to see connective patterns are rising from our depths. These symbols may not be the exact images of what they portray, but they can be identified symbolically. In this way, the webcam, when used in a perverse manner, can be viewed as a modern day symbol of the Evil Eye - and just like in ancient times, our children’s futures are threatened by its power. This small ‘single-eye’ camera, usually perched on top of a computer, offers the ability to see the person one communicates with over the Internet. Webcams provide great benefits such as allowing parents or grandparents to have an ‘online visit’ with their family in far-off places. However, webcams are also being used to exploit children.

A recent report by McKinsey Worldwide estimated that today commercial child pornography is a $20-billion industry worldwide, fuelled by the Internet. Webcam pornography has only emerged in the last few years, but it is already a significant part of this pornography industry. There is also strong evidence of increasing involvement between this industry and organized crime. Entire infrastructures have emerged to sustain this business, including credit-card processors who provide support for webcam child pornography. There are also scores of marketing sites known as ‘portals,’ and what is most disturbing is that major American and international companies advertise on these portals. These advertisers included webcam manufacturers.

Nowadays, children are more frequently online. It is estimated that approximately 75 million minors in the United States alone access the Internet daily either from their home, schools, community centres or libraries. They entertain themselves, chat with their friends, research, listen to music, and do their homework online. They need the Internet for their education, their careers and for their future: to deny them access is not a solution.
However, as technology has evolved, so too has the creativity of predators and their methods for victimizing children. There are people who make their living searching the Internet for children with webcams, luring them into sexual performances and selling the resulting pornographic videos. To aid such people in disguising their true identities, there is software available that allows anyone to make a recorded video appear to be a live webcam transmission. The result is that a middle-aged man can portray himself as a teenage boy or girl; complete with the video needed to convince anyone who doubts.\(^\text{14}\)

The victims are becoming younger. According to a recent report in the U.S. by the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, 19 per cent of identified offenders had images of children younger than 3 years old; 39 per cent had images of children younger than 6 years old; and 83 per cent had images of children younger than 12 years old.\(^\text{15}\) Another investigation identified 70,000 customers on one site alone paying $29.95 per month, using their credit cards to access graphic images of small children being sexually assaulted.\(^\text{16}\) These statistics are monstrous, and if a concept of ‘evil’ is conceptualized as ‘evil deeds,’ then these deeds are evil.

Evil is an abuse of power. It involves hate relationships and the destruction of beauty. Like envy, evil cannot stand other people’s genius and creativity which our young have in abundance: they represent beauty, new life, creativity, potential and our hopes for the future.

The Internet has provided predators with the means to remain anonymous. Before the Internet, they had to hang around schools and playgrounds in order to get physically close to the children. However, this was dangerous because the adults could spot them too. Now those risks are gone. Predators can act like ‘one of the kids’ online without revealing their identity. As long as they don’t say or do something in the public chat room that exposes them, they can stay there forever, taking notes. And, many of them do. They create large databases on children, tracking their likes and dislikes: information about their parents or friends, their favourite computer games, or rock groups. This gives the predators the means to gain their friendship, and then victimize them.

Social networking websites, such as MySpace.com, and the use of webcams, are now utilized by millions of people worldwide. Social networking sites permit registered users to create an online profile. This can include photographs, a list of areas of interest such as music and sports, and an online journal with highly personalized information. For young people this is an easy way to find new friends, and to share their thoughts, interests, and feelings. However, cyber predators can also access this personal information, and then groom their victims by appearing to be their ‘friend.’ They have only one objective: to lure minors with their ‘fascinating’ gaze.

In Greek mythology, teens and pre-teens fall under the influence of
Hermes, a god of Communication who today is a ruler the Internet. However, Hermes is also an archetypal trickster who may lie, cheat and steal. If the parental relationship does not allow enough room for growth, these minors resort to lying or cheating. Their maturation process seems somehow to require it. If the controls are too tight, this mercurial trickster encourages them to slip through their parent’s fingers and steal their right to freedom:

Hermes embodies a youthful vitality that enhances change, especially when faced with the new challenges of our time and culture. His distinctive transformative ability incites the young to deconstruct the beliefs, values and mythologies of their parents’ generation because these values may not be appropriate for tomorrow’s world. As trickster, he is driven to violate all taboos, especially those that are sexual or scatological in nature. He is highly sexual, but his sexuality can be somewhat crass, lewd and primitive.

Teenage years are a time for personal and sexual exploration, and for risk-taking. Teens seek thrills and challenges such as sexually communicating with an adult on the Internet. Their hormones are raging, and crossing the sexual threshold isn't as frightening online as it would be in real life: that's part of the thrill. Sometimes they create a promiscuous sub-personality: pretending to be someone other than who they really are. They lie, they pose, and act out sexual fantasies. To them, raised on television, the internet isn't real. It’s ‘just a game’ and they do things online they would never dream of doing in everyday life.

Hermes is also the god of boundaries and thresholds. He does not create them: he dissolves them. He is the guide and messenger between the worlds: the worlds of gods and goddesses, maidens and monsters, the earth plane, and the Underworld or realm of death. Today cyberspace is the terrain where the young generation transcends these boundaries and, more often than not, their parents do not even know what they are up to.

The Rutgers Nisso Group recently completed a survey with eleven thousand teens and pre-teens from diverse social, educational, and cultural backgrounds in the Netherlands. They concluded that one in four boys, and one in five girls aged between twelve and eighteen had had cybersex in the last six months. Most of them had found it exciting and fun. Half of the boys and girls had fallen ‘in love’ (verliefd) with a stranger they had met on the Internet. A staggering 43 per cent of boys and 35 per cent of girls had had physical contact with the person off-line. The report also revealed that almost half of those interviewed had been approached in the last year to undress and perform sexual acts in front of webcams. Some 39% of these boys, and 11% of these girls had agreed to do so.

Paradoxically, the paedophile or cyber predator also embodies many characteristics of the trickster Hermes, but in the most perverse form. Hermes is the master of cunning and deceit who may lie and cheat to gain access to his prey. He may cross the threshold of legality without a qualm,
and can easily lie under oath. As an archetypal seducer, he is frequently motivated by lust, commerce and greed. His eroticism is not oriented towards relationship or fertility. His ‘love’ is gained by theft - he destroys trust and innocence without any moral concern for the consequences.

Like Hermes, the predator wears the ‘Cap of Hades’ whereby he can make himself visible or invisible at will. He is the messenger between mortals and the Underworld and leads souls to the land of the dead. He is the nocturnal prowler, the skilled thief, and master of night-tricks: like Hades, he is trickery and darkness.

A recent study done by Parry Aftab, Esq., the world’s largest Internet safety organization, shows that astounding number of the girls in the U.S. between the ages of thirteen and sixteen years admitted to engaging in cybersex.23 One could argue that at this age of sexual experimentation girls are better off acting out in their own bedrooms where they can remain anonymous, do not run the risk of contracting AIDS, nor the risk of getting pregnant. However, Family PC Magazine reported that 24 per cent of the teen girls, and 16 per cent of the teen boys they interviewed admitted to meeting with Internet strangers in real life.24 That too is part of the thrill. At this age they like to feel adult, and they think they are clever enough to do this without getting caught. What they don’t realize is that their actions may have unforeseen consequences, or that things can go horribly wrong.

While innocently appearing on their webcams without clothes, perhaps just for fun or as a dare from friends, they are unaware that these images may end up on a for-pay global commercial pornography website without their knowledge or consent. These young people do not perform for money. They are being tricked into stripping and masturbating online for the person they believe is their ‘friend.’ Some even become victims of blackmail: they are threatened with disclosure to their family or educators if they do not perform on demand. Terrified of being exposed, of being transformed into a dehumanized object of shame, they obey every wish of the predator.

For the children who suffer shame, the world is full of eyes: the omnipresent ‘fascinating’ eye, or the annihilating Evil Eye that watches every moment of self. The anguish, distress and shame is caused by this element of exposure. It is the social significance of the act, the eye of the other that produces the shame. This emotional state can be so devastating that the victims wish to disappear, to hide, or even to die. They are visible but not ready to be visible, looking but afraid to be seen.

While it is difficult to imagine the enormous power that pre-literate people attributed to the Evil Eye, their very survival depended on the belief in their own inherent ability to control its influence. For this reason, symbols, amulets, gestures and rituals were devised to protect them against this malicious force. Believing that ‘like cures like,’ one of the most common
symbols used was also an eye – one that gazed back at the Evil Eye.\textsuperscript{25} It was imperative they protected themselves, their crops, tools and belongings, and most importantly their children, without whom future generations could not survive.

Today it is our task to find new symbols that will protect us. Since ‘the Eye’ has now entered cyberspace, it seems evident that the symbols of protection will be found there too. As in ancient times, ‘the Eye’ is being turned back on itself; the organization for Child Exploitation and Online Protection, or CEOP, has a webpage displaying an icon to ‘Report Abuse’. The symbol is a single eye, and by clicking on it, a link opens to the international agencies where child abuse can be reported. However, the time has come when we can no longer claim the Evil Eye to be solely an external power. We are all capable of envy, covetousness and abuse, and we must recognise the potential for this evil force in ourselves.

Notes

3 Gravel, op.cit., p. 7.
4 ‘From within, out of the heart of men, come evil thoughts…coveting, …envy’ – Mark: 7:22. Christ himself gave an example when he cursed the fig tree so that it withered – Matthew: 21:21.
5 ‘You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, nor a male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that is your neighbour’s’ - Exodus, 20:17 Holy Bible. \textit{Revised Standard Version}. Second Catholic Edition. Ignatus Press, San Francisco, 2006.
8 \textit{Webster’s Third New International Dictionary}, 1961. s.v. ‘fascinate.’
9 Gravel, op.cit., p. 6.
12 K Eichenwald, ibid., p. 1
13 P Aftab, ibid., p. 1
14 Eichenwald, ibid., p. 4
15 Allen, ibid., p. 6.
16 ibid.
17 The Rutgers Nisso Group is the Dutch expert centre for scientific research on sexuality in the Netherlands and internationally. The eleven thousand participants were contacted through social networking websites and, therefore, may not be a representative sample.
18 Rutgers Nisso Group, Utrecht, 2006, 2:3., p. 10. ‘Cybersex’ involves masturbation.
19 ibid.
20 ibid., p. 15.
21 Hermes is the father of Pryapus, the god who always has an erect phallus. In Roman mythology, Pryapus was also known as Fascinus. The word ‘fascination,’ stemming from the Latin *fascinum*, may mean ‘fascination of the evil eye’ as well as ‘phallus.’
22 Aftab, op.cit., p. 3. The report describes cybersex as “having graphic sexual communications online, typically with strangers they encounter.”
23 ibid.
24 In Malta, the symbol of an eye is still painted on the bow of fishing boats.

Bibliography


Colette Kavanagh is an Irish Cultural Psychologist and Mythologist. She currently resides in Amsterdam, the Netherlands working as a writer and lecturer.
Section 7:

Religion, Gods and Theodicy
Māra: The Depiction of the Monstrous in Buddhist Literature

C. D. Sebastian

Abstract: The vast corpus of Buddhist literature depicts the monstrous plentifully, and it is called as Māra or Namuci. Māra has been identified with the ancient symbols of Death, Yama, Mṛtyu, etc., as the name evidently means “the slayer”. Māra is an important figure in the mythology of the Buddhists. In all the Pāli texts, Māra appears as a living, active and mischievous imp or celestial being. This is his personal aspect, as he is a mythological being with a distinct individuality. There is also an impersonal aspect of Māra which in many passages he is merely regarded as a symbol of Evil, Sin, Desire and Temptation. He then belongs more to the realm of Allegory than of Myth. In Buddhist Sanskrit literature too Māra has personal and impersonal aspects. However, the personal aspect of Māra is not so important in the later Buddhist literature, as his figure gets resolved into the abstract idea of Evil. The impersonal and allegorical aspect of Māra is emphasized, and the personal and mythical aspect gets entirely ignored. The metaphorical interpretations make it clear that the real battle is not with outward mythological monsters but with the emotions and passions one finds within oneself; for, Buddhism is a religion of here and now. Māra is often interpreted to symbolize the mental afflictions that cause suffering, especially the principle afflictions of greed, anger, and stupidity. Thus, Buddhism, as a discipline, permeates into philosophy, religion and even psychology.

Key Words: Buddhism, Defilement, Desire, Devil, Evil, Māra, Namuci, Sin and Temptation.

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The large collection of Buddhist literature depicts the monstrous plentifully, and it is called as Māra or Namuci. The word Māra is derived from the Sanskrit root mṛ which means “to die”. It may be taken to mean “misery, misfortune or evil”. Māra is also called Namuci in Buddhist literature. Namuci means “the non-releaser” in Pāli, because as the personification of ‘death’ Namuci (Māra) allows none to escape from his clutches. Namuci is mentioned as an Asura (demon) in the Rgveda. Māra has been identified with the ancient symbols of Death, Yama, Mṛtyu, etc., as the name evidently means “the slayer”. There can be little doubt that the figure of Māra comes from the Brähmanic legend of Death, the wicked
and there is the legend of fights of gods with monsters, like Indra with Namuci or Māra. The figure of Māra was adopted from the Brāhmaṇa mythology, but his character was changed. In the Buddhist literature he is not merely the god of death, but lord of the realm of sense. Māra is the personification of Sin, Evil, Desire and Temptation in the Buddhist literature.

Māra is an important figure in the mythology of the Buddhists. He is the Buddhist devil. Technically a god (deva), Māra is the enemy of the Buddha and constantly tries to disrupt his teaching in order to prevent the beings reaching nirvāṇa where they would be beyond his clasp. He makes two main appearances in Buddha’s life: one just before Buddha attained enlightenment and the other shortly before his death. On the first instance of his appearance in Buddha’s life, accompanied by his daughters he tries to tempt and frighten the Buddha, but he could not succeed. On the second instance he tries to persuade Buddha to pass away into parinirvāṇa, but Buddha delays his passing for a time.

Māra, as stated above, is an important figure in the Buddhist mythology. He appears as a living, active and mischievous imp or celestial being in the Pāli texts. For instance, we see in the Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta Buddha telling his dear disciple Ananda that Māra has frequent assemblies. We see also in the same Sutta that Māra tempting Buddha to pass way from the world. Further we see in the Māra Samyutta, Māra and Buddha debate on whether the possessions are sources of joy and grief; Māra taunting Buddha as the latter is resting after an attempt on his life, Māra proclaiming his dominion over the sensory world, but Buddha explaining that he (Buddha) dwells in the one place that Māra can never go, and Māra, seeing that Buddha has developed the four bases of power (iddhipada), tries to persuade him to give up the monk’s life and become a righteous and powerful world ruler. We see also in Bhikkhuni Samyutta that Māra tempts the nuns by asking questions to confuse them in the disguise of a man. These instances show that Māra is depicted as a living and active imp in the Pāli texts. This is his personal aspect, a mythological being with a distinct individuality. This import of Māra is not our intent in this paper, but Māra is taken as a symbol of enduring evil within and outside human being.

Let us have a glance at the classic and dramatic encounter that takes place between Siddhārtha, before he became Buddha, and Māra. The narrative goes in a high dramatic form. When Māra saw what Siddhārtha was trying to do, he had been keeping a close eye on Siddhārtha’s activities. Māra tried to tempt Siddhārtha to give up his quest. He had whispered insinuations to Siddhārtha’s ear that his energy would be better spent earning merit for himself by doing good works. When Māra saw that Siddhārtha was on the success path to get enlightened, he decided to embark on an indomitable
attack with his band of demons aided by elephants, horses, chariots, infantry, auxiliaries and all. However, Siddhārtha was entirely unmoved by all these, and the attack got buckled. Māra ran away realizing that he was beaten and lost his game. In spite of his out-and-out defeat in his attempt to distract Siddhārtha, Māra made further attempts to interfere with Siddhārtha by deploying his seductive daughters, and in that too he was miserably unsuccessful.

This is how we have the dramatic depiction of the Māra in the Buddhist literature. We understand, as we have said before, that Māra is a kind of Buddhist Satan, the Tempter, whose goings-on within the scheme of things is to keep up delusion and desire in the minds of human beings. In the above mentioned dramatic narrative on Māra (and Siddhārtha), we have to interpret things in this way that there were times even in the life of Siddhārtha, precisely during his quest, when he was tempted to relinquish his quest. He might have felt at times to bow out his calling and go home to his palace of earthly comfort and honour. There must have also, perhaps, crushing fears and uncertainty rose up within him. He might have felt the agonies like any other human being, and become worried that he might go as an utter failure in life, or even might get mad. Sexual desires too might have been on the uprising at times (as the seductive daughters of Māra are mentioned in the narrative); we do not know! Thus, Māra does not stand for an active, mischievous, living imp, but for the desire, disappointment and delusion in human life. This Māra is a symbol of all the negative feelings one feels within oneself.

This is the impersonal aspect of Māra, which in many passages, is merely regarded as a symbol of Evil, Sin, Desire and Temptation. Māra then belongs more to the realm of Allegory than of Myth. In Buddhist Sanskrit literature too Māra has personal and impersonal aspects. However, the personal aspect of Māra is not so important in the later Buddhist literature, as his figure gets resolved into the abstract idea of Evil. Māra’s three daughters are allegorical through and through and not mythical creatures at all, for they are named Taṭṭhā or Taṭṭā (Craving), Aratī (Aversion, Discontent, Unrest) and Ragā or Ratī (Sensual Delight, Lust, and Attachment). More abstractly, Māra whose name means literally ‘death’ symbolizes all that is connected with the realm of birth and rebirth and the world of illusion (samsāra) and opposed to nirvāṇa. As stated above, the word Māra imports “Death” that is regarded as temptation or kleśas (defilements) disturbing one’s mind. In Samyutta Nikāya 1: 134 we see the question and reply-dialogue between Māra and the nun Selā. The Māra’s questions in this passage can be considered to be the suspicion which occurred to the nun, Selā by name.
There are said to be four forms of Māra: 1) Māra of the aggregates (skandha-māra) or Māra as a symbol of human mortality; 2) Māra as the Lord of Death (mṛtyu-māra); 3) Māra as the vices and moral defilements (kleśa-māra); and 4) the gods in the entourage of Māra (deva-putra-māra). Among these four forms of Māra, the first three are identified with the principles of Individuality (Skandha-Māra), Transiency (Mṛtyu-Māra) and Sin or Passion (Kleśa-Māra). In such references, the impersonal and allegorical aspect of Māra is emphasized, and the personal and mythical aspect gets entirely ignored.

In the Buddhist Sanskrit literature, one might find Māra getting more allegorical prominence. Māra represents all that is detrimental to progress towards enlightenment. He is depicted as the god of Lust (kāma-deva or manmatha) and also most frequently associated with kleśa (sin, evil, moral corruption and defilement). As stated above, the personal aspect of Māra is not very important in the later Buddhist literature. Māra stands for an abstract idea of Evil. The concept of kleśa (sin or defilement) or kleśa-māra is mentioned abundantly in the later Buddhist literature. All the kleśas (defilements) could be summarized into the three main vices of rāga, dveṣa, and mohā. Sometimes these three are also explained in terms of the five deprivations of attachment/passion (rāga), aggression/hatred (dveṣa), ignorance or infatuation (mohā), pride and jealousy. However, jealousy is rooted in dveṣa and pride in mohā. Thus all the defilements and deprivations could be summarized into these three main vices. These vices, namely, rāga, dveṣa and mohā are the foundation of the deeds of the body, speech and mind.

In the Buddhist Sanskrit literature, as said earlier, the impersonal Māra (allegorically) gets a clear treatment. Sāntideva in his Śīkṣāsamuccaya enumerates clearly several of the Māra-deeds, which are also termed as the “hacks of Māra” (māra-ankusā). They are lack interest and earnestness in study and discipline, dissensions and strife, anxiety for the wellbeing of one’s dear ones/relatives, conflict between teachers and students, indiffrence to spiritual discipline and practice among the monks and nuns, and unbecoming behaviour, all are the ‘works of Māra’ (mārakarmāṇā). These could be overcome by the practice of self-control.

The well known “army of Māra” in the Buddhist literature stands allegorically for different vices, evils and errors humans have in their psyche or life like lust, aversion, craving, pride, anger, hatred, fear, doubt, hypocrisy, vain glory, self-praise, craving for fame and name, envy and malice. They are the personified fetters which every disciple of Buddha must break up in his/her fight with Māra, the lord of the senses. That is why the Dhammapada says: “Fight Māra with the weapon of wisdom.” These are forms of enduring evil. These are the monsters and the monstrous in human beings
which perpetuate evil in the society. The metaphorical interpretations make it clear that the real battle is not with outward mythological monsters but with the emotions and passions one finds within oneself.

Māra is often interpreted to symbolize the mental afflictions that cause suffering, especially the principle afflictions of greed, anger, and stupidity. All the mental defilements (kleśā) are so called because they pollute the mind (cittopakleśanāt cittakleśakāraṇāt). The term kleśā means something like ‘affliction’, in the sense of disturbances of the mind, for humans are deluded beings. There is a delusion or defilement in us due to our ignorance, hatred, fear and desire, which are the Buddhist vices. Further, the outburst of dormant passions is called Paryavasthānas in the Abhidharmakośa. There are ten Paryavasthānas, namely, āhrīkya (lack of moral shame), anapatṛpya (lack of moral dread), ēryā (envy), mātsarya (avarice), audhhatya (dissipation), kaukṣīya (regret), styāna (torpor), middha (languor), krodha (anger), and mīkṣa (hypocrisy). They are mental defilements or vices. They are negative psychological tendencies. The Buddha said to his monks: “Everything is on fire” (sabbam bhikkhāve dīttam). What is metaphorically called fire is said to be the fire of greed, of aversion, of delusion, of old age and death, of grief, lamentation, pain, depression and misery. They could be got rid of only by wisdom and meditation. Thus, Buddhism, as a discipline, permeates into philosophy, religion and even psychology.

We live in a world where there is much unhappiness, discontent, misery and pain. The same fact had been taught by Buddha, ‘the Enlightened One’ in his first Noble Truth that sarvam duḥkham duḥkham. ‘Seventy million human beings have been uprooted, enslaved, or killed in the twentieth century alone.’ Albert Camus made this estimate when he published The Rebel in 1951. What figure should have been that by the close of twentieth century, we do not know. Further, we encounter undeserved suffering of the innocents, grinding poverty, and irrational acts of violence. Like a Buddhist in his outlook, Jonathan Glover, an Oxford philosopher, argues that we must not only reflect on what has happened in the last century, but also ‘need to look hard and clearly at some monsters inside us’ and to consider ways and means of ‘caging and taming them’. Buddhism addresses the “monsters” inside us and provides with a remedy to ‘cage and tame’ them.

Buddhism always emphasized an active life emanating from contemplation. After his enlightenment, Buddha continued his religious life doing good to all beings. He urged his monks to do the same. Buddha had exhorted his disciples to go around the world and preach the truth for the welfare and liberation of the people, as he loved his fellow creatures and had compassion for them. One’s actions should come from the meditative life of self-evaluation. At Isipatana Mṛgadāva (at Sārnāth-Vāranasi) Buddha
preached his first sermon and gave the Four Noble Truths to the five ascetics, who became his first disciples. Here he also enlightened them on the sublimity of “Middle Path” (madhyamā pratīpad), the Golden Mean of Buddhism. The Middle Path enables us to give up both the extremes in life: a middle position between sensual indulgences and self-mortification, a middle path of moderation in terms of Right Views, Right Speech and Right Conduct (manasā, vākā, karmatā). It also implies a philosophical position between ‘Being’ and ‘Non-being’, that is, a constant ‘Becoming’. This “Becoming” is Pure Act, or a benevolent action oriented philosophy of life. The Buddhist ethics is not simply a codified theoretical rigid code, but an ethics in complete praxis. This is an action-oriented philosophy, the philosophy of “becoming”.

Out of these sublime truths, Lord Buddha evolved a genuine code of ethics, the practical side of his philosophy, in the form of simple yet practical system of human life. They are the five noble precepts known as the Pārīśīla. The code of Pārīśīla or five noble precepts enjoin us 1) not to kill, 2) not to steal, 3) not to tell lies, 4) not to live an immoral life and 5) not to consume intoxicants. We have these five precepts in Samyutta-nikāya 2: 68; Anguttara-nikāya 2: 66; 3: 203; Sutta-nipāta 394-399; and Dīgha-nikāya 3: 235. The set of five precepts is known as the five śīka-pādāni in Sanskrit literature. Putting into practice these five precepts will help one to cage the “monsters” within oneself.

Further we find in the Buddhist literature that we are asked to reflect and examine our thoughts, words, and deeds (manasā, vākā, karmatā). One cultivates good qualities to get rid of the enduring evil in oneself by a constant meditation on the sublime states of life. In the Buddhist literatures we find a set of four virtues of life which is called mysteriously Brahma-vihāras or the Stations of Brahma, namely, Love or Friendliness (Maitrī), Compassion (Karuṇā), Sympathetic Joy (Muditā), and Equanimity or Impartiality (Upekṣā or Upekṣhā). This set of four virtues is meant to eradicate the enduring evil in us. These four states are for one’s personal, psychological and spiritual growth as well.

Buddhism, as said earlier, gives importance to one’s life here and now. This worldly life is very important (saṃvṛti). It does not believe that our relations to others can safely be entrusted to either chance (fate) or god. If they are left to fate or chance, the wild plants of the malice and avarice natural to the humans would soon throttle the delicate plant of a hard-won benevolence and love. One has to take responsibility for one’s and actions in life here and now and live it fully for oneself and for others. In practicing Mettā/Maitrī (friendliness/loving-kindness), we meditate “May all be happy.” In cultivating Karuṇā (compassion), we meditate: “May all be free from
miseries.” For exercising muditā, we rejoice on the prosperity of beings and meditate: “May their gain be with them for a long time”.

To sum up all that we have said so far, the struggle between the Bodhisattva and Māra which we find the Buddhist literature is an allegory, like other similar stories of sin and temptation. But the Bodhisattva does not succumb to any sin and temptation thanks to his freedom from passion and lust, and Māra, the monstrous, the enduring evil, gets defeated at the end of the day. The metaphorical interpretations make it clear that the real battle is not with outward mythological monsters but with the emotions and passions we find within ourselves.

Notes

1 Yuvam surānam aśvinā namucāv-āsure sacā. Rgveda X. 131. 4.
2 Sutta Nipāta: 439.
3 “Now there are eight kinds of assemblies, Ānanda, that is to say, assemblies of nobles, brahmans, householders, ascetics, of the Four Great Kings, of the Thirty-three gods, of Māras, and of Brahmās.” Mahāparinibbāna Sutta III. 22.
4 Mahāparinibbāna Sutta III. 7 – 8 in Dūgha Nikāya, (“And when the Venerable Ānanda had gone away, Māra, the Evil One, approached the Blessed One. And standing at one side he spoke to the Blessed One, saying: "Now, O Lord, let the Blessed One come to his final passing away; let the Happy One utterly pass away! The time has come for the Parinibbāna of the Lord.””).
5 Nandana Sutta (Samyutta Nikāya IV. 8)
6 Sakalika Sutta (Samyutta Nikāya IV. 13)
7 Kassaka Sutta (Samyutta Nikāya IV. 19)
8 There are four forms of iddhi power mentioned in the Buddhist literature: materialization, invisibility, thought transference and anesthesia, raising the bodily temperature, etc.
9 Rajja Sutta (Samyutta Nikāya IV. 20)
10 Bhikkhuni Sutta (Samyutta Nikāya V. 1 – 10)
14 Daśa-bhūmika-sūtra 53. 18.

16 *Ratnagotra-vibhāgo Mahāyānottaratantra sāstram* I. 12.

17 *Śīksāsamuccaya* 49-51.

18 For details see Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, p. 310.

19 *Sutta Nīpāta*: 436.

20 *Dhammapada*: 40.


22 Samyutta Nikāya IV: 19

23 Abhidharma Kośa V. 52-53.


30 The word *Bodhisattva* means one whose being (*sattva*) is knowledge or wisdom (*bodhi* = enlightenment). Knowledge here is the ultimate knowledge, the highest and has ontological significance like the Logos. The concept of the *Bodhisattva* has to do with the finest title and noblest role to which any Buddhist can aspire. A *Bodhisattva* is one who will certainly become a Buddha (literally means “An Enlightened One”), as the state of being enlightened is essential to the concept. Whereas for the Theravāda tradition, the term “bodhisattva” applies to the previous lives of Siddhartha Gautama as recorded in the *Jātakas*, for the Mahāyana tradition the term “Bodhisattva” refers to those who are constantly active in the service of all beings. Out of the great compassion for the sentient beings, a *Bodhisattva* makes the vow to help and liberate all and descends to the level of sentient beings. Every human being monks and lay men can place before him the goal to become a *Bodhisattva*, which means an enlightened being who receives the supreme illumination and brings liberation to all mankind. The *Bodhisattva* ideal is a

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Our Gods are Monsters: Popular Cultural Representations of the Evolution of Religion

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Abstract: A culture’s monsters possess a kind of “ontological liminality” because they are projected constructs of a geography that is always a disputed cultural area. A culture’s most popular modes of entertainment are a very rich source of information about the monstrous, and the genre of science fiction is especially so. In this paper, I examine the longest running American science fiction television series, Stargate SG-1 to explore constructions of monsters, the monstrous, and religion in 21st century American popular culture. I sketch a map of the geography of the monstrous gods of the program to identify myths and ideologies at work in the series and posit that the contested cultural space we find there is a manifestation of the fear that unless we become more moral than our gods, we may not survive as a species.

Key Words: Science fiction, gods, mythology, Stargate SG 1, ideology, Jung, politics, morality

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It is possible to read a culture by examining the monsters it creates. One rich source of material on ideas of the monstrous is their appearance in a culture’s popular modes of entertainment. Over the course of the 20th century, movie theatre and television screens have evolved into a kind of “collective dream space” for American and European audiences. The science fiction genre has been an important part of this dream space almost from the inception of film entertainment, in part due to its tendency to produce narratives which mediate between the often conflicting world views of science and religion. The power of sci-fi is that “it depicts truth without contemplating it, that it dramatizes our deepest conflicts in such a way that they are apprehended indirectly.” The longest running American science fiction television series, Stargate SG-1, provides abundant material for exploration of the ways that monsters, the monstrous, and religion are constructed in 21st century popular culture. The program, a spin-off of the 1994 feature film Stargate, is now in its tenth season on American television screens (having outlasted even the X-Files) and has become popular in England, Germany, and France as well.
The science fiction genre imaginatively explores the limits of human knowing and our place in the universe, and so it is not surprising that religious themes often appear in such works. Religion is a dominant theme of the *Stargate SG-1* series where it is depicted as a tool for oppression of planetary populations by monstrous beings who masquerade as the gods. If a television series or a film is successful, it is safe to assume that the storyline resonates deeply with the psyche of its audience. Popularity indicates at the very least that the themes have relevance, perhaps even that they address a real need of the viewing public. Since the monster always signifies something other than itself, it can be said that “the monster’s body is a cultural body...a construct and a projection” which “exists only to be read.” A culture’s monsters possess a kind of “ontological liminality” by virtue of which the monster’s geography is “always a contested cultural space.” What is the geography of the monstrous gods of *Stargate SG-1* and what might it tell us about ourselves?

In *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film*, Joel Martin and Conrad Oswalt suggest three approaches to reading film for religious content: theological, mythological, and ideological. A theological interpretation of the series would yield much material for reflection, but since theologies are located within a particular tradition, I limit my reading here to ideological and mythological content. This will broaden the conversation and in so doing perhaps enhance the possibilities for uncovering important information about ourselves.

1. **Synopsis**

The premise of *Stargate SG-1* derives from the 1994 film, in which we learn that all the gods of ancient Earth mythologies are in actuality nothing but members of an alien race called the Goa’uld (“Children of the Gods”). These aliens make use of a system of stargates, devices that make interplanetary travel almost instantaneous by creating a wormhole connection between devices on many planets. The purpose of the alien device remained undetermined by Earth’s scientists, from its discovery during an archaeological dig in Egypt in the 1920’s, until the 1990’s. Once the technology was deciphered, the American government established the Stargate Command, operated by the Air Force and headquartered at Cheyenne Mountain, Colorado, with the goal of procuring alien technologies for use in the defence of Earth against alien invasion.

The Goa’uld, Earth’s primary enemy for the TV series in its first eight seasons, are a technologically advanced parasitic race of serpent-like creatures that forcibly “blend” with human hosts by intertwining with the cervical spine and brain stem, taking over the human’s consciousness. They have found the human form to be most amenable to accomplishing their goals, and thousands of years ago used the stargate system to ‘seed’ many
planets with human life in order to have a steady supply of bodies. Using their advanced technology they pose as the gods to keep races in subjugation. Earth humans successfully rebelled during the time of the Egyptian pharaohs and buried the stargate, but the religious ideas lived on in human culture. In season nine, the Goa’uld are supplanted by an even more highly evolved race of beings also posing as the gods - the Ori, who preach the Religion of Origin. The Ori were once part of a race called the Ancients, who invented the stargate technology. Whereas the Goa’uld posed as gods to enslave entire races for fun and profit and are clearly evil, the moral status of the Ori is a bit ambiguous, since they promise salvation from suffering and disease for converts. They have apparently miraculous powers that are maintained by transfer of energy through worship; they must be worshipped to survive. Heavy-handed missionaries, called the Priors, travel the galaxies preaching that the Ori are the creator gods. Their sermons are made up of quotes from the scriptural Book of Origin, which contains passages like “Those who abandon the Path are evil.” A favourite technique for gaining converts is to unleash plagues which they subsequently cure in order to convince people of their power. The Priors of the Ori are human, but their appearance is disturbing - they have extensive facial scarification, some have pasty white skin and hollow eye sockets, and some have eyes with no pupils, all of which results from rituals marking progression through the ranks. Both races, the serpent-like Goa’uld parasites and the Ori, are monstrous in appearance and in action.

2. Interpretive Template

For this exploration of our monsters’ geographies I make use of depth psychology. In his examination of myth and symbol in Western culture, Carl Jung discerned that much religious and mythological content is common to the dreams of ordinary men and women. He theorized that there must be some sort of universal unconscious substrate to human experience (what he called the Collective Unconscious) that arises from the “inborn, preconscious and unconscious individual structure of the psyche.” This unconscious portion of the human psyche contains the archetypes, “sort of pre-existent forms or dispositions.” They are “the mind of our unknown ancestors…their way of experiencing life and the world, gods, and men,” “the ruling powers, the gods, images of the dominant laws and principles.” At the individual level, they appear as recurring images in dreams; at the ethnological level, they appear as myths. Since the archetypes are psychic manifestations of the spiritual, they cannot be integrated by rational means - they can only be understood through examination of our myths and dreams. Although personified in Jung’s psychology, it is important to remember that archetypes are not entities or things - they are more like models, genres, or ‘first principles’ which are ubiquitous in human behaviour and
consciousness. Jung and his interpreters have identified many archetypal patterns, but Jung believed that the most important ones for achieving self and cultural understanding were the Shadow, a metaphor representing the chthonic world of everything repressed, undeveloped, denied in the human psyche; the Self, or centre of the totality of conscious and unconscious, representing the unity of a mature psyche, and which Jung sometimes referred to as “the God within”; and the syzygy or anima/animus (prototype of the divine couple or primordial bisexuality), the male-within women and the female-within men.

3. Mythological Landscape

Mythological criticism operates on the premise that the myths of a culture reveal its root assumptions, desires, and fundamental values, and that religion is the manifestation of the human quest for contact with the sacred. Sci-fi lends itself well to parable and myth construction in that it allows expression “of the moral and theological imagination against a cosmic background.” In the Goa’uld of Stargate SG-1 we have one of the most common mythological symbols in human history. The serpent-like creature is found in nearly every religious tradition, from ancient Egyptian belief in the Apophis-serpent who was the enemy of the sun god to the Christian belief in the devil as the enemy of Christ. Although it sometimes symbolizes wisdom and healing, as in ancient Greece, most often the snake represents the “dark, chthonic world of instinct,” the “cold-blooded inhuman contents and tendencies” of our deepest imaginations, making it an archetypal manifestation of the Shadow aspect of human nature - everything repressed, undeveloped, denied in the human psyche. Jung claimed that the most potent “psychological fact” in a system is the god, “since it is always the overwhelming psychic factor which is called god.” If he is correct, a mythological interpretation of the Stargate SG 1’s monstrous portrayal of the gods as hideous serpent-like creatures (who possess advanced technologies used for the enslavement of entire galaxies) indicates that the most potent and unacknowledged psychological fact of Western society may be a “boundless lust for prey,” or lust for total domination.

This lust for ascendance is a manifestation of what Jung called the “spiritual problem of modern [humanity]” brought about by the catastrophic results” of the 20th century’s world wars that “shows itself in our inner life by the shattering of our faith in ourselves and our own worth.” We have “lost all metaphysical certainties” and yet we long for them and so have “set up in their place the ideals of material security.” The old gods have failed us and so we have created new ones. “The upheaval of our world and the upheaval in consciousness is [sic] one and the same… An enormous tension has arisen [in the Western world, especially in American culture] between the opposite poles of outer and inner life, between objective and subjective reality.” This
strain is reflected in the perceived conflict between religion and science, spiritual values and technological capabilities.

The conflict can only be resolved for an individual or culture by consciously acknowledging and taking ‘ownership’ of the Shadow in the process of working toward psychological wholeness. Jung theorized that archetypal symbols of wholeness often take the form of a quaternity - four-sided shapes, for instance. Although this concept has received less emphasis in recent Jungian interpretation, it is intriguing to note that the heroes of our program, the SG-1, are a team of four: two American Air Force officers, a civilian anthropologist/linguist/ archaeologist, and an alien former slave of the Goa’uld. Each of the team members embodies an essential archetype: the anima, Colonel Jack O’Neill (consummate warrior and humanitarian), animus, Major Samantha Carter (brilliant and beautiful woman warrior and scientist), the Wise Man, Daniel Jackson (brilliant and spiritually sensitive interpreter of cultures and languages, who serves as the bridge between other team members and newly discovered alien races), and the properly acknowledged Shadow, the alien Teal’c. Teal’c, who carries the serpent Goa’uld within, requires a bit of explanation here - he is a Jaffa warrior and former slave of the Goa’uld. The Jaffa, reviled and feared by all races, are descendants of humans taken from Earth in ancient times who were genetically altered to eliminate the immune system so they could serve as incubators for immature Goa’uld. A Jaffa cannot live beyond childhood unless implanted with larval Goa’uld. Promising young male Jaffa undergo implantation in a special religious ceremony and enter training to become soldiers. Since the Jaffa’s consciousness is not shared with the Goa’uld implant, without the belief that their masters are gods, the Jaffa could conceivably act freely. In the pilot for the series, Teal’c becomes fully conscious in recognizing his enslavement to false gods. He joins O’Neill, Carter, and Jackson in a battle against the Goa’uld and is accepted as a member of the team, completing the quaternity. In mythological terms, we now have a completed consciousness in the SG-1 team, made up of the reunited syzygy with O’Neill and Carter, the Wise Man in Jackson, and the accepted Shadow in Teal’c.

The Goa’uld allow us to apprehend without contemplation the tension within the collective Western psyche between a lust for power and longing for psychic wholeness. This monstrous archetypal representation of humanity forcibly overtaken and literally possessed by false gods who make use of advanced technologies can be read as revelatory of our deepest fears - that technology will so possess us as to eliminate the possibility of individual free will. Stargate SG-1 insists that the gods we worship are nothing more than manifestations of the monstrous lust for domination. Our gods are not worthy of worship. The Stargate team, our symbol of psychic wholeness and saviours, works to show us the way to true freedom.
While the mythological approach is helpful in uncovering the fundamental values at work within a culture, it can offer only broad themes about how the myths relate to the world. It helps us to identify the “ahistorical archetypes the human unconscious throws up in response to existential challenges” but it tends to overlook the ways meaning becomes politicized and historicized. A more specifically focused ideological criticism combined with Jungian interpretation will help us uncover the way our culture’s archetypal expressions shape and are shaped by politics and society.

4. Ideological Landscape

The geography of these monsters is the territory of domination through a religion of false gods. By way of ideological criticism we may uncover what the god image portrayed in *Stargate SG-1* tells us about how “religion legitimizes or challenges dominant visions of the social order.” At a superficial level, we clearly see that the series makes use of archetypal images of evil to portray religion in Marxist terms as “the sigh of the oppressed creature.” Marx and Engels’ description of the bourgeoisie’s practice of “naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation” that is “veiled by religious and political illusions” accurately describes the way the false gods of *Stargate SG-1* function. However, a deeper level of interpretation of the television series’ ideological content can be achieved through Jungian thought.

According to depth psychology, the lust for power originates in ego inflation that comes from identification of the individual ego with the image of God-within, or the Self archetype. The god-image and statements about it are “psychic processes” or manifestations of cultural and evolutionary development. The most that we can honestly say is that “an archetypal image of the Deity” exists. Identification of subjective ego experience with the archetypal Self leads us to attribute universal validity to experiences that only have validity at a personal level. “If the ego is dissolved in identification with the self, it gives rise to a sort of nebulous superman with a puffed-up ego.” This mistaken experience of “universal validity – ‘godlikeness’ – which completely ignores all differences” leads to attempts to “force the demands of [one’s] own unconscious upon others.” This is precisely the driving psychic force for the false gods of recent *Stargate SG-1* episodes.

Although much could be said about the Goa’uld in the context of ideological criticism, we can learn a great deal more about ourselves by focusing on the new enemy that appeared in the ninth season of the program. Beginning in July 2005, the Goa’uld threat has been minimized and the Ori, a more powerful adversary, has entered the galaxy. The Ori are a sect of advanced beings who split with the Ancients over ideological differences.
Religion is their agenda: they claim to be the creator gods and promise followers Ascension, a spiritual state achieved by the Ancients millennia ago that bears some similarity to Buddhist enlightenment. We learn over the course of season nine that the Ori are a schismatic group who result from a major disagreement among the Ancients over the proper use of technology and the place of religion in their culture. As perfect representations of ego inflation, the Ori feed off worshippers and force their beliefs on others. They rule through fear and prevent technological progress among their followers, whereas the Ancients insist upon the ethical use of technology, non-violence, and “self-determination” for all populations.

It should be fairly clear where all of this leads in terms of ideological interpretation. Stargate SG-1 is an American production and so is best read as a manifestation of that cultural dreamscape. The Ori appeared on the scene at a time when American society was becoming increasingly polarized over religious issues. The alliance of George Bush and the Religious Right had begun to transform political into religious rhetoric: everything from marriage to education to national security came to be defined in terms of so-called “Christian values.” This has become so pervasive that one ought not to be faulted for thinking “Those who abandon the Path are evil” could be a statement from American politics rather than the Ori’s Book of Origin.

The Ori control by suppression of scientific and technological development; the Bush administration and the Religious Right hamstring medical progress by vetoing stem cell research and advocate the teaching of “intelligent design” and Creationism in all science classrooms. The Ori demonstrate their power and gain converts by spreading plagues which they then “cure;” the Bush administration demonstrates power and attempts to gain converts to democracy by declaring war without just cause in the name of ending terrorism. The Ori claim absolute and objective knowledge of God; George Bush has said that God speaks to him and that his political actions are in concert with the divine will.

Although many Americans do not accept the Bush agenda, the truth remains that neither the American public nor our elected leadership have effectively acted against it. Looked at through the lens of Jungian thought, we might say this is so because the collective ego of the American people suffers from ego inflation. The monstrous gods of Stargate SG-1 reveal to us that the American collective self has become (in Jung’s words) a “nebulous superman with a puffed-up ego.”

5. Conclusion

Jung said that religion gives us “assurance and strength so that [we] may not be overwhelmed by the monsters of the universe.” The human psyche has not evolved as rapidly as have our intellect and technological
capabilities, and so the unconscious has been left behind. Speaking somewhat prophetically, Jung said that over the past one hundred years, the unconscious has been forced into “a defensive position which expresses itself in a universal will to destruction. The political and social ‘isms’ of our day preach every conceivable ideal” while “creating a chaos controlled by terrorism” that leads to a kind of “degradation and slavery” of the individual. How are we to deal with these cultural monsters? Jung insisted that they cannot be tamed “collectively, because the masses are not changed unless the individual changes…The bettering of a general ill begins with the individual, and then only when he makes himself and not others responsible.”

Jung was deeply disturbed by the proliferation of technologies of mass destruction. … [O]ur god-images call us to be just, loving, and merciful, and they can demand of us horrendous acts of violence. We must both worship and fear our gods…Jung’s words, written more than fifty years ago, speak prophetically across the decades: ‘The only thing that really matters now is whether [humanity] can climb up to a higher moral level, to a higher plane of consciousness, in order to be equal to the superhuman powers which the fallen angels have played into [our] hands’.29

The weekly heroic struggle of the Stargate team, archetypal symbol of psychic wholeness, to defend the world against monstrous false gods is conceivably so popular today because “it depicts truth without contemplating it…dramatizes our deepest conflicts in such a way that they are apprehended indirectly.” 30 In this effort to identify myths and ideologies at work in the series we have perhaps uncovered the conflict and deep-seated cultural fears dramatized therein: if we are to survive as a species we must become more moral than our gods.

Notes


5 Martin & Oswalt, op. cit. p. 6-7.


7 Ibid., p. 43-44.

8 Ibid., p. 286.


14 Jung, *Aion*, pp. 186, 244.


17 Martin & Oswalt, p.10.

18 Ibid., p. 6.


    “George Bush has claimed he was on a mission from God when he launched the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, according to a senior Palestinian politician in an interview to be broadcast by the BBC later this month. Mr. Bush revealed the extent of his religious fervour when he met a Palestinian delegation during the Israeli-Palestinian summit at the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, four months after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. One of the delegates, Nabil Shaath, who was Palestinian foreign minister at the time, said: 'President Bush said to all of us: 'I am driven with a mission from God'. God would tell me, 'George go and fight these terrorists in Afghanistan'. And I did. And then God would tell me 'George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq'. And I did.' Mr. Bush went on: "And now, again, I feel God's words coming to me, 'Go get the Palestinians their state and get the Israelis their security, and get peace in the Middle East'. And, by God, I'm gonna do it."
26 Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, op.cit., para 430.
28 Ibid.
30 V. Sobchack, op. cit, p. 151.
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[http://www.guardian.co.uk/usa/story/0,12271,1586978,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/usa/story/0,12271,1586978,00.html), 7/30/2006.


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Monstrous Modernism, Monstrous Bodies: Christian Iconography and “Degenerate Art”

Jennifer McComas

Abstract: Often overlooked in art historical scholarship on the Nazi era is the fact that fifteen percent of the artworks on display in the Degenerate Art exhibition of 1937 – including every work in the very first room of the exhibition – depicted Christian imagery. These paintings and sculptures, most of which portrayed scenes from Christ’s Passion, were primarily by Expressionist artists, and invariably represented the figure and physiognomy of Christ as disfigured, distorted, and physically ugly. This paper considers the collision of religious imagery with the Nazi rhetoric of the body, which rejected Expressionist depictions of Christ as racially monstrous.

Christ’s body, as depicted by Expressionist artists such as Max Beckmann and Emil Nolde, was indeed far removed from the ideal body type promoted by Nazi racial theory, with its ideological emphasis on the maintenance of an ideal, pure-blooded citizenry. Nazi visual propaganda promoted the notion of Jewish racial monstrosity through a reliance on stereotypical physical attributes, while modern art’s approach to the human figure was discredited through rhetoric rife with medical and racial tropes. The Expressionist Christ, with his distorted body, was thus castigated for displaying an aesthetic of human monstrosity. Expressionist religious art was ultimately purged from Germany through confiscation, sales, and destruction, a chilling precursor to the program of eugenics, euthanasia, and genocide aimed at people whom the Nazis perceived as monstrous.

Key Words: Nazis, Expressionist art, racial monstrosity, anti-Semitism, Christ’s Passion, Degenerate Art

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Modern art, Christian iconography, and Nazi perceptions of human monstrosity collided ominously in the Degenerate Art exhibition, which opened in Munich on 19 July 1937. On view were approximately six hundred paintings, sculptures, and prints, mostly Expressionist, and all confiscated from public art museums in Germany. Often overlooked in art historical scholarship on the Nazi era is the fact that fifteen percent of the artworks on display depicted Christian imagery – including, notably, every work in the very first room of the exhibition. These paintings and sculptures, most of which depicted scenes from Christ’s Passion, invariably represented the
figure and physiognomy of Christ as grotesque, disfigured, and distorted. Such art was unacceptable to the Nazis not because of any perceived desecration of traditional religious imagery, but rather because of the presentation of “unhealthy” and un-Aryan racial types and physiognomies within the context of “high art.” As Adolf Ziegler, a Nazi-approved artist who helped organize the exhibition, put it, the works on display represented “monstrosities of insanity, insolence [and] degeneracy.” This paper will consider how the Nazis’ anti-Semitic rhetoric led them to reject these Expressionist images of Christ as culturally degenerate and racially monstrous.

Welcoming visitors to the exhibition was Ludwig Gies’s wooden crucifix, a World War I memorial that had been forcibly removed from the Gothic cathedral in Lübeck (now destroyed). The placement of this crucifix, with its twisted and distorted Christ, ensured that this piece would have been the first artwork seen by visitors upon entering the exhibition. Once inside the exhibition, one would then be confronted with paintings such as Emil Nolde’s monumental Life of Christ polyptych of 1910-12 (Nolde Stiftung, Seebüll). In the large central panel of this work, which depicts the Crucifixion, Christ’s body is painted a sickly yellow, and his limbs twist in agony, as blood pours from his splayed hands. Hanging askew on the nearby west wall of the room was Max Beckmann’s Descent from the Cross (Museum of Modern Art, New York). Painted towards the end of the First World War, when Beckmann was recovering from war-induced psychological trauma, this composition depicts the removal from the cross of the dead Christ’s body, which is stiff with rigor mortis, unnaturally elongated, and drained of colour. The exhibition guide, available for thirty pfennigs, described these religious works in the following terms:

At one time in the Jewish press one called these horror stories “revelations of German religiosity.” The normally perceptive person certainly thinks of these “revelations” rather as voodoo subjects…The figures of Christian legends…sneer at us here with constantly new gargoyle faces.

In one short paragraph, the Degenerate Art exhibition guide links together modern Christian art, anti-Semitism, and the notion of physical or racial monstrosity.

In understanding why the Nazis would judge these works monstrous, it is important to consider their unifying stylistic characteristics, as well as their potentially politically charged content. The works share not just an Expressionist penchant for figural distortion, garish colour, and raw emotionalism, but also clearly reference earlier German art. That the Nazis
recognized this indebtedness to earlier art is apparent in their comparison of
the images to gargoyles, the sculptures of monstrous creatures that adorn
Gothic cathedrals. Before World War I, the Expressionist group known as the
Brücke marketed themselves as the inheritors of the aesthetic tradition that
had produced Cranach, Holbein, and Dürer, and had thus sought stylistic
models in German late Gothic and Renaissance art. Looking specifically at
the Catholic form of the altarpiece, the Brücke-affiliated artist Emil Nolde
consciously strove to create Christian art for the modern world by tackling
major iconographical themes such as the Last Supper and the Pentecost.

Characterized by its explicit attention to the details of pain, suffering, and death, German religious art of the fifteenth and sixteenth
centuries, such as Holbein’s Christ’s Corpse in the Grave of 1521
(Kunstmuseum, Basel), provided an appealing and suddenly relevant model
for a wider variety of artists in the aftermath of World War I. The
composition of Beckmann’s 1917 Descent from the Cross bears obvious
similarities to a late-fifteenth-century Deposition by Dürer’s teacher Michael
Wolgemut (Alte Pinakothek, Munich). Gies’s 1920 sculpture of the
emaciated and convulsed body of Christ recalls the medieval Pestkreuzer, or
plague crucifixes that were created as devotional objects during plague
epidemics. As early as 1918, the Mannheim curator Gustav Hartlaub
organized an exhibition entitled New Religious Art, which was comprised
almost entirely of such medievalizing Expressionist work. For many artists,
Christ’s Passion provided a model for portraying the pain and destruction of
the war. For others, it had become a vehicle for biting social, political, and
military commentary. George Grosz’s drawing Shut Up and Do Your Duty
(The Crucified) of 1927 is one such example. His depiction of the crucified
Christ attired in combat boots and gas mask was a thinly veiled attack on
German militaristic zeal.

Providing the most powerful model for the Expressionist religious
art produced around World War I was the Isenheim Altarpiece by Matthias
Grünewald (Musée d’Unterlinden, Colmar). Painted around 1515, the altar
was commissioned by the Order of St. Anthony for their hospital. The
Crucifixion is the focus of the altarpiece, and the sight of Christ’s body
covered by lacerations, lesions, and painful sores provided a spiritually
healing experience for the order’s patients, most of whom were afflicted with
terrifying – and often fatal – skin diseases, such as St. Anthony’s Fire. Because the altarpiece was housed at the Unterlinden Museum in Colmar in
the contested region of Alsace, patriotic rhetoric transformed it into a symbol
of German nationalism during World War I. In 1917, the altarpiece was
brought temporarily from Colmar to Munich, where it was publicly
displayed. The gruesome portrayal of Christ’s disfigurement in the altar made
it an object of pilgrimage for wounded war veterans, for whom, as Ann
Stieglitz writes, “the high naturalism of the painted body of Christ in
pains...was like a mirror to the wounds inflicted in the trenches.”

Throughout the Weimar period, German art historians established Grünewald’s place in the German cultural pantheon, often casting him as a precursor to the Expressionists. By the Nazi era, however, imagery such as Grünewald’s, like that of the Expressionists, would stand in stark opposition to the racial, aesthetic, and political ideals promoted by the Reich.

Gies and Beckmann, in the context of World War I, both emphasize, like Grünewald, the agony and emotionalism of Christ’s death in their work. For them, Christ’s suffering was a metaphor for Germany’s defeat, and their depiction of innocent martyrdom implicitly questioned German militarism. By contrast, the Nazi leadership viewed Germany’s defeat as a shameful capitulation, indicative of the nation’s “inner decomposition,” as Hitler put it. Nazi sympathizers within the Protestant Church recast Christ as an aggressive, Aryan warrior, triumphant over death. Christ’s tortured and broken body, as depicted in both Gothic and Expressionist art, was at odds with the Nazi conception of Christ as a militant warrior. Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg described this alternative view of Christ in his 1930 book, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*:

Today Jesus appears to us as the self-confident Lord in the best and highest sense of the word. It is his life which holds meaning for the German people, not his agonizing death...The mighty preacher and wrathful one in the temple...is the ideal which today shines forth from the Gospels, not the sacrificial lamb of the Jewish prophets, not the crucified.

As they suppressed mention of Christ’s martyrdom, so too did the Nazis adamantly deny Christ’s Jewishness. In 1921, Hitler had remarked, “I can imagine Christ as nothing other than blond and with blue eyes, the devil however only with a Jewish grimace.” Relying on stereotypical physiognomy to make his point as well, Alfred Rosenberg insisted that Jesus was not a “hook-nosed, flat footed saviour,” but rather, “slim, tall, [and] blond.” Because Nolde had insisted that the figures in his *Life of Christ* polyptych were “racially” Jewish, noting that he had “created them instinctively, painting the figures as Jewish types,” it is not surprising that, despite Nolde’s membership in the Nazi party, his polyptych dominated Room One of the Degenerate Art exhibition. Despite a move by some Protestants to “dejudaize” the church and transform Christ into an Aryan, images and statements such as Nolde’s, which affirmed Christ’s Jewishness, left the Nazi leadership largely hostile to the figure of Christ.

Thus, along with the association of Christian Passion iconography with disease and physical disfigurement, it was – not surprisingly – Christ’s
identity as a Jew that posed the greatest obstacle to Nazi acceptance of religious art. Indeed, the concepts of Jewishness and human degeneration were closely linked during the Nazi era, and pervasive anti-Semitism in the German medical community was crucial for reshaping attitudes towards art during these years. Throughout both the Weimar era and the Third Reich, doctors and scientists naturalized anti-Semitism by medicalizing it. The Jews were blamed, among other things, for the rise of syphilis, a disease that disfigures the skin in advanced stages. The similarities, in fact, between syphilitic skin lesions and the gangrenous flesh discolouration portrayed on Christ’s body in the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, were too great to escape notice. Hitler dismissed Grünewald’s work as “ugly,” and reviled the Expressionist portrayals of the crucified Christ, blaming Jewish art dealers and collectors for foisting such monstrous portrayals of humanity on the German population. He fumed that, “Germans, who accept perverse pictures of the Crucified Christ, are capable of swallowing other horrors, too, if one can persuade them that these horrors are beautiful.”

Just as Jewish art professionals were accused of causing a degeneration of German culture, so too was the figure of the Jew increasingly compared to a disease or cancer eating into the healthy Aryan German body. The 1935 Nuremberg Laws attempted to bring the perceived degeneration of German health to a halt by outlawing marriage between Jews and non-Jews on “medical” grounds to ensure the racial health of future generations. Likewise, the confinement of Jews to ghettos in Poland during the war was justified as a “quarantine” necessary to contain Jewish germs and disease.

Art under the Third Reich was charged with illustrating the racial health that the Nuremberg Laws were designed to ensure. Any treatment of disease or physical imperfection, any admission of weakness or defeat, any distortion or stylization of the body, and any portrayal of non-Aryan figures was taboo in Nazi-sanctioned art. As art was believed to reflect the racial health of the artist, those who did not comply with Nazi guidelines were dismissed as physically, mentally, or genetically ill. Indeed, modern art had already been explicitly equated with human degeneration and racial monstrosity in 1928 by Paul Schultze-Naumburg’s book *Art and Race*. To discredit modern art, the author compared reproductions of modern paintings with photographs of physically deformed and mentally ill people. The racially monstrous, abject status of modern art was further made explicit in the wall texts of the *Degenerate Art* exhibition. Texts lamenting the “niggerization” or the “Yiddish view” of modern art were placed above paintings perceived to illustrate these statements. Such terms (*Verniggerung, Verjudung*) had recently been employed in a scientific context to describe the degeneration of the Nordic race.

While the Nazis lamented that “the Negro and the South Sea Islander [had] become the apparent racial ideal of ‘modern art,’” classical
Greek sculpture was instead the standard by which they judged the human body. Alfred Rosenberg associated Greek sculpture with the ideal Aryan who was untainted by biological mixing with “degenerate” races. The sculptures of Arno Breker, such as Readiness of 1939, present the Aryan masculine ideal: athleticism muscular, broad-shouldered, disciplined, prepared for battle, but hinting at the erotic. Nazi-approved painting showed a more völkisch physical idealization. Adolf Wissel's Farm Family from Kahlenberg of 1939 shows a rural family, rooted to the land. Physically strong and healthy, the blond hair of this multi-generational family signals their racial purity, while the three children reflect their parents’ health and fertility.

While paintings such as this emphasize Aryan perfection, anti-Semitic propaganda instead portrays the Jewish body as its monstrous opposite. A 1938 poster for The Eternal Jew exhibition in Vienna shows the Nazi visual stereotype for the Jewish body: hunchbacked and deformed, sporting an exaggerated nose, and hiding behind an unkempt beard. The Jewish figure hoards a pile of money, and is juxtaposed with the Soviet hammer-and-sickle. Similarly, a green face and evil eyes dehumanize the Jew on the poster advertising the 1940 anti-Semitic film Jud Süss.

Comparative images that illuminated the perceived difference between the monstrous Jew and the normal, healthy Aryan were a staple of Nazi racial propaganda, as well. Indeed, as art historian Reinhold Heller writes, “Without the pejorative Jewish image, the German ideal could not be purposively visualized.” Propaganda employed the crudest of stereotypes – which were, however, validated by Nazi-era science – to differentiate normal from monstrous physiognomy: the Jews, characterized, as one newspaper put it, by “hooked noses, flat feet, waddling walk, drooping ears and shifty gaze,” were made to appear monstrous beside the “healthy German…with long limbs, straight nose, symmetrical features [and] keen and determined gaze.”

One such visual comparison appeared as early as January 1933 in the fascist journal Illustrierter Beobachter. A montage on the back page of the journal juxtaposed a healthy Aryan with his degenerate Jewish counterpart. The face portraying the Jew was none other than that of Alfred Flechtheim, one of Germany’s most prominent Weimar-era dealers of modern art. The same physical features that appear on The Eternal Jew and Jud Süss posters – deep facial wrinkles, a prominent nose, and a devious looking mouth – are exaggerated here to characterize Flechtheim. By contrast, the Aryan man’s steely gaze, straight nose, and determined mouth signify his racial integrity.

The simultaneous exhibitions of Degenerate Art, which was exhibited cynically in Munich’s Archaeological Institute, and its counterpart, the Great German Art exhibition in Munich’s newly constructed “House of German Art,” can easily be seen as a comparison of the aesthetically healthy and the monstrous on a grand scale. Nazi-approved art was spectacularly exhibited in this first of eight annual Great German Art exhibitions, whereas
the *Degenerate Art* exhibition was the equally spectacular culmination of a series of smaller, more regionally oriented, but similar shows. If the *Degenerate Art* exhibition represented the end of an era considered weak, sick, and dominated by the Jews, the *Great German Art* exhibition marked the beginning of a new, healthy, classically-oriented Aryan age. It is no accident that the Jewish artist Otto Freundlich’s abstracted sculpture *The New Man* was chosen for the cover of the *Degenerate Art* exhibition guide; it could likewise be contrasted with the classical bust gracing the cover the *Great German Art* catalogue.

In the environment of medicalized anti-Semitism created during the Third Reich, the distorted figure of Christ in Expressionist art could be read – like the body of the Jew – as racially monstrous. The Nazis’ intertwined obsessions with the Jewish figure and with racial health are addressed in Room One of the *Degenerate Art* exhibition, in which viewers were encouraged to interpret the Expressionist Christ as a diseased and degenerate Jew. Juxtaposed with the strong, virile male warriors and athletes presented in Nazi-sanctioned art, the sickened, weak, and disfigured Christ could easily be read as monstrous. Expressionist religious art was ultimately purged from Germany through confiscation, sales, and outright destruction, a chilling precursor to the genocidal program soon aimed at Jews and other people whom the Nazis perceived as monstrous.

Notes

1 Stephanie Barron (ed.), “*Degenerate Art:* The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany,” Abrams, New York, and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 1991, provides a checklist of all the works confiscated from museums, and images of many of the artworks discussed in this paper.

2 Neil Levi, “‘Judge for Yourselves!’ – The *Degenerate Art* Exhibition as Political Spectacle,” *October*, vol. 85, Summer 1998, pp. 41-64, is an exception. This article devotes a section to the religious art on display.


See a picture at: [www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/galleryDetail/15-16-jahrhundert/holbein-d-i-hans/010/show.html](http://www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/galleryDetail/15-16-jahrhundert/holbein-d-i-hans/010/show.html)


Not surprisingly, a reproduction of this drawing also appeared in the *Degenerate Art* exhibition, in the room devoted to prints and drawings. For a picture see: [http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record&id=87326&type=101](http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record&id=87326&type=101)

For a picture see: [www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/g/grunewal/2isenhei/index.html](http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/g/grunewal/2isenhei/index.html)


Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel (eds), *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1999. Some German Protestant groups attempted to Aryanise Christ and “dejudaize” Christianity through the removal of Hebrew words from the New Testament,
the removal of the Old Testament altogether, and the elimination of Biblical references to Christ’s descent from David.


20 Quoted in Steigmann-Gall, 37. Emphasis added.


28 Ibid, p. 127. Historian of science Reinhold Müller had published an article in 1932 using these racist terms in a medical context to describe racial degeneration.

29 Bunce, 16.


31 Berthold Hinz, *Art in the Third Reich*, Robert and Rita Kimber (trans), Pantheon Books, New York, 1979, p. 19. Paintings such as this were rewarded at competitions held by the Reich Association for Large Families, which gave prizes for “artistically exemplary representations of genetically healthy families with many children.”


34 Ibid.

35 *Illustrierter Beobachter*, vol. 8, no. 1, 7 January 1933, p. 24.
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Div(Demon), the Most Noxious Creature in Ancient Iranian Myths

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Abstract: The mythical history of Iran starts by a conflict of two powers, goodness and badness in order to gain the rule of the world. Throughout Iranian legends “Ahuramazda” is manifestation of brightness, loveliness and goodness and on the other hand “Satan” is the representation of darkness, ugliness and badness. This idea existed among Arians a long time ago. The old Indo-Iranians had the same point of view too.

Based on their habit to follow tent dwelling, they worshiped the natural elements such as: the sun, the sky, the land and the fire. On the opposite side of these beneficial powers, there were some harmful ones like: darkness and drought. Arians considered them as the Satan’s power. “Div” meant “god”. This name was given to a group of Arians gods who were common among Iranians and Indians. But after the appearance of Zoroaster and acquaintance of Ahuramazda, these creatures (Dives) became known as Satan and deceivers. In Iranian myths Dives devastated all the beings to combat with Ahuramazda. They attacked the sky and made it dark, fated the plants and made the water salty and bitter. And then they perished humans and animals. But the representatives of Ahuramazda who were responsible to defeat His creatures, confronted Dives in no pause. They forced them to drawback, cleared the world of their existence and re-established peace. Of course some of spoiling signs such as night, death and saltiness of the water has remained yet.

Later “Div” became an imaginary and legendary creature with an ugly giant figure of a mankind, a tail and horns in Persian culture.

Based on common narrations they were homely deceived creatures who enjoyed eating the flesh of mankind. They were powerful, cruel and stone-hearted. They had the ability to transform themselves. They were skilled in conjuring and their clothes were made of pelt. In Iranian epics like Shahnameh, Div is described being black, strong, with boar and had long hair. In Zoroastrian religion Div is a title that is given to wicked people. Among Zoroastrians the word “Div” was a name given to the god’s enemies and later ogres and other Satan’s creatures joined this category.

A part of the holy Avesta is called Vandidad (anti div). In this part illness and other unpleasant things are considered to be related to Dives. Magi (priests) made them a way by murmuring holy words. According to Iranian legends some heroes fought with Dives and after exhausting fights, heroes won and the defeated became at their service. Among these heroes we
can mention Hooshang, Tahmures, Rostam and Esfandiar. In the literature of Iran Div is a metaphor. It means a wicked person who as the manifestation of Satan tries to devastate holy creatures. In moral and mystic works Div means “concupiscence” and internal Satan that should be controlled by mankind, the one who is a representation of God. In fact the opposed Dives and gods join legends with religion.

**Key Words:** Div, Ahooramazda, Ahriman, Amshaspand, God, Satan, Holy immortality

Div is one of the most important members of the legends in the history of early Iranians. "Daeva" in Avestain and “Deva” in old Indian language are the terms used for Div. In ancient times this word was applied to a group of Arian’s gods, which were worshiped among Iranians and Indians. Div meant “God” too. Before the immigration of Indo-Iranian Arian tribes from their common country, these tribes worshiped the natural elements as their “god”, but after the appearance of Zoroaster some amendments took place in the field of Iranian religion:

Zoroaster believed that only it is “Ahura Mazda” who deserved to be worshiped and he rejected worshiping other gods. The philosophy of Zoroastrism was based on the existence of two powers in the world, one was attractive and the other repulsive.¹

In another word at the beginning there were two spirits Ahuramazda and Ahriman (=Satan), necessarily people praised Ahuramazda who was the blessing power and refused to be under the power of Ahriman.

On the basis of the dowelling life of Arians’, they praised natural elements such as: the sun, the sky, the fire and earth. Against these beneficial powers there were harmful powers too, and the manifestations of them were darkness, drought or shortage of raining. So they considered them as Ahriman’s forces.²

This point caused the separation of religious thought between Iranians and Indians. From this time forward Iranians know the evil manifestations as “Div” and the good manifestations as “Izad” (=god).
In *Avesta* the purpose of “Div” is the rejected gods, Satan or malicious people. Based on the viewpoint of Zoroastrians the word “Div” is given to the enemy’s gods. “Through a chapter of *Avesta*, “Vandidad” which means anti Div rules, diseases and all the other disliked things and attributed to Dives and Zoroastrian clergymen removed Dives by saying holy words”.

According to the creation legends of ancient Iran, the creation of the universe took place in four durations; the length of each one was three thousand years. Through the first period two beings were created that is the initial of the mythical history of Iran. Of these two beings, one belongs to *Ahuramazda* and the other to *Ahriman*. The world of *Ahuramazda* is full of joy, happiness, truth, light, aroma and health, and on the other hand, the world of *Ahriman* is full of deceit, homeliness, annihilation, stink and illness. The manifestations of these two worlds are always against each other in order to one defeat the other and gain the rule of the universe.

Through the texts of *Avesta* specially the old part which is called *Gahan*, *Ahuramazda* is introduced as “*Spanta Mainiyu*”. This title means “the holy spirit”, and in opposite is “*Angro Mainiyu*” which means “destructive spirit.

In order to take the possession of the universe, they both gather powerful forces by creating their representations and prepare themselves for a war. In duration of three thousand years they created their representatives. *Ahuramazda* created a bright world. He created six holy forces to help him control the world. These six powers were called “Emshasepands”; each of them had a specified responsibility.

Based on their responsibilities they preserved the world of *Ahuramazda* from *Ahriman’s* harm. *Emshasepand* means “the holy immortality”.

The names of these six *Emshasepands* are as follow:

1- *Vohu Manah*: Means good intellect. His role is to consult *Ahuramazda* and he is responsible to preserve animals.

He also prepares reports of the peoples' speech, thought and behavior everyday.

2- *Arta – Vahishta*: is the representation of order and discipline of the world. He supervises the world of *Ahuramazda* in order not to become disordered. He is responsible to preserve the fire and light too.

3- *Khshathra - Vairya*: Means the desired monarchy and kingship. *Khshathra- Vairya* is the representation of the royal strength, power and splendor. He preserves metals. He is also responsible to look after the poor.
4- Spenta - Armaiti: Means patienth and purity. This Emshasepand is responsible to take care of the earth in order not to be polluted by the forces of Ahriman. She feels very sad when the wicked men and women walk on the ground.
5- Harurvatāt: means accomplishment. He preserves water. The succulent of the plants is the result of her manifestation. Harurvatāt removes the waters toward the other countries to keep them out of the reach of Ahriman when he attacks the waters.
6- Amertāt - means everlasting. She represents immortal live. She preserves the plants not to fade. This Amshasepand is the representation of the growth and life in the world of Ahuramazda.

Along this period of three thousand years, Ahriman creates his forces, too in order to confront Ahuramazda and devastate His creatures,. The forces of Ahriman, are called “Div”. There are six Dives as follow:

1- Akamanah: He is the enemy of VohuManah and is the representation of false and filthy intellect.
2- Indar or Endar: He is the enemy of Arta-Vahishta and by making the world disorder he confronts Arta-Vahishta.
3- Savol: Is the enemy of Khshathra-Vairya and he is the manifestation of cruel and oppressive reign.
4- Nanghaithya: Is the enemy of Spanta-Armaiti. He makes the beings to become greedy. He is the manifestation of selfishness and smugness.
5- Tairi: He is a Div to annihilate the plants and herd. He is the enemy of Harurvatāt.
6- Zair He is the enemy of Amertāt. He makes poison and tries to destroy plants 4.

These six dives are the main forces of Ahriman. All the homeliness and evils are the result of their existence. There are other dives than these six ones and each one has a responsibility to devastate one of the beneficial forces. For example one of these dives is “Jahi”. She is the manifestation of prostitution. Some dives are also introduced as the most dreadful ones. They are well known as the “dives of death”. They kill the creations of Ahuramazda. They attack a person’s body and decay them. “Another dive is known as “Bushianstă”. This dive causes the laziness and drowsiness. At the day break makes the eyelids heavy and prevent people to do their career”5.

Many dives cause drought, some others are responsible for people’s pain and affliction and cause senility. Some cause earthquakes,
hurricanes and demolish everything. Others cause jealousy, envy, lies and hatred to oppose people against each other.

After the creation of gods and dives, the second duration of three thousand years starts. At the end of the first period Ahuramazda says a praying which makes Ahriman to become unconscious during the second period. This praying is called Ahunvar. It is the most sacred praying among Zoroastrians. In this praying “truth” is praised and it is the basic principle of this religion.

During the second period through which Ahriman is slept, Ahuramazda starts the creation of the physical objects like the sky, the earth, the water, the plants, the animals and humans and appoints the specified Amshasepand of each creation to preserve the relevant creature. Through this duration the forces of Ahriman, dives try to awaken Ahriman. Jahi, a div of prostitution, encouraging Ahriman to fight and cry out, “Get up our father”. Ahriman awakes and all the dives promise to help him destroy the world of Ahuramazda. In this way a war starts and consequently it is the start of the third period.

Ahriman and the dives attack the sky, as a result of being frightened the sky becomes dark and night appears. Then they attack the waters and make them salty and muddy. Gradually all the creatures of Ahuramazda are annihilated by dives. They fade the plants and kill animals. The forces of Ahuramazda do not loose their time of course, they struggle in a stiff combat against them and make them retreat and clear the world out of their existence. Although in spite of their effort some of the destructive marks are still remained in the nature like the saltiness of the water, night and death.

After the victory of Ahuramazda’s forces the fourth period begins. Throughout this period the generations of mankind increase. They live in a pure, lovely world, without threat from disease. Evil is removed completely and there would be an unlimited welfare and prosperity. In Persian literature “Div” is introduced as a mythical creature with a body like a mankind, but giant, two horns and a tail - both ugly and frightening. Based on common narrations they were homely deceived creatures who enjoyed eating the flesh of mankind. They were powerful, cruel and stonehearted with big teeth like a boar. They had ability to transform themselves. They were skilled in conjuring and their clothes were made of pelt. Through Persian legendary epics like Shahnameh, the well known masterpiece of Ferdowsi, many dives blocked the way of the heroes. These dives are troublesome. They are usually forces of the enemy to help them in the wars between Iranians and the people of other countries but they are killed by Iranian heroes. The Dives are very powerful and they
are able to perform extraordinary tasks. The most important dives mentioned in *Shahnameh* are called *Dive-Sepid* and *Akovan* - who were killed by *Rostam*, an Iranian hero. 

*Dive-Sepid* defeated *Kikavoos*, an Iranian king who sent a military expedition to *Mazandran*, and the div blinded the king and his followers by using black magic on them. When *Rostam* heard this news, he went to *Mazandran* and after passing seven terrifying stages, found the div sleeping in a cave. After awakening him, *Rostam* fought with the div and killed him. *Rostam* slashed the div’s chest and dropped some of the div’s blood in the eyes of the king and his companion. As a result they became able to see again. It was only the blood of the div that could remove the magic. The legend of *Rostam* and killing *Dive-Sepid* influenced Persian poems too.

*Akovan* was another dive who transformed himself into a zebra and joined the cattle of *Kikavoos* and sustained a loss. *Kikavoos* asked *Rostam* to help him to get rid of that div. When *Rostam* went to kill him, *Akovan* disappeared as the result of his own magic and made *Rostam* follow him on and on. Feeling tired *Rostam* fell into asleep beside a spring. *Akovan* detached the piece of land on which *Rostam* had slept. *Rostam* got up and found himself defeated by the div. Div asked him to choose whether he prefers to be thrown into the sea or mountain. As *Rostam* knew *Akovan* is spiteful and would invert his choice, he responded, “Throw me to the mountain”. Dive threw him in to the sea. Swimming *Rostam* struggled and reached the shore and killed *Akovan* with his club.

According to some legends of *Shahnameh* one of Iranian kings, *Tahmoores*, chained many dives. Dives bartered to be released and, to compensate, they taught him how to read and write. In this way they taught him thirty languages. In *Shahnameh* he is given the title of “divband” (Div binder). Other than *Tahmoores*, some other Iranian kings and heroes challenged dives seriously and finally won them. Among them we can mention *Hooshang* and *Esfandiar*. These men struggled and killed the dives.

In a general conclusion we can say that div has a metaphorical meaning in Persian literature. The purpose of the usage of div is the wicked people as representations of Satan. They annihilate holy creatures. Their ugly and frightening faces are the symbol of their bad and evil deeds.

In mystic and moral literature div means concupiscence and internal Satan. They should be killed by a clergyman or a mature representation of God. Gods and dives are pitted against each other and join legend with religion where Satan is defeated.
Notes

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A Mirror of Monsters: Escapes of Revenge Tragedy

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Give me leave to lead you by the hand in a wilderness where none but monsters – whose cruelty you need not fear, because I teach the way to tame them. Ugly they are in shape and devilish in conditions. Yet to behold them far off, may delight you, and to know their qualities if ever you should come near them may save you from much danger.

With this short passage we are ushered into the disruptive and liminal space of the seventeenth century underground London, where a literary persona of a narrator invented by Thomas Dekker, a playwright and a metropolitan writer, opens up for the curious reader a spectacle of “shadowy sub-communities”, in which beggars, prostitutes and unlicensed actors are cast as monstrous characters. Though Dekker hyperbolically and perhaps somewhat auto-ironically refers to London’s dispossessed as monsters, unlicensed actors assumed the position of cultural marginality, occupied by diverse grotesques already within cultural discourse of antiquity and the Middle Ages. The person of a Renaissance actor that more often than not would serve as the locus of theatrical transvestitism and categorial indeterminacy that transvestitism evokes, may be interpreted as a carrier of dual signification, for, as a “double” of what is both familiar and unknown he appears as a figure of ironic ambiguity, as a dramatization of human repressions and sublimations, but also as a mediator of the disabling discontinuities of the self in an equally contradictory form of a human body that self-consciously points to both its position on stage and the dramatic persona that it would embody – or even consume. Such an uncanny distinction of the figure of an actor may well be strengthened by unsettling and highly ambiguous status of theatre itself. Bloodshed, incest and murder, mutilation of the body in all ways (un)imaginable would provide the stock-trade of theatrical industry in-between 1580’s and 1630’s and were distinctive for what we can today call the representation of a tragic breakdown (or impossibility) of consistent human subjectivity as well as for metatheatrical recognition of the perverse relationship between language, power and action integrated on stage. Theatre then would take the position on the edge, geographically, socially and politically inscribing itself into the deviant (de-vious) landscape of the urban London taken straight from Dekker’s vision.
The aim of the paper that this presentation most monstrously and insolently refuses to give you will be to ask some (obviously pertinent) questions about the place of an actor, the playhouse and the state in the discussion of the limits of representation that would take place within the sphere of Renaissance criticism and simultaneously to draw a (tentative) parallel between Protestant use of rhetoric of monstrosity and practical applications of the monstrous on the English Renaissance stage; all that while taking into consideration the fact that the birth of Elizabethan tragedy coincides rather unincidentally with the increase of popular interest in maleficia, observable in publication of witchcraft pamphlets, trial accounts and demonological tracts of all sorts.

1. Scandalum magnatum

As you know, the first decade of Elizabethan’s reign witnessed the rise of anti-theatrical controversy that was ignited by the founding of The Shoreditch Theatre and The Curtain and culminated in the closure of theatres. On the polemical prints and pamphlets we can trace political/religious divisions of the kingdom that to a large extent concerned inseparability of the religious and secular discourse on the moral limitations of art. It comes as no surprise that anti-theatrical clamour focuses on the objectionable practices accompanying public playing and that heated denunciation of plays would oscillate round the common stage and popular theatre accused of the “abuse” of theatrical medium as a vehicle of excessive pleasure and impious idolatry. What is significant, however, is that -- at least according to Michael Hattaway -- Renaissance stages should be treated “as spaces rather than places, as fields of play, places for supposing, spaces where ideas might be explored...” as sites of scandalous contestation of the norm and an escape from it. If we consider numerous evidence of censorship in the activities of the Master of the Revels it will become apparent that from this point of view, the “fault” and “transgression” of the new space of the theatre resided predominantly in irreverent questioning of the established institutional order. Diversions of the playhouse were not so much diverting as divergent, for plays would topple feudal hierarchy by subjecting “great men of the [literary] realm” to the scrutinizing pen of a playwright and the impassive gaze of common audience, all that for a fee within the liberating, marginal space of the playhouse. Such a carnivalesque “scandal of the magnates” and the abuse of language that it called for, had to be stigmatized at all cost, it was then
common ground to address playhouse, playwright and common audience in language itself suggestive of radical disorder, as language of theatre adversaries became itself infused with paradox, hyperbole and dangerous comparisons. The range of metaphors invoked in the discussion over theatre registers a sense of uneasiness about shifting and unstable identity of an actor and the playhouse, constituted and destabilized by dissolution of the self, a contagious disease threatening the debilitated audience as well. No wonder that in a 1587 pamphlet William Rankins voiced disdain of all things theatrical as the site where

Men doo then transforme that glorious image of Christ into the brutish shape of a rude beast, when the temple of our bodies whiche should be consecrate vnto him is made a stage of stinking stuffe, a den for theeeues, and an habitation for insatiate monsters.6

In his treatise Rankins does not differentiate between the place of the stage and the space of theatrical representation; actors’ bodies metonymically invoke both the subject matter of the play as well as the material environment of the playhouse. In order to express a violent critique of enormous “abuses” of the theatre, the pamphleteer employs discourse of the monstrous that brings out to the open the liminal sphere of human body. No longer a unified whole, the “temple” of the body is desacralized in a wilful act of performative disobedience and becomes transmogrified into a profane spectacle. From such a perspective “all theatrical phenomena, by being ‘monstrous’ are culturally alien and hence profoundly threatening.”7 What is particularly significant in the passage is the dynamic and wilful process of metamorphosis of the body, whose biological dimension is here quelled and surpassed by its deeply ideological significance as the “glorious image of Christ”, only to re-emerge on stage in a de-formed, “brutish shape of a rude beast”, textualized as an ex-cremental space, where actors become monsters because they invite monsters in, in a sacrilegious act of reproduction of the auto referential gesture pointing to relative and changeable nature of the human subject. Signifying practices of an actor make a show of an absence of integrity and represent temporary impersonation as the only available mode of human existence. Theatrical transvestitism would dramatically expose the myth of stable social and political distinctions, leading to a disturbing release from constrains of ideology. A similar thought is articulated by a Bristol clergyman John Northbrooke (1577?):

As farre as good exercises and honest pastimes & plays doe benefit the health of manne, and recreate his wittes, so farre I speake not against it, but the excessive and
unmeasurable use thereof, taketh away the right institution thereof, and bringeth abuse and misuse ... and therefore they are rather chaunged into faults and transgressions, than honest exercises for mans recreation.\textsuperscript{8}

His writing here is symptomatic for the treatment of theatre as a site of aesthetic corruption, moral decay and destabilization of proper theatrical “institution” that in the eyes of anti-theatrical pamphleteers was synonymous with educational and religious drama controlled by Church/State. Attack on theatre can be read as a part of the iconoclastic war against orality and visuality of Pre-Reformation England: Protestant principle of \textit{sola scriptura}, emphasising the significance of the printed word in spiritual development\textsuperscript{9} stood then against the (perverse) visual attributes of theatrical representation, for theatrical decorum defied the ‘scripturalism’ of Protestant literature with its aesthetic of plain style and open sense. Instead drama would cash on its scopic appeal to the senses and metaphorical “abuse” of language, all that in order to “misuse” and mock traditional distinctions between the sexes, social ranks, truth and falsehood, and ultimately lead to a truly monstrous indeterminacy of reality and representation:

[F]or a boy to put on the attire, the gesture, the passions of a woman; for a mean person to take upon him the title of a Prince with counterfeit port and train, is by outward signs to show themselves otherwise than they are, and so within the compass of a lie.\textsuperscript{10}

In \textit{Plays Confuted in Five Actions} (1582), an Oxford clergyman Stephen Gosson sees the scandal of the theatre in a perversion of the natural order offered in theatrical transvestitism of sexual, political and moral norms. Self-conscious sexualized display of a body on stage, “showing” or rather \textit{demonstrating} itself “otherwise than it is”, portends obscenity of representation and relativity of an individuated, discontinuous self that opens itself up to a change which escapes logical categorization of binary oppositions. From such a point of view the body of an actor can presence itself only by “outward signs” of a dress code, but that is rendered monstrous as “the attire”, understood as “a prime expression of social identity”\textsuperscript{11} dissolves the body in the operation of sartorial excess and in this way brings about the threat of physical disintegration.

Thus, ostentatious theatricality of “the attire, the gesture, the passions” becomes imbued with a particular meaning only when it is controlled by a confluence of forces and circumstances that condition the functioning of a society; but the society is represented by antitheatrical
rhetoric as a body vulnerable to the infectious influence of the plague pit of the stage, and in this way it is rendered powerless.

1. *Theatrum crudelitatum*\(^2\)

Anti-theatrical campaign accusing theatre of dangerous transgression of normative boundaries points to fixation on purity of all norm and the iconoclastic desire to limit all representation to the pure aesthetics of the word that excludes corporeality. It is then the human body or rather its dismemberment, pollution and death (on stage) which becomes a signifier of the abuse, or the limit of representation, and comes to be identified with moral, ideological and sociopolitical transgression, most vividly articulated in revenge tragedies of the time. For the sake of the present discussion I will briefly address only one play, notable for the amount of horror and mutilated corpses that fill the stage. Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* draws attention to carnal appetites and monstrous desires of aristocratic bodies whose unrestrained actions lead to disintegration of the “body politic” of the state and the excess of “wild justice” on the part of villains and revengers alike; all of them become transformed by their murderous inclinations into brutish beasts governed by “insatiable monsters” of passion, hatred and bloodlust – all that within a space bearing the signs of profound linguistic and geographic confusion that calls into question the very notion of cultural difference and meaningfulness of verbal representation.

The initial movement of the play obeys the convention of Senecan tragedy, as it opens with a formal description of a battle interspersed with Latin quotes. But the elevated style and formal rhetoric of the passage slip and falter only a few lines later, when it comes to a discomfiting depiction of dead bodies in words. The whole structure of the play is hinged between two violent deaths (of Andrea/Horatio and Hieronimo) which set out a symbolic space of inverted order in which language fails to describe the horror of a mutilated body. This failure circumscribes the convoluted attempt of most the characters to come to terms with murder and death of one’s beloved. Throughout the play we observe a repetition of the pattern in which the death of a child is followed by a shocked response of a father, finding its traumatic resolution (or escape) in valorisation of violence and distorted “victim’s discourse” that makes a consistent use of such phrases as “monstrous homicide” and “monstrous deed”. The perverse logic of revenge and moralizing but ultimately powerless narrative of monstrosity are most conspicuously deployed by Hieronimo, Marshal to the King of Spain, as revenge and distorted diction provide the only discourse that is left to a father observing the “murd'rous spectacle”\(^3\) of his son’s death:
What savage monster, not of human kind,
Hath here been glutted with thy harmless blood, ...
And left thy bloody corpse dishonored here,
For me, amidst these dark and deathful shades,
To drown thee with an ocean of my tears?
Oh heavens, why made you night to cover sin?
By day this deed of darkness had not been.
Oh earth, why didst thou not in time devour
The vild profaner of this sacred bower?
Oh poor Horatio, what hadst thou misdone
To leese thy life, ere life was new begun?
Oh wicked butcher, whatsoe'er thou wert, ...
How could thou strangle virtue and desert?

The passage serves as a description of the scene Hieronimo encounters in his bower; it allocates the monstrous within the catastrophic event of Horatio’s murder. Death of Horatio is premature, unjust and perverse as this violence is a violation of the natural order of things: life is “leesed”/wasted, youth and virtue are “strangled”, body becomes “dishonored”: all that in the “sacred bower” that is “profaned” “amidst these dark and deathful shades”, in the temporal monstrosity of night. Hieronimo’s “monster” signifies an apocalyptic fragmentation of his universe, based on the notion of “social piety”, but it by no means functions as a fixed entity, categorized once and for all as a monstrum horrendum “not of human kind”. What is observable in the passage is a peculiar progression from a definition of the murderer in beast-like categories to an appellation fashioning the perpetrator of the crime into a vile and evil, but all the same, human subject that can be addressed via a rhetorical question and held personally responsible for the atrocity. Thus, it is not the murderer that becomes imbued with meaning as a symbol of aberrance from the norms of social behaviour; it is the event of a violent death that is perceived by Hieronimo as a lusus naturae. Monster’s identity becomes disambiguated in language, as it turns into a “wicked butcher”; but the monstrous serves here and elsewhere as a rhetorical figure encompassing the experience of death that turns out to be grounding for the production of Hieronimo’s new destructive identity as a revenger.

Symbolically, the murder serves as a breach in the semblance of harmony and unity of the kingdom. Horatio dies because he is not only “getting in the way of a dynastic marriage”;
but first of all, because he forms an unworthy liaison with the King’s niece, Bel-imperia, who becomes the object of desire for Balthazar, the heir to the throne of Portugal, and her own brother Lorenzo, who sees in her marriage the way to greater power. It is the sin of a woman and her transgression of the accepted social norm that
occasions in retribution on the part of the patriarchal community, whose cultural code of behaviour she violates. But the emblematic vision of hanged Horatio becomes more than a sign of personal vendetta on the part of offended male bodies; it serves as an iconic marker of abnormality of the state, as death by hanging, usually reserved as a tool of state justice, is abused here as an instrument of whimsical vengeance of a future king. The revengers strive to expose lust and fear of miscegenation that govern actions of the murderers only in the absence of legally enforced justice: ultimately Bel-imperia and Hieronimo’s aim is to uncover the deformed political dimension of that death and bring the stasis of the system to a tragic crisis. This particular death not only touches upon the notion of abuse of institutional order by a monarch and thus serves as an instrument leading to a subversion of the order that shakes the boundary between reality and theatrical representation: the very fact that it could potentially become a “real” act of staged violence, in which the part of Horatio could be taken by a convicted criminal, leads to a further destabilization of the interaction between state justice and its theatrical representation.

Death by hanging is followed in the play by three murders, three suicides and one act of tongue-biting, all equally problematized, as all of them probe the boundary between reality and representation, because they occur within a polyglot play within-a play staged by Hieronimo in which:

The English actor who plays Spanish Bel-imperia plays Italian Perseda who speaks “courtly French.” The English actor who plays Portuguese Balthazar plays Turkish Soliman who speaks Latin. The English actor who plays the Castilian Lorenzo plays a knight of Rhodes who speaks Italian. And finally, the English actor who plays the Spanish Hieronimo plays the Bashaw who speaks Greek.16

As we can see, the movement of the play as well as the progression of the play-within-a play mirror Hieronimo’s growing sense of alienation and dis-memberment from the “body social” of the court and find their violent climax in proliferation of real and less that real dead bodies on stage. The traumatic tableau in which three fathers gaze at the corpses of their children, with the body of Horatio brought to the centre of attention, becomes a gory externalization of Hieronimo’s self-dissolution brought about by a “monstrous resolution of a wretch” attempting to dislodge the order he initially embodies as the Marshall. As Mazzio succinctly concludes:

Through Hieronimo’s bloody theatre of revenge... Kyd stages a discursive war zone which conflates murder, contamination, and corruption with the uneasy juxtaposition
of alien forms. In many important ways, Hieronimo’s ultimate revenge is a revenge on language, on representation, on what he returns to in the end, ‘our vulgar tongue.’

3. Cetera erunt Evαίγμoî

Howard Bloch would write on medieval fabliaux that they possess “essentially conservative status ... at once against the law and on the side of law.” It seems that the same applies to Kyd’s theatre of cruelty and by extension to the corp(ps)e of revenge tragedy which articulates basically the same concerns as the anti-theatrical Protestant pamphlet, only more so. Discourse of monstrousity is used and abused to highlight the problematic relationship between language and power, indeterminacy of representation and self-dissimulation, all that to subvert and uphold the institutional order in which it is immersed. Metaphors of the monstrous and monstrous metaphors employed both in the sphere of theatre criticism as well as in the sphere of theatrical production are engaged into a dramatic display of the ways in which the strictly organized and carefully structured space of Renaissance imagination uses corporeality to allocate transgression of social and cultural boundaries always within the space of the theatre, to bound and simultaneously liberate the body in a scandalous, sacrilegious act of auto referential representation. And yet, again in the words of Thomas Dekker we “need not fear” the cruelty of those “insatiate monsters” of the stage: they are to be “delighted in” and “beheld far off” always in the “mirror” of representation. Does it really matter that their devilish qualities: murderous inclinations leading to carnage, dismemberment and death are enclosed in a human body that we all share.

Notes

4 [The scandal of magnates]. Defamation of a noble person that became punishable in the court of Star Chamber during the reign of James I. Since the times of Tudors the Star Chamber was often used as the means of political oppression, which led to its abolition in 1641.


10 S Gosson, Plays Confuted in Five Actions, in W Hazlitt (ed), The English Drama and Stage under the Tudor and Stuart Princes, 1543-1664, Burt Franklin, New York, 1869, p. 196.


13 T Kyd The Spanish Tragedy, 2.5.9.

14 Kyd, op. cit. 2.5.20-30.


17 ibid.


Bibliography


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