The Monstrous Identity of Humanity:

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Introduction

Marlin Bates, IV

The creation of identity is an interesting concept. Kenneth Burke noted that “the human animal, as we know it, emerges into personality by first mastering whatever tribal speech happens to be [in its] particular symbolic environment.” In much the same way, human beings master their identity by the cultural artifacts that surround them. Burke states that this collection of language and artifacts results in the creation of “terministic screens.” “Terministic screens” are the way we see ourselves and the world around us, it is how we understand the world and how we judge information we receive. In Burke’s words:

We must use terministic screens, since we can’t say anything without the use of terms [i.e., words, symbols]; whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another. [...]. All terminologies must implicitly or explicitly embody choices between the principle of continuity and the principle of discontinuity.²

Thus, the way we recognize what is part of our world - our reality - is through the use of a system of screens that are composed of a large hierarchy of terms/symbols. That reality contains - and is contained by - the identities of people within and without that reality. Our identity, therefore, is comprised not only of our own screens, but also of those around us. In the next few pages, you will come to understand how we create an identity that is - ostensibly outside of our self-identity, yet as we have seen from Burke - part of our overall understanding of our reality.

Yet even after all that, we are still left with a question: How do we understand our own identity? To be precise: What is identity? A dictionary definition provides us with a beginning: “1. The condition or fact of being the same or exactly alike; sameness; oneness. 2. a) the condition or fact of being a specific person or thing; individuality.”³ From this, we can see that there are two essential parts to identity. The first is how we, as humans cum rhetors, fit into a group of individuals. The second provides us with a basis of how we are specific individuals. The question becomes, how do we discover these two identities?

Burke would have us believe that we express ourselves in a variety of methods and those methods change depending on our circumstances.
However, he cautions us that “self-expression today is too often confused with pure utterance, the spontaneous cry of distress, the almost reflex vociferation of triumph, the clucking of the pheasant as he is startled into flight.” So how do we avoid this confusion? Burke’s best clarification comes in the statement that “the self-expression of the artist [rhetor], qua artist, is not distinguished by the uttering of emotion, but by the evocation of emotion.” Therefore, how we identify ourselves is not found directly in the words we utter to our audience, rather it is found in the emotions we evoke from our respondents.

Our emotion-evoking utterances must be conveyed to our audiences somehow, though. Burke touches on this aspect when he mentions “it is inevitable that all initial feelings will undergo some transformation when being converted into the mechanism of art.” Therefore, as rhetors, claims of identity through feeling-evocation will be somehow altered depending on the channel through which the emotions are transmitted to the audience. Thus, the speaker/person/reader must be cognizant of how the messages are transformed by the medium in which they reside. Indeed, the rhetor is aware of this transformation to such an extent that the medium becomes part of the evoked identity. Burke provides support for this when he posits that “the philosopher does not merely use logic to convince others; he uses logic because he loves logic, so that logic is to him as much an end as a means.”

So far, we know that a rhetor produces his/her identity by not only evoking emotion, but also by evoking it through a particular channel. In time, the repetition of these items produce what Burke would term a symbol. That symbol is identity when it is brought down to the individual and/or group rhetorical level. As Burke mentions, the symbol brings with it a certain “technical form” that “becomes a generative force” that assists us in advancing towards a synthesis of the rhetor. Additionally, the symbol gives us the ability to return to it again and again and find the aesthetic values of identity. When new information is received, we can analyze it in terms of that which was experienced before.

Burke tells us that “in the realm of rhetoric, such identification is frequently by property in its most materialistic sense.” In the following chapters you will begin to see how property - in the form of our cultural monsters and monstrosities - are used to fulfill that materialistic sense. Specifically, our culture and reality vis-a-vis the monstrous will allow us to understand how our “moral growth is organized through properties, properties in goods, in services, in position or status, in citizenship, in reputation, in acquaintanceship and love.” The discussion of cultural monsters displays not only what we are/are not, but also how “the cult of property come to reflect public norms, norms identified with the social classes which are differentiated by property.”
Moreover, when we seek to understand what is not part of ourselves, we often describe it as the “other.” Indeed, many of the papers you will read focus on how the “other” is made to be monstrous, whether it is Professor Liggins discussion of Bigger Thomas as the racialized monstrous other, or Professor Miller’s discussion of how technology is used to otherize the unknown. It is because of this combination of otherization and identification that I have chosen to title this collection of papers as “The Monstrous Identity of Humanity.” It is in both the creation of the terministic screen of “monster” and in “other” that results in how we see the world and ourselves. In the next few pages, I will present a brief synopsis of the papers and how this creation of our monstrous human identity results from them.

1. **Written Monsters.**

Since the invention of the printing press, humankind has sought to detail both our ambitions and our fears. The Bible is many things to many people, but, as the first printed document, it records what we hold dear (God, virtues, love) as well as what we have chosen to shun (Devils, demons, sin). As the printing press advanced, newspapers were created to continue that tradition. In Andrew O’Day’s paper, we are presented with a prime example of how the newspaper was used in Nineteenth-Century London to not only present that which should be shunned, but also make money simultaneously. It is interesting to note that the choices for what stood for monstrous in the 1800s is still the norm in the twenty-first century: Murder and serial murderers. Whether it is Jack the Ripper or Ted Bundy, our terministic screen of “monster” always includes one or two members of a legal “rogue’s gallery.” Indeed, Professor O’Day notes that “this discourse of monstrosity is not so different from the sensationalist reporting in the tabloids of today.”

The next eight papers, explore how we can identify monsters in the novel. Although the novels run the gamut from science-fiction (Sanna’s examination of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*) to discussions of race and privilege (Liggins’ discussion of *Native Son*) to Medieval verse (Priest’s discussion of *William of Palerne*), all of the discussions examine and problematize how humans seek the monsters around us. Antonio Sanna’s examination of the monstrous in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* reflects our previous discussion in how the different use of terms can result in a different reality being created. In his paper, he argues that “the Beast People shown in Wells’ 1896 work” are not monsters, but “a representation of human beings.” In his discussion, he carefully teases out how Wells has masked the truly “human” beings as monsters and how the real “monsters” are the so-called civilized human beings recounting the tale.

In a further examination of how society has attempted to otherize that which it does not want as part of its reality, Saundra Liggins demonstrates how “the sexual and racial apprehensions associated with the black male” are used as
an impetus to otherize and exclude Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright’s novel, *Native Son*. It is a frank discussion of how racism and prejudice in 1940s America is no less frightening and no less diminished in our current era. Indeed, it is the continuing conversion of how society changes many a “young man into a monster,” through racial otherization that haunts our societal identity even now. The racial monster discussion is further dissected with Inderjit Grewal’s examination of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. The difference here is that the otherization of the African-American slave is so pervasive, so patriarchal, that society’s monstrous identification forces a slave-mother to kill her own child rather than see the child transformed into another monster by the “Colonial Father” of American slavery.

Terministic screens are (re)created in Anne-Lise Perotto’s examination of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Author and characters create and recreate their own identities, the reader-supported by Perotto’s examination - is told one falsehood after another. Perhaps, it is one truth after another? The reader is left to his/her own doubts and, as Perotto notes, perhaps the monstrosity is not the identity of the characters or even the author, but the story itself!

The final three novels focus on a dystopian reality. A realm in which identity is inextricably linked with a non-human identity. Indeed, it is the need to associate with the allegedly monstrous that is key to these two papers. The first, Thomas Michael Murphy’s discussion of *CAR: A Novel*, examines how the automobile has become fused with the American identity. As a result, the American cultural identity is no longer simply human, it is a cyborg, a “‘coupling between organism and a machine.’” Murphy continues by explaining that this coupling is at such an intimate level, there can be no separation between the two. Indeed, Our discussion with Burke, above, agrees that merging at this level cannot be two identities or terminisitic screens, but one. It is a fascinating discussion of how human values are, indeed, fused with the material world. The second, Roger Davis’ examination of *Oryx and Crake*, not only represents how human identity has become hybridized with science and the physical, but also how that identity is still inextricably linked to an identity of race even as we seek to use science to divide us from that. The final paper again looks at the concept of hybridity in identity, but this time from the perspective of gender. Indeed, Cecilia Feilla’s examination of how the feminine was codified by men as monstrous and then re-codified by women as a denial of the monstrous allows us the ability to read Frankenstein as not only a “ghost story,” but also as a text that “makes literal the pervasive horror of the creative/procreative female body [...] and thus founds a place for women’s writing in the liminal space of the monstrous.”

Taking a departure from the modern novel, Hannah Priest analyzes how societal norms are both violation and reconstructed in her discussion
about the 14th Century poem, *William of Palerne*. It is intriguing to note that her discussion points out that the step-mother as witch is not necessarily the negative connotation we regard it as in the modern era. Indeed, her examination demonstrates how the identity of the “human prince and the transformed werewolf state” are continuous and, thus, both monstrous and acceptable. Again, the identity of a given monster or a given human is fluid.

2. **Monstrous Performances.**

The largest section in the book you are holding focuses on how monstrosities are performed in modern society. Although a good number of them concern themselves with cinematic monsters, a number of them focus on how the monsters were created and what the monsters truly represent when viewed through our terministic screens.

In “Jumping, Yelling, Screaming,” Professors Rodriguez discern how horror film director, John Carpenter, crafts his films to provoke the most visceral response from his audience. Indeed, this examination demonstrates how the horror film is not just a simple fright, but a deep look into what makes us jump, yell, and scream. In Holly Baumgartner’s paper, the focus on how the operatic *femme fatale* is used as a monstrous trope continues that discussion. Like Carpenter, Baumgartner states that we need to see the damsel-in-distress so that we can become greater than the monsters in the play.

Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik’s study of Shakespeare’s Caliban continues that discussion. Her paper looks at how the cultural approach to monstrosities has changed over the years. Interestingly enough, in accomplishing that examination, we are granted further proof that monsters allow humanity a way to “express our carnal appetites and immoderate desires.” More simply, we need monsters in order to be human. This is true not only in Western culture, but also in Eastern culture as well, according to Colette Balmain’s examination of Kurosawa’s *עבגאיכו* (Sweet Home). Professor Balmain’s analysis posits that the maternal becomes monstrous when it is too large a part of our identity. Although the mother figure is valorized in post-war Japan, it is also made into a monster so that societal angst can be expunged. Moreover, the breakdown of the standard family structure in reality is excoriated as the film deals with the monstrous mother.

The next two papers, Lucy Fife’s examination of *Rosemary’s Baby* and Duane Kight’s examination of *Session 9*, give us access into how the Devil and its requisite evil are represented in our lives. Although both papers go into exquisite detail on how society attempts to prove that evil is not inherently human, but from some othered source, we are again given insight into how humans craft who they are by demonstrating what they are not. The everyday behaviour of Guy is both attractive and repellant: We want it to be from some supernatural source, but, at some level, realize that it is our own
reflection up on the screen. This terrifies us, yet we return again and again to see it. Kight’s examination of how evil is represented in the everyday is also frightening, yet insightful: Evil is everywhere, especially inside of us, the human. Ann-Marie Cook’s examination of how Terry Gilliam uses The Brothers Grimm as a foil against the American War in Iraq is yet another example of how society uses the monstrous to deal with issues it cannot deal with plainly and directly. Not only is the discussion of life’s vicissitudes - love, money, death - curtained behind the fairy tales, but also the discussion of when war is rational or not. Amaya Muruzabal furthers this discussion in her examination of the war veteran as monster by looking at the portrayal of Homer in The Best Years of Our Lives. Here, the war veteran has been otherized by society, he has gone and become monstrous so that society does not have to deal with the monstrosities of war. Homer comes back physically and psychically altered by the war, yet it is the very vicissitudes of life - love - that allow the monster, Homer, to be re-humanized. The slasher film has slowly evolved as a sub-genre within horror films. Toward that end, our human identity has encapsulated some of its elements within our identity. Sorcha Ni Fhlainn and Kristen Miller present us with two different studies on the slasher film. The first, Professor Ni Fhlainn’s study in how the slasher film is used to both perpetuate and respond to social and class problems in society, is a very interesting examination of how we, as a culture, seek to use the slasher film to maintain class boundaries and still be repelled by them. Professor Miller’s examination gives us access to an even further distinction in the slasher genre: Techno-horror, or how the machines that humanity creates are also a source of its undoing. This is continued in Sarah Arnold’s study of Dumplings, a film that highlights not the technological monster, but the monster of the consumer. The consumer portion of who we are is shown to be crass and vain, more interested in how to perpetuate our beauty than in helping out those who have been victimized by the consumerist monster. The final two papers in this section, Christie’s analysis of Nosferatu and the Weimar Republic and Depauw’s analysis of 1930s Belgium horror film reception, are both prime examples of how the context in which humans find themselves often dictate what is acceptable and what is monstrous. Christie’s paper looks to how the societal need to act against its own monsters - war, mass death, and subjugation - must be stoked into existence and that the Dracula character is not so much a monster, but a warning that society needs to stop the real monsters that are being created around us. Depauw’s paper is an intriguing examination into what happens when our terministic screens are developed in such a way as to not recognize what other cultures deem monstrous. Specifically, it is how Belgian society
perceived the American Horror film as comical while the rest of Europe sought to ban them!

3. **Legal, Historio-Cultural, and Medical Monsters**
   
The beginning of this chapter discussed how humans use symbols to create terministic screens that are ultimately combined into a coherent - yet changeable - identity. Perhaps the most blatant example of that is in the next two sections of papers. The current one discusses those monsters that humanity wishes did not exist. Unlike the papers we have discussed so far, these papers investigate the monstrous acts that humans do not in the fantastic, but in the real worlds of our existence. In doing so, we get an even closer - and perhaps more disturbing - look at who we are and who we have become.

   The first two papers, Davis’ discussion of the Colombine High School tragedy in the United States and Morrissey’s examination of the Eliza Davis murder in Australia, examine how children have become the monsters in modern-day reality. It is interesting that Davis’ discussion focuses on how everybody but the monsters themselves - parents, the school, the other students - are blamed for the tragedy. Indeed, Davis even gives us insight into her own surprising feelings toward some of the victims in her examination. Again, it is in the mimesis of the practical that we are forced to view our own beliefs and, thus, our own identity. The Colombine High School tragedy is just another example of how we attempt to root out the monsters in order to make certain that the monster is not of our own creation. Morrissey’s paper takes us further into understanding how humanity attempts to distance itself from the monstrous by demonstrating how Eliza Davis’ killers were non-emotional, even non-human actors. Individuals so far outside our ken that the general public could not or would not comprehend how the murderers - girls so young that they could not be named in public press - committed such a heinous act.

   The most intriguing part of this section is that this desire to separate “us” from the “monster” is not a new phenomenon. In Webb’s discussion of the diary of Herculine Barbin and the persecution she was subjected to as a result of her being born a hermaphrodite, we are shown a historical basis for how the general society forces those that are unlike the masses to be separated from those masses. Indeed, it is Webb’s acute observation that “contemporary society would have preferred to ignore” Herculine’s presence that leads to Ms. Barbin’s eventual suicide. Not only does society seek to distance its identity from the “other,” but it also goes to great lengths to ensure that the “other” does not survive. Much the same discussion is present within Angell’s look at the case of Joseph Merrick in nineteenth-century London. Medical monstrosities are treated as “freaks” that lack any
legitimate medical confirmation until hope for help by the medical profession is long past exhausted.

The separation of humans from monsters is much older than even the case of the Elephant Man, however. In Francesca Leoni’s examination of Shahnamas, she demonstrates how Divs (demons) are portrayed differently that humans in the illustrations done by fourteenth to sixteenth-century artists in Iran. Yet, at the same time, she demonstrates that sometimes the representations of the demons are closer to being human then they are demonic and that sometimes the humans being represented are more demonic than human. It is in this blurred identification of the human and the monstrous, that again we are presented with this driving need for identification: Who are we and how are we different from the evil in the world?

This section is rounded out with Dudley’s examination of the history of scientific “re-animation” or the real-life creation of Frankenstein’s monster. Her account of the number of body transplants, reanimated canines, and other ghoulish creations is well worth the read, if only to acquaint yourself with what humanity is capable of in the name of science. In addition to Dudley’s paper, Natalya Androsova looks at how Norval Morrisseau’s shamanistic paintings give humanity yet another access point into our own hidden selves, the identity we are still seeking to finalize.

5. Monstrous Diversions.

The final section is the shortest one. The three papers within this section are set apart because they represent the next frontier for human identity formation. Ewan Kirkland’s examination of the videogame, Shadow of the Colossus, is a journey in to how the player’s identity is constructed throughout his/her journey within the game. Kirkland makes the powerful argument - one that is echoed throughout this section - that the games people play are not just play, they are how we define who we are and what we do.

David Kingsley’s paper on the roots of Stephan King’s writings is a conformation of this thought: Stephen King’s books have their basis in what he read growing up. As King read the four-colour comic books of his generation, he was learning how to describe the world not only in which he lived, but also in which his characters lived. This world is the one we would come to reside in - albeit temporarily - as we read his books and watched the movies based on them.

Finally, my paper on identity construction in online games makes an attempt to wrap up our search for identity temporarily. The paper demonstrates how humans start to interchange the real and the online ur-real in order to perform and cement their identity. It is in this identity that we, as humans, discover that who we are is found in what we write, what we
perform, and how we relax. It is the monstrous identity that we all share, we all create, and we all decipher.

6. **Conclusion**

I hope that you enjoy this collection of works. It is an interesting cross-section of how the world works and how it exchanges ideas about itself. It is also a nice snapshot of the conference. Although, the after-paper discussions can never truly be re-created, it is my hope that the book you hold in your hands will allow you and your colleagues to create a new discussion that, perhaps, will result in a new understanding of who you are and what is truly your monstrous identity.

**Notes**

5 Burke, p. 53
6 Burke, p. 54.
7 Burke, *Counter-statement*, p. 55.
10 Burke, *Rhetoric*, p. 130.
12 Liggins, p. 29.
13 Liggins, p. 36.
14 Feilla, p. 99.
15 Priest, p. 54.
16 Kowalcze-Pawlik, p. 138.
PART 1

Written Monsters
Predators and Prey:  
Newspaper Editors, Readers and the Monstrous  

Andrew O’Day  

Abstract  
This paper argues that the monster provides a useful entry point for considering the aesthetic and economical strategies of print media in the late nineteenth-century: A period of sensationalist New Journalism. This New Journalism followed the sensationalist and serialised narratives of the day and belongs to a period when melodrama - pitting good against evil - thrived in the theatre; and when the gothic novel still enjoyed popularity. Drawing on primary archival material, the paper centres on the way in which Jack the Ripper - since his true identity remained unknown - was largely constructed as a monster in the visual press. The paper then examines the way in which the notion of the monster tied in with the form of these newspapers. Sensationalised and associated with the horror of the unknown, the discourse of monstrosity works in tandem with the serialised form of the Jack the Ripper case, with hermeneutic questions posed in each new issue engaging readers of the day in a continuing narrative, for people loved a good monster narrative. The paper concludes by noting that this discourse of monstrosity is not so different from the sensationalist reporting in the tabloids of today.

Keywords  
New journalism, sensationalism, tabloidisation, whitechapel murderer, jack the ripper, illustrated police news

“Jack the Ripper. It’s a newspaper man’s dream,” states a journalist for The Star upon hearing the epithet for the very first time in the 1988 Euston Films/Thames Television production of the case. This paper examines the representation of Jack the Ripper as monster in the press of 1888, as part of the economic imperative of New Journalism. Aimed at a mass market, newspapers were then produced using faster technologies (for example, the rotary press) and in a more appealing fashion than previously.1 Newspapers carried on the aims outlined by the editor of the Twopenny Dispatch in 1833/4 that that paper would abound in such events as “murders” and “theatricals.”2 The focus here is on the visual covers of The Illustrated Police News, which attracted people to buy the paper, although there will be some mention of the written press.

Although countless Ripperologists have sought the true identity of Jack the Ripper, the Whitechapel Murderer’s very facelessness is crucial to the way in which he was seized upon and represented in the print media of
the late nineteenth-century - and indeed in later film and television productions. In this respect, my paper carries on the work of Alexandra Warwick and Martin Willis’ recent edited volume, *Jack the Ripper: Media, Culture, History*, since this facelessness left a blank space, or, if you like, “blank canvas,” which could only be filled by the imagination. The case of the Whitechapel Murderer therefore blurs the boundaries between the known and the unknown, and between reality and fantasy. Fiction is a product of the imagination, the filling in of a blank space. So, while the Whitechapel Murderer is a historical figure (we know that he really existed and perpetrated the murders of some prostitutes in the East End of London in 1888), he is also a nebulous figure, who continually evaded detection and who, especially today, cannot be pinned down. There thus exists epistemological uncertainty. Due to the horrific nature of the murders there was a desire to attribute these deeds to an other, to a monster.

In his book, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press*, L Perry Curtis surveys the presentation of the Whitechapel Murder case in the written press of 1888, focussing on dailies, Sunday papers, weeklies and biweeklies with varying political slants. Furthermore, according to Curtis:

> What transpired […] was not just a series of five sadistic murders but a serial story combining mystery and sensation-horror, spread out over almost four months and cobbled together by a metropolitan press eager to boost sales.⁴

Therefore, Curtis points to the written press’s intertextual allusions to literary texts and monsters almost from the start of the crimes. The “fiend,” “ghoul,” or “monster” was something more ghastly than that found in the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe and was time and again compared to the double being, part-man, part-monster, from Robert Louis Stevenson’s gothic novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which was playing at the theatre of the time.⁵ But, Curtis does not focus in detail on the illustrated coverage of the case, and while Warwick and Willis incorporate press illustrations in their book, they do not analyse these fully, focussing instead on the written press as well as wider culture and other media. So, since Richard Altick observed that Victorians treated murders like a “spectator sport,” how was the case depicted in the visual press?⁶

*The Illustrated Police News* was a weekly penny tabloid with a wide circulation which saw the most sensationalised reporting of the mid to late-Victorian era.⁷ It began in 1864 and ended production in 1938. As its main interest was in depicting murder, it leapt upon the 1888 Whitechapel Murders, allocating numerous covers and a great deal of cover space each issue to the case. The covers of this tabloid were composed of fine wood engravings, sometimes of sea monsters, and ghosts.⁸ On its covers, the Whitechapel
Murderer was represented as monster as an economic strategy designed to draw Victorians to buy the paper. The Illustrated Police News was inspired by The Illustrated London News, which was launched because newspapers with illustrations sold more copies. Therefore, I focus on the covers of 1888, and the development of the monster narrative, but there were, in fact, a huge number of later such covers devoted to the case.

The covers of The Illustrated Police News concerning the Whitechapel Murders are notable for an increase in the presentation of the murderer as monster. The focus of the first covers (unseen here) is on the horror of the murdered prostitutes - the discoveries of the bodies, lit up in the darkness, the mutilations and the inquests - but, while the victims continued to be a concern of the covers, gradually more emphasis was given to the murderer, who had not been discovered by the police (for example, see Figures 1-4). The murderer was a “blank space” that was gradually being filled by the idea of the monster. The presentation of the murderer as monster lagged behind that in the written press, but, as the series of horrific murders progressed, as a way of increasing interest, the nature of the murderer was exaggerated more and more, with quantitative analysis pointing to the frequent use of words such as “MONSTER” and “FIEND” on individual covers (compare, for instance, the increase of such language in Figure 5 with Figures 2 and 4).

This discourse was a way of representing a murderer who was faceless and it was a means of enticing the reader to a narrative. Looking at the visual depiction of the Whitechapel Murders, we can detect conventions that were used not only in the gothic novel but were later employed in the film and television horror genre - including productions which focus on the case - and note how these are used in these media to entice an audience. The Whitechapel Murderer is the prototypical stalker, preying on defenceless women in the fog-shrouded streets of the East End, his features hidden from view, and newspapers, film and television horrors work with the idea that what is kept from view is potentially more threatening than what is revealed. On these covers, there is a play with light and dark, even in a later edition when the murderer is also represented as monster. While the murder victims are depicted in the light, frequently a dark silhouette of the Whitechapel Murderer is presented, often from behind or dashing through a window such as on the cover of the 17 November 1888 and the 8 December 1888 editions of The Illustrated Police News (Figures 6 and 7). The case was represented on another cover of The Illustrated Police News where in the foreground the female allegorical figure of Justice stands blindfolded over one of the gorily murdered prostitutes with the murderer presented dashing through an archway from behind, his face not visible. The meaning of the image is anchored by a caption reading “JUSTICE IS BLIND!” However, on some covers of The Illustrated Police News, sketches of the murderer - resembling
those made by police artists - can be found, such as on the editions of 27 October and 24 November 1888, showing both the desire and failure to pin him down. Also the murderer is sometimes presented as a stock melodramatic villain, in menacing posture and with even a caption where he boasts of his villainy, which, as with the monster, makes him an embodiment of evil.

Because of the nature of the murders and the mutilations of the victims, among the many suspects initially considered to fill in the murderer’s faceless blank space were doctors and even butchers. Over time, however, the paper seized upon this type of person, as opposed to a specific individual, to construct the notion of a monstrous beast, as was so in the written press. A common metaphor for the East End of the time was that of a jungle, which carried with it connotations of savageness compared with the civilized West End. The Whitechapel Murderer was seen as a monster ripping apart its animalistic prey, because the sexual activity of prostitutes was associated with bestiality. The covers of the early editions of The Illustrated Police News make implicit associations between the murderer and the slaughter of animals; the cover of the 15 September 1888 edition features a box depicting a police officer “MAKING INQUIRIES AT THE SLAUGHTER HOUSE” (Figure 1), for instance, while, only a week later, the cover of the 22 September 1888 edition features drawings of Annie Chapman side by side before and after death with two men with a horse at a slaughter yard pictured below (Figure 2). The cover of the 17 November 1888 edition, though, makes the comparison between the murderer as monster and his victims as slaughtered animals more explicit, featuring an illustration of a victim accompanied by a caption “PICKED OUT FOR SLAUGHTER BY THE EAST-END FIEND” (Figure 6).

The Jack the Ripper letters that constructed the Whitechapel Murderer as a monster also became a subject of these covers. Hundreds of letters were sent to the police and local press purporting to be by the Whitechapel Murderer. The question of their authenticity is pertinent here since most of the letters have been deemed to be fakes created by reporters attempting to start a story. Until the famous “Dear Boss” letter was received at the Central News Agency on September 27 1888 (believed by some to be genuine), the perpetrator of these crimes was simply known as “the Whitechapel Murderer.” But the “Dear Boss” letter, where the writer describes how he had to substitute red ink for blood, is signed “Jack the Ripper.” Such a trade name highlights the construction of a monstrous slasher figure. This can be found on covers of The Illustrated Police News, such as those of the 20 October and 27 October 1888. The headline of the 27 October cover reads “LATEST INCIDENTS IN CONNECTION WITH THE DOINGS OF JACK THE RIPPER THE EAST-END FIEND.” In the centre underneath that headline is a sketch of the murderer’s possible
appearance and to the sides of him are clearly visible the letter beginning “From Hell.” The “From Hell” letter addressed to George Lusk, president of the Whitechapel Vigilance Committee and received on 16 October 1888 (again believed by some to be genuine) gave the Ripper a monstrous presence akin to the Devil. Contained in a three-inch-square cardboard box with half a human kidney preserved in wine, this letter also emphasised the Ripper as monstrous cannibal, who had eaten part of the victim Catherine Eddowes’ organ. A scene of the vigilance committee examining the box and of the box accompanied by the caption “THE BOX CONTAINING A HUMAN KIDNEY” is present on the top left of this cover.

After the murder of Mary Jane Kelly, with a lack of any new murders, the press eventually gave the faceless Whitechapel Murderer the face of an instantly recognisable monster, designed to startle and again engage the reader. Here, Warwick and Willis’ description of the case as providing a “blank canvas” to be filled is particularly appropriate since a canvas can be a piece of fabric upon which a painting is executed, therefore filling an empty space. In the centre of the top portion of the 8 December 1888 cover of The Illustrated Police News, in a prominent position, what is obviously a man is represented (wearing a hat, a long coat, trousers and shoes, Figure 7). But this man’s face has been substituted with that of a skeleton that, with a menacing grin, leans towards Mary Jane Kelly who is, as the caption sensationally exclaims, “OPENING THE DOOR TO ADMIT DEATH!” The image of Death as a skeleton was a common one from the Middle Ages onwards. It was seen earlier in The Illustrated Police News where on the cover of the 25 June 1870 issue a woman dies due to tight-lacing. Here in 1888, the Grim Reaper’s traditional scythe (used to hack down its victims) has been replaced by the black bag associated with the Whitechapel Murderer in which were contained his weapons (a feature of many illustrations). With the lack of a literal human face to put to the Whitechapel Murderer, the press have given him a symbolic role as man-monster. We can detect the idea of the murderer as man-monster not only by looking at this specific illustration but also through the way the skeleton on this cover has taken the place of the male murderer in a similar pose while Mary Jane Kelly opens the door to her lodging on the bottom left of the 24 November 1888 cover of The Illustrated Police News, and indeed in larger form on the 17 November 1888 cover of The Penny Illustrated Paper (Figure 8). The repeated posture therefore creates an identification with the earlier images where we can see that the originally shrouded figure - the blank space - has been substituted by a monster. Allegory involves the construction of layers of symbolic meaning and here the murderer’s monstrous nature is highlighted.

The issue of narrative, which is highly constructed, is also important. Darren Oldridge argues that even before the Jack the Ripper letters were
received, the written press attributed the murders to one killer in order to involve readers in an ongoing narrative.\textsuperscript{14} This was also the case on the covers of\textit{The Illustrated Police News}. Furthermore, sensationalised and associated with the horror of the unknown, the discourse of monstrosity worked in tandem with the serialised form of the Whitechapel Murder case in the press, with hermeneutic questions posed in each new issue engaging readers of the day in a continuing narrative to discover the outcome. All narrative occurs over time and enabled by the fact that the Whitechapel Murderer was a serial killer, the serialised form in the press saw time and again headlines of \textit{The Illustrated Police News} emphasising the “LATEST” victims of “MYSTERIOUS” crime (15 September 1888; 22 September 1888; 29 September 1888, Figures 1-3), with one edition headed “THE SEVENTH HORRIBLE MURDER BY THE MONSTER OF THE EAST-END” (17 November 1888, Figure 6). Questioning, the edition of 6 October 1888 is headed “TWO MORE WHITECHAPEL HORTORS. WHEN WILL THE MURDERER BE CAPTURED?” (Figure 4), while “EAST END HORTORS. WHEN WILL THEY CEASE?” is the headline accompanying the horrific image of the Whitechapel Murderer as Death on the cover of the 8 December 1888 edition (Figure 7). Roland Barthes’ later notion of “the hermeneutic code”, of the setting and solution of puzzles, was partly evident.\textsuperscript{15} The narrative enigma was strung out over time, drawing readers back in a live event where anything could happen, but where no solution was reached. This visual serialised form - emphasised by the continuation of the story after 1888 where the fact that a monster had been constructed drew readers in - not only prefigures modern television dramas but was one that many Victorians would have been accustomed to because literate Victorians often consumed fictions in weekly periodicals, such as the sensationalised narratives by Ouida. The covers therefore owe as much to these magazine serials as they do to the sensationalised nineteenth-century penny dreadfuls.

Each issue would, furthermore, summarise the drama to that point, engaging readers. Often containing a sequence of drawings accompanied by captions, the illustrated reports of the Whitechapel Murders are important in the way in which they resemble newspaper cartoons and prefigure later film and television narrative, using similar strategies to draw in an audience. Narrative involves the telling of a series of events in sequence, and films and television programmes are composed of a series of scenes, that unfold visually and aurally, keeping viewers engaged. These scenes consist of numerous frames. Narratives are evident on many covers of\textit{The Illustrated Police News}, but the ties between narrative and the monster are most apparent on the cover of the 13 October 1888 edition (Figure 5). It is the central block of this cover with the headline “SKETCHES OF THE FIENDISH WORK OF THE MONSTER OF WHITECHAPEL. HIS SIX CRIMES” that is noteworthy here. One follows the narrative from left to
right looking at different framed boxes. Captions accompanying images, for example, read “THE FIRST OF THE SERIES OF WHITECHAPEL HORRORS” and “TAKING THE DYING DEPOSITORNS OF THE FIRST VICTIM OF THE WHITECHAPEL MONSTER,” “THE WHITECHAPEL MONSTER VISITS HANBURY STREET,” “HOW THE MONSTER ESCAPES AFTER HIS FIENDISH WORK,” “THE MURDERER SEEN WITH HIS LATEST VICTIM,” and “THE MONSTER BUYING FRUIT FOR ONE OF HIS DUPES.” Written in a third person narratorial voice, these captions therefore sensationalise the murders for the reader of the paper providing a simplified story where evil is transposed onto a monster. There are also snippets of first person dialogue accompanying the images, strengthening the connection between this monster narrative and later film and television productions in which characters can speak. For instance, one image is accompanied by the victim’s words “I SHARNT BE LONG GETTING MY BED MONEY LOOK AT MY SMART BONNET” while, more pertinent here, the illustration where “THE WHITECHAPEL MONSTER VISITS HANBURY STREET” is accompanied by the shrouded killer stating “WILL YOU?” to his victim, luring her to her death by promising her money.

This discourse of monstrosity, then, tells us about the aesthetic and economic strategies of the print media in the period of New Journalism where the Whitechapel Murderer was likened to a monster in order to sell papers. This is not so different from the sensationalist reporting in the tabloids of today, which owes much to the experiments of these Victorian tabloids. Referring to format, form and the dumbing down of news values, tabloidisation is evident today where not only is the size of many newspapers smaller but also where stories are presented in sensationalist form on the front cover, using alliterative headlines, exclamations, and now photographs - as opposed to drawings - to lead people to buy the paper and read the main story inside. This conference paper contributes to existing scholarship since it has examined how words and pictures work together in the representation of the Whitechapel murder case. The illustrated covers examined in this paper are important since pictures have a more immediate impact than words. The covers would have appealed to a literate audience, encouraging them to buy the paper to read the detailed gory accounts inside, and, moreover, the covers would have appealed to a semi-literate or largely illiterate audience that had the money to buy the paper.
Notes

2 Williams, p. 39.
6 Curtis, p. 83.
8 Jones, p. 1.
10 Curtis, p. 32-7.
12 ibid.
13 ibid.
16 I thank Dr Paul Manning and Dr Shaun Kimber of the University of Winchester for allowing me to explore some of the ideas that formed the basis of this paper with my class in *Introduction to Media Studies* and *Researching Film and Media*; Alexandra Warwick and Martin Willis for supplying me with a copy of their much-needed book prior to publication; and Tim Harris for his assistance in preparing the illustrative material for this e-book.
Bibliography


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Figure 1: The Illustrated Police News, 15 September 1888
Figure 2: *The Illustrated Police News*, 22 September 1888
Figure 3: The Illustrated Police News, 29 September 1888
Figure 4: The Illustrated Police News, 6 October 1888
Figure 5: *The Illustrated Police News*, 13 October 1888
Figure 6: *The Illustrated Police News*, 17 November 1888
Figure 7: *The Illustrated Police News*, 8 December 1888
Figure 8: *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, 17 November 1888
Transforming Monsters into Humans: H.G. Wells’
The Island of Doctor Moreau

Antonio Sanna

Abstract
In my paper I shall argue that the Beast People shown in Wells’ 1896 work (explicitly defined by Prendick - the tale’s narrator - as monsters) are actually a representation of human beings. This affirmation will be based, on the one hand, on an analysis of specific parts of the novel which show the real humans as more monstrous and unethical than the laboratory-creations of Dr. Moreau. On the other hand, my argument shall be furthered by reference to the suggestion (made by various critics during the past twenty years) that Moreau is depicted as a representation of God. By arguing that the characters of Montgomery and Prendick respectively represent Christ and the Holy Ghost, I shall suggest that this religious trinity represents divinity as set against the humanity of the Beast People. I shall also argue that Prendick’s narrative is actually a fantasy provoked by the experience of cannibalism he supposedly enacted in the dingey. Thus, Prendick thinks of the Beast People as the cannibalistic natives of Noble’s island. They are an imaginary construction of his traumatised mind projecting cannibalism onto others in order to forget his own evil. This reading corresponds to the thesis (introduced by William Arens in 1979 and supported by many critics up to the present) that cannibalism is a concept invented by Westerners in order to legitimate both imperial expansion and the cruelties inflicted upon natives. My reading shall be supported also by reference to the novel’s passages demonstrating the unreliability of the narrator’s words and the prejudiced nature of his analysis of reality. My suggestion that humans and monsters are therefore inverted in The Island of Doctor Moreau shall be based on a detailed analysis of the text as well as on reference to the recent academic debates on the subject of cannibalism and the imperial representation of the native.

In Wells’ 1896 work, The Island of Doctor Moreau, the Beast People are explicitly defined by the narrator Prendick as “monsters manufactured”¹ and “Beast Monsters.”² In effect, every time he does not specify the kind of animal the creature is made of, the narrator resorts to the term “monster.”³ This occurs despite the fact that the narrator himself seems to notice the humanity that Moreau’s creatures actually impersonate when, for example, he interprets the behaviour of the Beast community by saying: “I had here before me the whole balance of human life in miniature, the
whole interplay of instinct, reason, and fate, in its simplest form." The beasts’ behaviour can therefore be clearly read as a sort of parody, of travesty of that of the human community, as representing “the idea of humanness” itself. They can be considered as human also if we refer to the Law they continually repeat and attempt to follow. “Are we not Men?” is the question concluding every commandment that they quote. We could say that Moreau convinced them that they are human, and then chased them. The doctor is the first to break the law by inflicting pain onto other individuals. He has initially forbidden them to kill other human beings, but, by killing them, he himself is breaking the Law. Though the Beast Folk are explicitly compared to human beings on some occasions, Prendick, Moreau, and Montgomery often refuse any comparison with them.

This is true if we think that, in the novel, the real humans are depicted almost as divine beings presiding over the Beast People as well as judging their actions, wills and thoughts. As Margaret Atwood has pointed out, in fact, Dr. Moreau is represented as a God, the creator and controller of the micro universe which is the island. His face is described as “white and terrible.” The first time he is seen by Prendick, he is “bawling orders.” This is the first action performed by Dr. Moreau that is witnessed by the reader, too. He is depicted as a God who imparts order to those surrounding and inferior to him. Moreau superiorly looks at his creations as if a God would do from heaven, from his throne, by commenting: “To me, just after I make them, they seem to be indisputable human beings. [...] Yet they’re odd. Complex [...] there is a kind of upward striving in them, part vanity, part waste sexual emotion, part waste curiosity.” This seems to be a description of humanity itself, with Moreau as a detached God watching almost with pity at his own creations, judging them to be definitely inferior to his expectations. He, indeed, attributes them the qualities that all human beings have, such as the down ward and upward tendencies, the instincts and passions, the sexual needs, the curiosity to know about the surrounding world.

Atwood has also argued that Montgomery represents Christ and M’Ling is a figure for the Holy Ghost. I would dispute this by arguing that it is Prendick who is represented as the Holy Ghost in that, by repeating Moreau’s commandments to the Beast Folk and by attempting to convince them of the continuity of Moreau’s presence after the scientist’s death, he is announcing the creator’s words among his possible followers. When trying to convince them that Moreau is not dead, but has merely “changed his shape” and is now residing in the skies “where he can watch you. You can’t see him. But he can see you,” Prendick is definitely introducing the scientist as a God. He is announcing God’s will by mediating between Moreau and the human world represented by the Beast People and their continual fight between faith and evidence, between reason and instinct.
Besides, the Beast People can be seen as human because the real human beings are depicted as monstrous and cruel individuals. They often behave in an unethical way: They are prone to violence and they lack care for the good of the other individuals or for the animals. The captain of the Ipercacuanha is said to be “three-parts drunk in his cabin” for almost the entire journey and is shown as utterly unkind towards Prendick as well as delivering “so much vile language [...] in a continuous stream.” Montgomery is said to “ill-treat [M’Ling], especially after he had been at the whisky, kicking it, beating it, pelling it with stones or lighted fuses.” This is definitely not a consonant behaviour for a human being, especially if we consider that, earlier in the novel, Montgomery is said to be a learned man who practiced medicine in London. On the island he is depicted, instead, as Cyndy Hendeshot has suggested, as a degenerate. Is this the proper attitude of an individual? The same unethical behaviour is exhibited by Prendick himself. Indeed, he who should have been grateful to Montgomery for saving his life and to Moreau for allowing him on the island, often demonstrates to be utterly ungrateful, as Michael Draper has noted. After being given hospitality, food and help in his recovery, Prendick demands immediate answers about Moreau’s doings on the island and is disappointed about the lack of explanations furnished by Montgomery. He therefore says: “I was persuaded from his manner that this ignorance was a pretence. Still I could hardly tell the man I thought him a liar.” Is defining Montgomery a liar all the gratitude Prendick feels and demonstrates? If we also think of doctor Moreau as a sadistic scientist intent on inflicting pain only for the sake of his own studies, fame and carrier, we could then argue that all of the real human beings depicted in Wells’ work are inhuman in their behaviour towards each other and towards the Beast People. On the contrary, this affirmation cannot be fully applied to Moreau’s creations. In fact, the Beast People are shown as carrying out their daily habits without inflicting any cruelty or pain to each other. They seem to be intent only on listing the commandments of the Law and trying to follow them. Their behaviour seems, in this way, much more human than that enacted by Moreau, Montgomery and Prendick.

However, an identification between Prendick and the Beast People could be established in many ways in the novel. I believe that the similarities between the narrator and Moreau’s creations are firstly realized on a physical level by means of the description of their eyes made throughout the novel. When lingering in the lifeboat, Prendick says: “After the first day we [...] lay in our places in the boat and stared at the horizon, or watched, with eyes that grew larger and more haggard every day, the misery and weakness gaining upon our companions.” The only action performed by the three starving men is actuated through the glances they give to each other. A few lines after, the narrator adds: “The water ended on the fourth day, and we were already thinking strange things and saying them with our eyes.” He is saying that
the only way for him to express the idea of cannibalism is by staring at the others and communicating it only with the eyes. It is my opinion that the description of the eyes as well as of the way an individual looks at others is what characterizes the Beast People too. When encountering the Leopard Man in the forest, the narrator says: "He looked up guiltily, and his eyes met mine." The two characters simply look at each other. This is all the action they perform, just as in the case of the three men on the gunwale. Prendick attributes guilt to the glance of the Leopard Man because he suspects that it has eaten flesh and could then commit cannibalism. In Wells’ novel, the occasions in which two or more characters stare at each other without moving or talking are linked to the thought of cannibalism.

Another particular which has not been noted by previous critics and which, according to me, constitutes a central point in the narrative is made by the continuous and detailed references of the narrator to his need and consumption of food. All of Prendick’s main meals are mentioned during the tale, even when it does not seem necessary. He describes in detail his first meal in Moreau’s compound by saying that he is offered: “A tray bearing bread, some herbs, and other eatables, a flask of whisky, a jug of water, and three glasses and knives.” Is this really necessary and useful in regard to the tale of his experience on the island? Besides, food is also the subject of many conversations Prendick has with the other characters of the tale. The very second time he addresses Montgomery on the Ipercacuanha, he asks: “Am I eligible for solid food?” This question is repeated when he addresses the Beast People after Montgomery’s death. It is the need for food which drives Prendick to join the company of the Beast People. This is said in a context in which a sort of identity is established between the narrator himself and the Beast Folk. He specifies, indeed: “I lost the opportunity [of ruling over the Beast People], and sank to the position of a mere leader among my fellows.” Thus, Moreau’s creatures are seen by the narrator himself as his fellows. He now considers himself as their equal. A few lines later he describes his encounter with them with the following words: “I want food,” said I, almost apologetically, and drawing near. I would argue, then, that it is the very need for food which forces him to consider himself as their equal. This is confirmed when, at the beginning of the following chapter, he states: “In this way I became one among the Beast People in the Island of Doctor Moreau.”

Another way of affirming that the Beast People could be seen as human beings in respect to the monstrosity exhibited by the human characters of the novel is by realizing that Prendick’s narrative could be interpreted as unreliable. In this way, his description of the Beast People as monsters would not be valid. First, he himself admits his own doubts regarding his own perception of reality. When being chased by the Leopard Man, he specifies that “at times I would turn and listen, and presently I half-
persuaded myself that my pursuer had abandoned the chase, or was a mere creation of my disordered imagination.” This seems to be an admission of unreliability on the narrator’s part. He doubts his own mind by thinking that the Leopard Man is merely an illusion, a creation of his own brain. He also addresses Moreau, when asking for explanations on the creatures he saw on the island, in “a state bordering on hysterics.” Is a narrator who falls into a hysterical state of mind really reliable and trustworthy for the reader? Second, Prendick is not completely stable as well as prone to quick judgements about the surrounding reality. After some assumptions about the nature of Moreau’s experiments on the island, he becomes very confident about his own explanation by declaring: “I was convinced now, absolutely assured, that Moreau had been vivisecting a human being.” Is he so absolutely assured? As we can see in the rest of the narrative, such a thesis is not right at all. Thus, how could he be so sure? He formulates such a hypothesis without confirmation or any proof. This contradicts the very scientific spirit and method he should have learned when he was a student of Thomas Henry Huxley, as he affirms during the tale. It is then legitimate to wonder whether he is a reliable narrator, since he formulates such judgements without proofs. Third, and most importantly, the introduction to the narrative offered by Prendick’s nephew definitely establishes his tale as a fictional narrative. Charles Edward Prendick’s words discredit his uncle’s veracity. At the beginning of the introduction, Charles argues that his uncle “gave such a strange account of himself that he was supposed demented.” The reliability of Prendick as a truthful narrator is thus placed on an uncertain status. This is further emphasized by the fact that, as Charles largely explains, Noble’s island, which actually corresponds to the place described by his uncle, has been definitely charted as uninhabited. The tale about Moreau and his creatures cannot be substantiated by any empirical evidence. In the same respect, the fact that the Ipercacuanha is said to have shipped in that area of the ocean certainly establishes the truth of Prendick’s presence on Noble’s island. However, this is the only truth that can be established with certainty in the end. Prendick has definitely been on Noble Island, but, since there was no sign of Moreau’s creations in a subsequent patrol, we are entitled to affirm that all the facts corroborate the evidence for the mental creation of the monsters. Why has he created the illusion of these monsters and elaborated a narrative about them?

My suggestion is that Prendick actually imagines the Beast Folk, that he creates them in his mind, because of his own traumatic experience of cannibalism. He fancies the Beast People as potentially cannibalistic in that he himself has been a cannibal on the lifeboat and refuses to admit such a truth to the crew of the Ipercacuanha as well as to the people of England he returns to at the end of the tale and to the reader. The argument that Prendick’s narrative is a hysterical hallucination caused by his practice of
cannibalism on the gunwale has been sustained by critics such as John Glendening and Elaine Showalter. These critics, however, do not specify many details about the tale’s references to cannibalism. Instead, I will argue that, along with the constant references the narrator makes to food, the very way he behaves when alone on the island often parallels his behaviour aboard the lifeboat. For example, after Montgomery’s death, he describes his following actions: “And there I sat, chin on knees, the sun beating down upon my head, and a growing dread in my mind, plotting how I could live on against the hour of my rescue (if ever rescue came).” As in the case of the lifeboat, he is facing a cruel fate, with the sun beating over his head, and waiting to be rescued. He is desperate about his fate, with a specific dread in his mind in both occasions. On the lifeboat, it was the explicit dread of practising cannibalism over another human being. In this case, it is the dread of being cannibalised himself. In many passages of his brief narrative about the experience of loneliness and his eleven-month life with the Beast People, it is difficult for the reader to distinguish whether Prendick is actually talking about his experience with Moreau’s creatures or about the experience with the two men on the gunwale. We could refer the sentence “the change was slow and inevitable. For them and for me it came without any definitive shock” to the beginning of the narrative as well. This would be confirmed by the fact that Prendick chooses not to recount his experience with Moreau and his creations after being rescued. The reader is entitled to think that Prendick is refraining from telling about his alleged practice of cannibalism, too. This is confirmed by the fact that he is very aware of such a practice. Cannibalism is indeed referred to in the text on some occasions. On the one hand, Montgomery reminds Prendick that “there were spots of blood on the gunwale.” We are not told how blood comes to be on the gunwale. Is it because of the fight between the two other survivors, or actually because Prendick fed on their bodies? Montgomery is uttering these accusatory words just after he has been staring at Prendick. As we saw before, cannibalism is expressed through a person’s glances at his fellows: It is never explicitly mentioned by the narrator, but only alluded to. In this case, it is Montgomery who is making such an allusion to Prendick, allusion which is allegedly validated by the physical evidence of blood. On the other hand, Prendick even mentions other cases of cannibalism when referring to the widely discussed Medusa case. Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century, a sensationalising press used to spread many accounts of cannibal natives living in the colonies of the British Empire as well as the narratives of actual anthropophagy practiced by the survivals of shipwrecks. Prendick has been also a student of Huxley, who, as Gananath Obeyesekere has noted, included a chapter on Huxley’s work *Man’s Place in Nature*. Thus, considering that Wells himself has been Huxley’s student, we could argue that both Prendick and Wells were very conscious of the subject of
cannibalism. It is in this respect that cannibalism constitutes an important
keyframe for reading the narrative of Prendick.

The argument that the Beast People are cannibals created by the hysterical
mind of a person who actually practiced survival cannibalism could parallel
the studies conducted on the subject of cannibalism in the past thirty years,
and particularly William Arens’ 1979 assertion that there exists no
substantial evidence documenting the existence of anthropophagy among
indigenous tribes all over the world. This controversial argument, which
has produced a long series of responses from the academic community, has
been agreed upon by many other critics, who believe that all narratives of
cannibalism are actually a projection of violence onto colonized people
(especially people living in the Pacific ocean) on the part of Western
colonizers. According to these critics, this has been done in order to justify
the real massacres and evil acts accomplished throughout the centuries by the
colonizers themselves. In this sense, we could apply to Prendick’s actions H
L Malchow’s affirmation that “accusations of cannibalism establish the
community of the virtuous by projecting onto others evils feared within.”

His fear of being eaten alive by the Beast Folk exactly represents the evil he
has probably committed after the shipwreck of the Lady Vain. Prendick is,
after all, a Western white male visiting a Pacific island - actually charting it
with his explorations and wanderings - and making contact with the local
population, though judging them through his own p
rejudices. He attributes
cannibalism to the indigenous tribe of the place - the Beast People - just as
many colonizers did during the modern age and especially during the
expansion of the British Empire.

The Beast People can therefore be interpreted as a representation of human
beings in that the real humans are depicted as unethical and inhuman. The
real monster present in Wells’ book is the narrator himself. Prendick
transfers onto his imaginative creation of the Beast People the monstrosity he
has committed and is trying to repress. He has elaborated a tale of monsters
in order to hide the fact that he himself has been a monster. This is the reason
why, though not admitting any effective identity with the Beast Folk, he can
be compared to them through the description of his eyes as well as of his
actions and, most importantly, through the frequent references to his need
and consumption of food.

Notes
2 ibid., p. 127.
3 ibid., pp. 96, 101.
4 ibid., p. 93.
6 Wells, op. cit., p. 57.
8 Wells, p. 48.
10 ibid., pp. 76-77.
11 Atwood, p. xxii.
13 ibid., p. 10.
14 ibid., p. 13.
15 ibid., p. 82.
18 Wells, p. 35.
19 ibid., p. 6.
20 ibid.
21 ibid., p. 38.
22 ibid., p. 34.
23 ibid., p. 9.
24 ibid., p. 115.
25 ibid.
26 ibid., p. 116.
27 ibid., p. 43.
28 ibid., p. 46.
29 ibid., p. 50.
30 ibid., p. 27.
31 ibid., p. 3.
34 Wells, p. 113.
35 ibid., p. 121.
36 ibid., p. 127.
37 ibid., p. 8.
38 ibid., p. 5.
40 Obeyesekere, p. 223.
43 Malchow, op. cit., p. 43.

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Richard Wright’s Bigger Thomas: 
Black Man as Racial/Sexual Monster

Saundra Liggins

Abstract

Nearly since the first encounter between Europeans and Africans, the black male has been a source of racial and sexual anxiety. Music, art, and, history have served to respond to assumptions about African American males either by perpetuating myths or countering stereotypes of the black male as threat. In literature, Richard Wright’s 1940 novel, Native Son, offers a trenchant examination of the social and economic causes and effects of this racial animosity. The most striking element of Wright’s novel may be the creation and development of his protagonist, Bigger Thomas, as a (perceived) sexual monster. Bigger, a rapist and double-murderer, signifies to the citizens of Chicago, where the novel is set, the sexual and racial apprehensions and terrors associated with the black male. Through Bigger’s capture, arrest, and trial, Wright explores both the origins of society’s apprehension towards racial minorities and the impact of this apprehension on the individual. When the conclusion of the novel is reached, the question that the reader, and Bigger himself, is left to ask is what is it that has created the “monster” that Bigger has become? The answer must be found, Wright posits, at least in part, in society itself.

Keywords
Richard Wright, Bigger Thomas, segregation, race

Since the first encounters with the European, the African - not only because of his physical appearance but also because of his religious and social practices - has been seen as a threat. This fear of the black person carried over to the New World, and regulations to maintain the racial hierarchy were put in place as interactions between blacks and whites increased. From the slavery era, throughout Reconstruction and the Civil Rights era, to the present day, the African American male in particular has been represented as the monster that haunts the imaginations of white American society. Richard Wright, in his 1940 novel, Native Son, graphically illustrates the origins, and the tragic and fatal consequences, of the figuring of individuals or groups of people as monsters.

The novel’s protagonist, Bigger Thomas, is perhaps one of the most controversial in American literature. A rapist and two-time murder, Bigger is a poor, undereducated African American in Chicago, struggling to navigate his way through a society that does not offer people of colour many
opportunities. Bigger does not even receive support from his own family, and the relationship between the family members is one of bitterness, strain and disappointment. Mrs. Thomas wonders why she ever gave birth to Bigger, and responds, when asked by her daughter why Bigger acts the way he does, that he’s “[j]ust plain dumb, black crazy.”\(^1\) Bigger’s mother even chastises him for not doing more to support the family, complaining, “We wouldn’t have to live in this garbage dump if you had any manhood in you.”\(^2\) She criticizes Bigger for being selfish and “the no-countest man I ever seen in all my life!” She warns him that in the future he will wish that he had made more of himself, and in a moment of insightful prophesying, declares that “the gallows is at the end of the road you travelling.”\(^3\)

Throughout the novel, Bigger is seeking a way in which to carve out his manhood in the midst of a society determined to deny him his humanity. The restrictedness of his opportunities is emblematized even further by a poster showing the face of Buckley, the man running for re-election to the position of State’s Attorney:

\[\text{T}he \text{ white face was fleshy but stern; one hand was uplifted}\]
\[\text{and its index finger pointed straight out into the street at each}\]
\[\text{passer-by. The poster showed one of those faces that looked}\]
\[\text{straight at you when you looked at it and all the while you were}\]
\[\text{walking and turning your head to look at it it kept looking}\]
\[\text{unblinkingly back at you until you got so far from it you had to}\]
\[\text{take your eyes away, and then it stopped, like a movie}\]
\[\text{blackout. Above the top of the poster were tall red letters:}\]
\[\text{YOU CAN’T WIN!}\]^4

That this poster is being put up in Bigger’s neighbourhood, the black, lower class section of Chicago, signifies the omnipresent control of the white power structure over the black and poor communities. Through the poster, the apparent futility of these communities to strive for more, to even dare to want more, is visible.

Bigger and his friend Jack are remind once again of what they do not have when they go the movies to relieve their boredom. After they take their seats, each boy begins to masturbate. Once finished their imagination is heightened even more when the newsreel begins, featuring images of smiling, dark-haired white girls lolling on the gleaming sands of a beach. The voice of the commentator ran with the movement of the film: *Here are the daughters of the rich taking sunbaths in the sands of Florida! This little collection of debutantes represents over four billion dollars of*
One of the girls highlighted in the clips is identified as Mary Dalton, the daughter of the man whom Bigger is going to be working for. The manner in which Mary’s identity is revealed literally magnifies the gulf between the black and white - and rich and poor - worlds. Black people like Bigger and Jack are allowed to observe members of the rich, white society, whose exploits are used as entertainment, but their only access to this lifestyle is second-hand, as an employee of families like the Daltons. One of the final statements of the narrator, “Oh, boy, don’t you wish you were down here in Florida?” While not, of course, directed at Bigger specifically, is another reminder - like the poster of the State’s Attorney - that Bigger and others like him are removed from the promise and prosperity that America advertises.

Bigger’s first job at the Daltons’ is to drive Mary Dalton to the university at night. Once they had left the Dalton home, however, Mary directs him to a different location, where they pick up Mary’s boyfriend, Jan. The night with Mary and Jan is one marked by nervousness and apprehension. What makes Bigger uncomfortable is not, however, any disrespectful behaviour on the part of Mary or Jan, but rather the exact opposite. From the moment that Mary enters the car, she maintains a physical closeness to Bigger, leaning forward from the backseat so that her face is not far from his. As she does so, she asks, “I scare you?” Bigger replies, “Oh, no’m.” Mary furthers intimates a familiarity with Bigger by saying that she knows that she can trust him, and that she is “on [his] side,” before she tells him to go and pick up her friend Jan, who is a Communist.

What appears to be a pleasant evening between three people - they drive around before stopping at a restaurant to eat - is actually a painful and difficult encounter for Bigger. While Jan and Mary apparently think that they are treating Bigger nicely, it is this very treatment that unsettles him. At one point during the night Bigger asks himself:

Were they making fun of him? What was it that they wanted? Why didn’t they leave him alone? [...] But they made him feel his black skin by just standing there looking at him [...]. He felt he had no physical existence at all right then; he was something he hated, the badge of shame which he knew was attached to a black skin [...]. He felt naked, transparent; he felt that this white man, having helped to put him down, having helped to deform him, held him up now to look at him and be amused. At that moment he felt toward Mary and Jan a dumb, cold, and inarticulate hate.
Accustomed to being socially and physically separated from white Americans, to being ignored by most of society, Bigger is uncomfortable being treated as an equal. Rather than seeing himself as Jan’s fellow human being, which is Jan’s wish, Bigger views himself as an object of ridicule for both him and Mary.

After a night of drinking and driving around parts of Chicago, Jan is dropped off at another party and Bigger drives Mary, who is more or less drunk, home. Now alone, the relationship between Bigger and Mary intensifies. She compliments Bigger on how nice he is and continues her physical closeness with him by placing her head on his shoulder as he drives. After she laughingly observes that he’s gotten more talkative as the night went on, “[h]e tightened with hate. Again she was looking inside of him and he did not like it.” Helping her out of the car, Bigger grows dizzy at his contact with her. At this point, a boundary that had previously only been delicately approached is finally crossed. While Bigger still continues to hate Mary, he also sees her as an object of desire. Just as Mary is under the influence of alcohol, Bigger is intoxicated by Mary’s smell, by her waist and breasts that he touches as he helps her up the stairs to her room. As he attempts to move Mary to her bed, Bigger continues to kiss her and feel her breasts. At that moment, Mary’s mother, who is blind, appears at the doorway. Wanting to avoid being found out by Mrs. Dalton, Bigger first holds his hand over Mary’s mouth and then covers her face with a pillow, eventually smothering her. Needing to get rid of the body after Mrs. Dalton leaves, Bigger places Mary’s corpse in a steamer trunk and carries it down into the basement, where he burns the body in the furnace.

This act of destruction served as a constructive or creative undertaking in Bigger’s eyes. Once back at his family’s apartment after disposing of the body, Bigger looks at his surroundings and ponders the reasons for their living conditions:

What had they ever done? Perhaps they had not done anything. Maybe they had to live this way precisely because none of them in all their lives had ever done anything, right or wrong, that mattered much.9

He goes on to say to himself, “He had murdered and had created a new life for himself. It was something that was all his own, and it was the first time in his life he had had anything that others could not take from him.”10 Later, interacting with his friends, and then riding a streetcar through Chicago, Bigger no longer fears society, as he had done earlier in the novel. Bigger
now possesses a secret about himself, the knowledge that he is capable of doing things that no one thought he was able to do.

With his newfound boldness, Bigger decides to make it appear as if Mary’s disappearance was the result of being kidnapped by Communists, and writes a ransom note to be found by the Daltons’ housekeeper. The search for Mary intensifies, culminating in a confrontation in the Daltons’ basement, where reporters, trying to help Bigger clear ashes from the furnace, discover Mary’s burnt remains. Bigger is able to make his escape and heads to the apartment of his girlfriend, Bessie Mears. It is Bessie who reveals to him the full implications of the killing of Mary Dalton. After informing him that people will just assume that he had raped Mary, Bigger is at first rather surprised by, but then accepting of, this conclusion, even agreeing with it:

Had he raped her? Yes, he had raped her. Every time he felt as he had felt that night, he raped. But rape was not what one did to women. Rape was what one felt when one’s back was against a wall and one had to strike out, whether one wanted to or not, to keep the pack from killing one. He committed rape every time he looked into a white face…But it was rape when he cried out in hate deep in his heart as he felt the strain of living day by day. That, too, was rape."

Not wanting to wait to be discovered hiding in Bessie’s apartment by the police, the two of them leave, seeking shelter in an abandoned building. Lying together to keep warm that night, their physical closeness - and Bigger’s volatile emotional state - leads to Bigger making sexual advances toward Bessie. Bigger becomes more aggressive with Bessie, ultimately, the reader is to assume, raping her. Later, having decided that he could neither leave Bessie in Chicago as he attempted to escape the city nor could he take Bessie with him, he chooses to kill her, beating her in the head with a brick; he then throws her body down an air shaft.

Walking on the streets of Chicago now alone, Bigger steals a newspaper to read the progress being made on the manhunt that Bigger correctly assumes is underway for him after the discovery of Mary’s body. The paper details the authorities’ belief that Bigger perpetrated a sex crime, along with committing murder, and reveals the white community’s fears surrounding having a black criminal on the loose: “Maintaining that they feared for the lives of their children, a delegation of white parents called upon Superintendent of City Schools Horace Minton, and begged that all schools be closed until the Negro rapist and murderer was captured.” This fear eventually leads to violence, as vigilante groups were formed and Negro men in several neighbourhoods were beaten. Black men resembling Bigger Thomas were taken into custody, and Black employees were fired from their
jobs, including a black cook for a White family, who had been fired “for fear that she might poison the children.”

The hysteria reaches its peak when Bigger is hiding on the top of a water tower, surrounded by white police officers. Unarmed and nearly frozen from the water that had been sprayed in order to immobilize him, Bigger is taken into custody. In a scene reminiscent of the capture of fictional monsters such as Frankenstein or Dracula, once on the street Bigger is met with the jeers and shouts of an angry mob: “Kill ’im!” “Lynch ’im!” “That black sonofabitch!...Kill that black ape!” One of the final descriptions that Richard Wright offers of this scene succinctly expresses the mob mentality: “Two men stretched his arms out, as though about to crucify him [...].”

The final book of the novel, Fate, reveals Bigger’s journey through the justice system, as he is arraigned, tried, and convicted for the murder of Mary Dalton. The rape and murder of Bessie Mears are of minor consequence to the prosecutors, only brought up to strengthen their contention of Bigger as a monster. The days waiting in his jail cell give Bigger ample opportunity to contemplate his past and his future. The larger significance of his arrest and ultimate death quickly dawns on him:

They were determined to make his death mean more than a mere punishment [...] they regarded him as a figment of that black world which they feared and were anxious to keep under control[...]. They were going to use his death as a bloody symbol of fear to wave before the eyes of that black world.

Echoing the justifications of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century lynching parties, Bigger’s execution will serve to remind black citizens of their status as outsiders in the larger community, and that any attempts - legal or otherwise - to go beyond their marginal position will be punished. But Bigger’s death would also be a symbol for white society. It would reinforce the majority’s sense of rightness or appropriateness in maintaining the distinct separation of the races.

The closing arguments made by the prosecution and the defence each attempt to cast Bigger Thomas’ particular case within the larger frame of identity and race relations. The state’s attorney, in explaining the justification for applying the death penalty, proclaims:

It is a sad day for American civilization when a white man will try to stay the hand of justice from a bestial monstrosity who has ravished and struck down one of the finest and most delicate of our womanhood.
Every decent white man in America ought to swoon with joy for the opportunity to crush with his heel the woolly head of this black lizard, to keep him from scuttling on his belly farther over the earth and spitting forth his venom of death!

The prosecutor continues his verbal assault, calling Bigger “this black mad dog” and “this subhuman killer.” Other degrading appellations include: “the hardened black thing”; “this rapacious beast”; “this black cur”; “that maddened ape”; “this infernal monster”; “this worthless ape”; and “a cunning beast.” Buckley concludes his argument by proclaiming the need for the destruction of Bigger in order to preserve society.

Using language that similarly deprives Bigger of his humanity, Bigger’s attorney attempts to mitigate his crimes by explaining the roots of Bigger’s actions, describing how Bigger is merely a product of his racist environment. Max furthers his position, invoking imagery perhaps more appropriate in a horror movie than at a murder trial:

Obessed with guilt, we have sought to thrust a corpse from before our eyes. We have marked off a little plot of ground and buried it. We tell our souls in the deep of the black night that it is dead and that we have no reason for fear or uneasiness.

This corpse, represented by Bigger Thomas and presumably many more black Americans like him, is a metaphor for white society’s repressed fears, anxieties, and even desires. This corpse, however, Max argues, is never actually dead, but “returns and raids our homes! We find our daughters murdered and burnt! And we say, ‘Kill! Kill!’” The black man has become animal-like and violent in his subjugation. Max continues:

[This corpse] has made itself a home in the wild forest of our great cities, amid the rank and choking vegetation of slums! It has forgotten our language! In order to live it has sharpened its claws! It has grown hard and calloused! It has developed a capacity for hate and fury which we cannot understand! Its movements are unpredictable! By night it creeps from its lair and steals toward the settlements of civilization! And at the sight of a kind face it does not lie down upon its back and kick up its heels playfully to be tickled and stroked. No; it leaps to kill.

After stressing the segregated conditions under which Bigger grew up - conditions which created desires in him that would never be filled - and
placing at least some of the blame for Bigger’s actions on society itself, Max
ends his remarks by pleading for Bigger’s life. Despite his attorney’s efforts,
however, in the end, Bigger is sentenced to death for the crime of killing
Mary Dalton.

While a seminal text in African American (and American) literature
- its 1940 publication date beginning a new literary focus after the relative
frivolity of the Harlem Renaissance - Richard Wright’s *Native Son* offers
another in a long line of depictions of the black male as threat to white
society, and to white women in particular. The Bigger Thomas “type” was
not unfamiliar to American society before or after the publication of *Native
Son*. In 1931, nine young black men were arrested in Alabama for allegedly
assaulting two white women. Eight of the nine “Scottsboro boys” were
initially convicted in trials that received national and international attention;
after a series of appeals and new trials over the following seven years - due to
changes in witness testimony and procedural errors - five of the eight are
found guilty again. Wright’s novel pre-dates the 1955 murder of Emmett Till,
a fourteen-year-old black boy who was killed in Mississippi for allegedly
making an inappropriate comment or whistling at a white woman. The later
twentieth and early twenty-first centuries saw a number of high profile
criminal cases - with the seemingly requisite press and public frenzy -
involving African American men as actual suspects or convenient scapegoats.
In Bigger Thomas Richard Wright creates an individual who, in no small part
due to society’s fears and prejudices, is converted from a young man into a
monster.

Notes

2 ibid.
3 ibid., p. 9.
4 ibid., p. 13.
5 ibid., p. 31.
6 ibid., p. 63.
7 ibid., p. 64.
8 ibid., p. 66-67.
9 ibid., p. 105.
10 ibid.
11 ibid., 228.
12 ibid., p. 244.
13 ibid., p. 270.
14 ibid., p. 276.
15 ibid., p. 409.
16 ibid., p. 410.
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Writing and Re-writing the Story: Self-Preservation and Monstrosity in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*

Anne-Lise Perotto

Abstract
In Hogg’s most famous novel, the story of Robert Wringhim is written and re-written. A fictional editor reappraises the events told by the justified sinner in his confessions, warning the reader that he should not believe their author, a monster who killed his elder brother, George Colwan. Wringhim, though, does not see himself as a monster. In his eyes, his father and his brother are the monsters, hence the very different version of the events he gives. He also points out the influence on his actions of a mysterious being, Gil-Martin, whom the reader identifies as Robert’s evil double or as the Devil himself. Gil-Martin’s protean nature suggests that the monster may not be the one that is shown. The narrative invites the reader not to trust either the editor or Wringhim, and to try to identify who the monster really is, or what monstrosity is.

Keywords
monster, Hogg, memoirs, confessions, justified, sinner, embedding, preservation.

With *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, James Hogg created a fascinating novel made up of embedded narratives, writing and re-writing the story of Robert Wringhim. A fictional editor reappraises the events told by the justified sinner in his confessions, warning the reader that he should not believe their author, a monster who killed his elder brother, George Colwan. In addition, he decides to publish Wringhim’s book after witnessing the mysterious preservation of his body after death. Therefore, for the first narrator, Wringhim is a monster in the etymological sense, an aberration to be exhibited.

The latter, though, does not see himself as a monster. In his eyes, his father and his brother are the monsters, hence the very different version of the events he gives. He also points out the influence on his actions of a mysterious being, Gil-Martin, whom the reader identifies as Robert’s evil double or as the Devil himself. Gil-Martin’s protean nature suggests that the monster may not be the one that is shown. The narrative invites the reader not to trust either the editor or
Wringhim, and to try to identify who the monster really is, or what monstrosity is.

1. **Exhibiting the Monster**

   The novel starts with “the Editor’s narrative,” a frame narrative written by an anonymous editor who presents the reader with Robert Wringhim’s “private memoirs and confessions.” The very act of framing signals the need to circumscribe the narrative inside the narrative. It acts as a caution. From the very beginning, the reader is thus aware there is another story, which will soon appear as a story of the other.

   Furthermore, the first narrator says he wants to relate the story of the Colwan family, but the need for it is questionable since he is:

   Certain, that in recording the hideous events which follow, [he is] only relating to the greater part of the inhabitants of at least four counties of Scotland, matters of which they were before perfectly well informed.¹

   Two conclusions can be drawn from this assertion as to the true motives of the narrative. First, the fact that the story is told again and again means that the “hideous events” are fascinating. The monster is exhibited because people want to gloat over his unnatural deeds. Second, the aim is not to inform, but to conform to tradition. The whole narrative is meant to show the monstrous other, that Robert Wringhim whom the reader can only reject. The editor holds him out to general hatred. The frame narrative has therefore a clear function: To turn the reader’s look towards the monster. The oxymoron “justified sinner” is understood by the reader as designating an aberration, instead of a sinner who has been granted grace by God.

   The interventions of the editor in the frame narrative thus partake of a strategy to show a monster. For example, the narrator stops to declare:

   We cannot enter into the detail of the events that now occurred, without forestalling a part of the narrative of one who knew all the circumstances - was deeply interested in them, and whose relation is of higher value than any thing that can be retailed out of the stores of tradition and old registers; but, his narrative being different from these, it was judged expedient to give the account as thus publicly handed down to us.²

   The editor here refers to the memoirs written by Wringhim. The statement is paradoxical: Wringhim’s narrative is of “higher value than tradition,” but the editor chooses “to give the account as thus publicly handed down to us.” “Publicly” implies that Wringhim’s version stands alone, and is therefore to
be discarded. The editor, by choosing to relate first the story as it was handed down by tradition clearly gives it precedence and suggests that the other story is illegitimate. Why is it of value then, but to corroborate by contrast with the authorized version the idea that Wringhim is evil?

The editor’s narrative centres around the fact that self-preservation for George Colwan senior and his elder son, means preservation from Robert Wringhim, a potential persecutor. Indeed, the frame narrative accumulates negative descriptions of Robert and underlines the harassment undergone by the poor George when followed by his brother in Edinburgh. Although the narrator is omniscient, Robert is mostly seen from the outside, be it from George’s point of view, or, at the end of the main narrative, Miss Logan’s point of view, that is to say from a prejudiced point of view in favour of the Colwan party. The reader identifies with the elder brother as the narrator takes his side and sees Robert as an evil character. The young man is designated in the frame narrative as the “unaccountable monster.”

“Unaccountable” means that his behaviour cannot be accounted for, but also that narration of his feelings is refused, that he can be nothing else than a monster.

As is now clear, when the editor states that he will leave “everyone to judge for himself” the document he inserts in his narrative - Wringhim’s memoirs - he is not telling the truth. He takes good care to interpret the events for the reader and adds after Robert’s narrative that he accounts most of his narrative “either dreaming or madness,” for it is not “consistent with reason.”

Moreover, he publishes “the private memoirs and confessions of a sinner,” while the title on the manuscript runs “the private memoirs and confessions of a justified sinner.” He is not trustworthy. He insists he did not amend the text, yet he removed the word “justified” from the title. The omission is not a slight and meaningless one. Justification is an essential event in Wringhim’s life, which accounts for many of his actions. Note the word “monster,” too, used just before the insertion of the memoirs in the main text page 92. The first narrator is not a faithful guardian of the text. He defaces the autobiography and disfigures Wringhim. The editor goes further than simply exhibiting a monster. He takes part in creating it.

2. Robert Wringhim’s Narrative

Still, the reader, although he may be biased, discovers with Robert Wringhim’s narrative that the protagonist may well be mad. The limits of the self are blurred for Wringhim. He does not see himself as a single person: “I generally conceived myself to be two people,” he states. According to Otto Rank, the double reveals narcissistic tendencies. Robert’s identity is a problem: He is George Colwan’s son. But he bears the name of his godfather, Robert Wringhim, who is suspected of adultery with Rabina Colwan. Robert
is rejected by society at large as an illegitimate son. How can he compensate rejection, but by loving himself immoderately and by designating George Colwan and his elder son as monsters? He, who “was born an outcast in the world” has been granted divine grace. His life is not meaningless. Contrary to his father and brother, he is one of the elect.

On the day of his justification, he meets a stranger, “the same being as [himself].” Acceptance in the covenant of Grace provokes the open expression of self-admiration through the projection of the double. He greatly admires the youth and is in turn flattered by the latter by “compliments paid to [his] abilities.”

The relationship with Gil-Martin cuts Robert from his godfather and mother as the double gains a growing ascendency over him. The double becomes then a threat to the self in an evolution that Rank traces: From the guardian angel of man securing immortality for him, the double becomes his persecuting and torturing conscience, the Devil.

In the same way, Wringhim first sees Gil-Martin as a “guardian angel,” who takes up his religious tenets. However, his strange friend, relying on his confusion as to the doctrine of predestination, carries the conception to extremes and even leads Robert Wringhim to consider murder:

\[\text{[H]ow vain was it in man to endeavour to save those whom their Maker had, by an unchangeable decree, doomed to destruction. ... How much more wise would it be, thought I, to begin and cut sinners off with the sword!}\]

The double is soon identified as the Devil taking Wringhim as his prey. What follows the fratricide clearly shows that from that moment on, Robert Wringhim loses all hold on his life: He begins to undergo lapses of consciousness during which he commits monstrous acts (the seduction, rape and murder of a young woman, possibly the murder of his own mother).

In fact, the protagonist continually expresses his wish to have a clear, unique status, while his identity is constantly moving and escaping him. The defence set by Wringhim to preserve himself from public hatred and the blurring of the frontiers of the self have disastrous consequences. At the end of the memoirs, his attempt to flee from the persecution of Gil-Martin is so desperate that he commits suicide. Self-preservation paradoxically results in self-destruction.

The permanent form of the body in the grave is opposed to the various forms assumed by Gil-Martin and therefore moving boundaries of the self. One of the characters argues that Wringhim’s book, the autobiography, is at the origin of the mysterious preservation. An apt explanation. Indeed, the memoirs are meant to guarantee immortality and to leave a trace that he can - at last - control. The text is designed to order his
life. With his birth, Robert discovers confusion, and his whole life is devoted to finding unity and keeping it. With his memoirs, he wants to make sure his self-representation will not be altered, hence the curse “on him that should dare to alter or amend.”\(^{17}\) The injunction not to amend the narrative reveals how essential it is for Robert Wringhim to maintain a single, purged version of himself, to prove he was justified, that he was not a monster.

However, the reader soon doubts what the editor or Wringhim would have him believe and sees monstrosity, rather than Wringhim (monster or elect), as the main subject of the book.

3. **Writing and Re-writing the Story: Who is the Monster?**

Gil-Martin takes many forms because monstrosity can take many forms, too. The monster is the other, but sameness and difference are not relevant notions in the novel. Two characters can look the same and not be the same; two characters can look different and be the same. Hence the irony of the introduction of a character who is reputed for the fact that “he never mistook one man for another in his life.”\(^{18}\) No such categorical position can hold in the novel.

Moreover, a same fact can be mentioned several times by different characters. Each time, new layers of meaning appear and force the reader to reassess what he read before. The biased editor thus relates how the events in Edinburgh (the meeting and the conflict between George and Robert) were “distorted” by the way they were related by Rev. Wringhim, how “it excited the utmost abhorrence, both of the deed [George’s persecution of Robert] and the perpetrators,”\(^{19}\) and how those who trusted Rev. Wringhim “declaimed the act as an unnatural attempt on the character, even the life, of an unfortunate brother, who had been expelled from his father’s house.”\(^{20}\) The adjective “unnatural” designates George, not Robert, as the monster. Robert is the victim of evil family members. The editor derides the naivety of the people who believe Rev. Wringhim and think that George is a monster, but as we have seen, the editor manipulates his reader in the same way.

Nothing is stable. Interpretation calls for reinterpretation. George Colwan senior is called in derision a monster at the beginning of the editor’s narrative, but is he not after all the original monster who engendered what follows?

Let us stop for a moment and focus again on the two versions of the story. This is the story first given by the editor: George Colwan married a puritan woman. Soon they led separate lives, George Colwan with Arabella Logan, Rabina with Robert Wringhim. Two sons were born, George, raised as a legitimate son, and Robert brought up by his guardian Rev. Wringhim and his mother, suspected of being adulterous. Robert, a monster, killed his brother, by stabbing him in the back, to get the inheritance.
This is Robert’s story: George Colwan is a monster, a lecher, living in adultery with a disreputable woman. No wonder his mother could never love her husband and had to flee from him. Robert was raised by his guardian whom he loves like a father. He is one of the elect and was commissioned to rid the earth of the wicked, among them his brother. He stabbed him in the back because he had no choice; George was about to kill his friend Gil-Martin. At the end, the first narrator suddenly throws back into question his own version of the events and states: “I think it may be possible that he had some hand in the death of his brother, and yet I am disposed greatly to doubt it.” The accumulated markers of uncertainty are characteristic of a text which denies its reader an easily defined monster.

“Judge for yourself” are we repeatedly told. Let me for a minute play at rewriting the story again. George was rejected by Colwan’s wife - who lived in a separate part of the house very early after the wedding - because he was the son of Arabella Logan. The almost complete seclusion in which the characters lived makes it possible to have hidden a pregnancy. After all, we are told several times that Miss Logan was like a mother to George and she takes an uncommon interest in avenging the murder. They, in fact, passed off George junior as a legitimate son so that he would get the inheritance. Local tradition handed down the story as it was created by George Colwan for the eyes of the public. Does not the editor himself equate tradition - on which he relies for his narrative - and gossips? An element that could further corroborate this interpretation is that this false narrative would not be the first forgery made by Colwan. Indeed, Robert is alleged to have used a forged letter in order to become the proprietor of an estate, a forged grant that in fact used to belong to George Colwan senior. Why should he not have forged the narrative of his elder son’s birth as well?

Is this far-fetched? Perhaps but there are numerous forged narratives in the novel, especially (is not that paradoxical?) in court. An oath is no guarantee that the truth will be told. False evidence, outright lies, falsifications of all sorts abound. Hogg features himself in the novel, and the editor says of Hogg that he is a liar. This mise en abyme clearly suggests that narrators are untrustworthy. Literary falsifications are only another version of the various falsifications the characters make. Besides, the shifting limits between fiction and reality mirror the shifting limits between good and evil, normality and monstrosity in the novel. Thus, the reader is made to doubt everything and has to read the story over and over again to try to get a hold on it and identify who the monster is, or what monstrosity is.

4. Conclusion

What is monstrosity? Is it possible to set a limit between monstrosity and normality? The monster may not be only the one that is ostracised, but appear in everyone: Is not the editor’s curiosity, his digging
up a grave to witness the preservation of a body after death, itself monstrous? The novel is disturbing because it offers no perennial truth or reliable norm. The single form, permanence stand for aberration. Even the story fails to subsist. Indeed, the role of the reader is to doubt everything that he is told, not to suspend his disbelief. Perhaps then the novel itself is the monster, a breach of literary norms.

Notes
2 ibid., p. 48.
3 ibid., p. 25.
4 ibid., p. 93.
5 ibid., p. 254.
6 ibid., p. 97.
7 ibid., p. 253.
8 ibid., p. 154.
9 O Rank, Don Juan et le double, Payot, Paris, 1973 (1914).
10 Hogg, p. 97.
11 ibid., p. 116.
12 ibid., p. 125.
13 Rank, p. 88.
14 Hogg, p. 117.
15 ibid., p. 123.
17 Hogg, p. 253.
18 ibid., p. 79.
19 ibid., p. 25.
21 ibid., p. 254.
22 ibid., p. 136, for example.
23 ibid., p. 254.

Bibliography


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The Witch and the Werewolf: Rebirth and Subjectivity in Medieval Verse

Hannah Priest

Abstract
In the fourteenth-century romance, William of Palerne, a young man’s stepmother uses necromancy to transform him into a werewolf. Though the presentation of this woman as a “wicked stepmother” follows some conventions of the stereotype, the relationship between the witch and the werewolf is complex. The stepmother is presented as behaving “wickedly” but use of narrative techniques speaks of a fundamental connection between witch and victim. The werewolf’s humanity is preserved throughout his transformation, and through their connection, the witch is also presented as a rational human being. The witch is not a monster; necromancy in this text - as in other medieval romances - is presented as evidence of secret, female learning. The stepmother, however, stands in opposition to social norms and threatens to overturn the “natural” order of inheritance and succession. The intimacy of the transformation back to the human indicates, again, the close relationship between witch and werewolf. As in other medieval tales, the witch must be alone with her victim to effect the change back into the human. The embarrassment evident in the young man represents not only the physical vulnerability of the newly-transformed human, but also the crisis of identity brought about by the fracturing of corporeal subjectivity. The witch’s undoing of her spell allows for a refiguring of her relationship with the werewolf-stepson. Although, as she was responsible for the “birth” of the werewolf, she has stood in a pseudo-parental relationship to the creature, she is now able to enter into a more socially normative parental role - clothing, bathing and comforting the new human. The forgiveness of the witch by her stepson demonstrates the redemption of their relationship. Thus, through her relationship with the werewolf, the witch embodies both the transgression of societal norms and the potential for their reassertion.

Although the subtitle of my paper today is “rebirth and subjectivity in medieval verse,” I shall, in fact, be focussing primarily on one specific poem, William of Palerne. Notions of identity formation and subjectivity are central to this work, and many of the explorations of these ideas are enacted through the troubled and troubling relationship between a witch and a werewolf. William of Palerne is a Middle English adaptation of the Old French romance, Guillaume de Palerne. It was written in alliterative long lines around 1335 or 1336. The poem tells the story of William, son of the
king of Sicily, saved from his uncle’s murderous plot by a benign werewolf who carries him away in its teeth. The romance focuses on William’s trials, love affair and eventual reunion with his mother; however, the figure of the werewolf - and his own trials and familial relations - is key to the main subplot of the work, which, at times, takes the centre stage.

The reader learns early that the werewolf is the transformed state of a Spanish prince, Alphons. He has been enchanted by his stepmother to enable her own child to inherit the throne. This woman is the young, new wife of the king, who has used her powers of witchcraft and necromancy to do harm to her stepson and transform his physical state. Early in the poem, we are told that:

studied sche stiffly, as stepmoderes wol alle,/to do dernly a despit to here stepchilderen[].

[she studied carefully, as stepmothers will,/to secretly do harm to their stepchildren.]

It would seem, superficially, that this witch conforms to our expectations of the wicked stepmother. I would argue, however, that contemporary readers’ expectations of the witch may have been shaped by the preponderance of the “wicked witch” stereotype in popular culture. It is not my intention here to dissect this stereotype; however, I feel that to take it as a model in this case reduces many of the complexities of the relationship between the witch and the werewolf in *William of Palerne*.

Narrative technique and structure in this work are vital to the creation of meaning and, therefore, an examination of the poet’s wordplay and use of language can enhance our understanding of the relationships between characters. Though the (unnamed) stepmother is referred to as Alphons’ “kursed stepmoder,” she is never directly referred to as “wicked.” In a poem that alliterates so heavily on the letter *w*, and includes numerous instances of the word “wicked,” this seems striking and suggests that to view her in terms of a single stereotypical trait may be reductive. An examination of the use of repetition and alliterative epithets in this text reveals more subtle characterisation. Though the adjective “wicked” is not used to describe the stepmother, it is used to describe her will to inflict harm on her stepson, and to describe the counsel Alphons’ father has followed in trusting his wife. “Wicked” is used as a definitional adjective to describe character in this text; for example, the adjective is used to describe the enemies of William’s mother. However, it is specifically not used to describe the stepmother. When the word is found in connection with the witch, it is in its adverbial form - suggesting that, though her actions are evil, she is not necessarily an evil person.

This may seem to be an overly subtle distinction, yet I would argue
that the difference between an evil person and a person who does evil deeds is key to our understanding and satisfaction with the resolution of the witch and werewolf subplot. It is one of the reasons why the rehabilitation of the stepmother seems an appropriate ending. The separation between the ostensible essence of the person and their misguided and misjudged actions allows for their forgiveness.

The stepmother is not described as “wicked”; however, the repeated adjective “witty” though almost exclusively used to describe the werewolf, is used to describe her. The descriptions of the werewolf as “witty” serve as reminders to the audience that the beast retains some humanity and rationality. Therefore, when the word is used in connection with the witch, we must also conclude that there is a suggestion of humanity and rationality in her characterisation. This instance of the word is more complex, however, as it appears in connection with her skills in magical arts. William instructs Alphons’ father to tell his wife to reverse her spell:

“Yif thi wif of wicchecraft be witti, as thou seidest, that sche him wrought a werewolf, riot wel I hope sche can with hire connyng and hire queynt charmes make him to a man agen, it may be non other.”
[“If your wife is so witty in witchcraft, as you said, that she was able to make him into a werewolf, well I hope she can, with her cunning and her strange charms make him into a man again, and nothing more.”]

Thus, the word “witty” here has connotations of knowledge, cunning and skill. It is interesting to note that the only other human in the text described as “witty” is William’s mother, where the word is used to imply the virtue and worthiness of a ruler. The use of alliterative adjectives in this text, in a sense, undercuts the narrative’s early assertion that we will be presented with a stereotypical wicked stepmother. Furthermore, it questions the appropriateness of viewing this woman as a generic “wicked witch,” and the usefulness of such a model of interpretation.

It has been suggested that the transformative witch is as monstrous as the being that she creates, perhaps more so. I would like to consider more closely this notion of the witch-as-monster, and its relevance to this medieval text. Though there is some association of the woman in this romance with the nonhuman or the cursed, there is no clear explanation of her “nature” as monstrous. She is linked, not to the bestial nature of the werewolf she creates, but to the “witty” and human rationality the transformed beast retains.

To argue that the witch is a “monster,” or that she symbolically “gives birth to a monster,” conflates the characterisation of the woman with the characterisation of the thing she creates. There is a very clear and
intimate relationship between the transformer and the victim, but to reduce this relationship under the classification of “monstrosity” effaces both the specifics of each and the importance of the relationship between them.

The figure of the stepmother represents a possible rupture in the cultural norms of parentage and primogeniture. From the child’s perspective, she is a figure with the authority and power of a parent, but without necessarily possessing parental love or concern for the child’s wellbeing. Much has been written on the use of the “stepmother” figure in children’s literature, folk and fairy tales, and this has often focused on the relationship between the child and the pseudo-parent figure and its implications for identity formation. Of perhaps more relevance to medieval chivalric romance, however, is the threat the stepmother poses to a culture based on inheritance and primogeniture. In such a society, the first-born son takes precedence over his father’s other children. However, if the father remarries after the mother’s death, two main threats are introduced. First, further children may be born to split the inheritance or, in some cases, the kingdom and thus “deny” the first-born his expected share. Second, the stepmother - possibly exerting control over her husband at this point - may choose to favour her own children ahead of those of the first wife. This is the case in William of Palerne: Alphons' stepmother wishes her own son, rather than the child of her predecessor, to inherit the kingdom.

It is this second threat - to the norms of inheritance and lineage - rather than a notion of the stepmother as a non-maternal parent figure that allows us to draw parallels between Alphons’ stepmother and the mother-in-law of a knight in another chivalric romance of the later Middle Ages. In The Greene Knight, a late fifteenth-/early sixteenth-century analogue to the more well-known Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the knight Bredbeddle’s mother-in-law uses her skills with witchcraft to concoct a plan that threatens to destroy his marriage. This mother-in-law, Agostes, encourages the knight to challenge Sir Gawain, apparently to prove the latter unworthy, and uses her magic to allow Bredbeddle to appear supernatural and thus reveal Gawain as a coward. The reader is made aware of her true plan, which is, in fact, to demonstrate the fortitude of Sir Gawain and to bring this famous knight into close contact with her own daughter, Bredbeddle’s wife. However, she is not doing this because she is the “wicked” pseudo-parent torturing the child in the absence of his own mother. Rather, she is attempting to offer her daughter the chance of a better union with Sir Gawain and, one assumes, the increase in status this would entail.

Agostes, here, poses not simply a threat of malice to the individual knight, but an overturning of the norms of marriage. She has decided, even after her daughter has married one knight, that there is a chance of improved status through a union with another. The controlling mother-in-law poses a threat to both the stability of the societal institution of marriage, and also to
the hierarchical gender structure: The man no longer rules in his own household. Thus we can see parallels between the stepmother and the mother-in-law, as both exist as anomalous categories of women, standing outside of - and in opposition to - societal norms.

However, an examination of how these women are anomalous, or even unnatural, does not explain why they are figured very specifically as “witches.” In considering accusations of witchcraft in early modern Europe, Stuart Clark has argued against a simplistic reading of witches as anomalous women. In Thinking with Demons, he asserts that “there is no necessary (i.e., conceptual) link that enables us to derive being a witch from being anomalous.” In addition to this, the desire to posit such a “necessary” link has resulted in the conflation of other disruptive or anomalous women with the image of the “wicked stepmother” and, by extrapolation, with the image of the witch. Thus, to understand more fully the role of the witch in medieval verse, it is important to avoid a reductive classification of these women as “monstrous,” “anomalous,” or “unnatural” and instead to address, as Clark has suggested, “why accusations should have concerned witchcraft, rather than some other crime.”

To return, then, to William of Palerne: in this work, the reader is told that Alphons’ stepmother is skilled in “nigramancy.” “Nigramancy” appears as a variant spelling of “necromancy” in the Middle Ages, and medieval usage did not distinguish between the two variant forms. Though the etymological definition of the term “necromancy” limits its meaning to divinatory practices using dead bodies, by the time the texts under consideration here were composed, its meaning had been expanded to include other forms of demonic and “black” magic. The Middle English Dictionary lists the meanings “sorcery,” “witchcraft,” and “black magic” as well as “divination” and “conjuration of spirits.” In William of Palerne, there is no indication that the witch practises divination, makes use of dead bodies, or conjures spirits and, therefore, it is clear that romance writers were using necromancy as a term that encompassed a wide spectrum of magical arts. This seems, however, at odds with the definitions of necromancy posited in theological and legal treatises of the Middle Ages. Richard Kieckhefer’s discussion of the practitioners of necromancy in the medieval period claims that:

Judicial and anecdotal evidence suggests that explicitly demonic magic, called “nigromancy” or “necromancy,” was largely the domain of priests, perhaps especially those without full-time parish employment, as well as ordained monks with some education and esoteric interests, university students and others who had been received into minor orders.
It is clear, however, that in popular literature, necromancy was not the preserve of the learned clergy. It had come, on occasions, to be associated with a different group of people and was not considered to be “explicitly demonic” magic. In *William of Palerne*, Alphons’ stepmother has learned necromancy as a young girl. The poet repeats the notion of “learning” when he states that she had “namore of nigramauncy to lere [nothing more of necromancy to learn].”

Thus, romance necromancy is depicted as learned and secretive knowledge; moreover, it is a specialized form of female knowledge. This set of skills had to be studied carefully for the woman to achieve mastery of them. In these texts, the woman’s malevolence does not simply manifest itself in some sort of monstrous offspring. Alphons’ stepmother did not “give birth” to the werewolf, but rather “wrought” it, suggesting a link to both science and craftsmanship. Moreover, it is precisely because of this that the text allows a more forgiving resolution of the “enchanted transformation.”

Contemporary readers may expect to see something resembling the grotesque and visceral punishments meted out to fairy-tale wicked witches and stepmothers for their transgressions: eyes pecked out by pigeons, made to dance to death in red-hot iron shoes, melted by an accidental dousing of water. Elsewhere in medieval verse, strict sentences are imposed on transgressive women. At the end of Marie de France’s werewolf tale, *Bisclavret*, the wife who has betrayed her husband and prevented his transformation back from his werewolf state is punished by having her nose ripped from her face. To compound the punishment, her female descendents will also wear this scar as a mark of their ancestor’s shame. However, no such punishment appears in *William of Palerne*. Alphons’ stepmother is forgiven by both her victim and his new-found friend William. As I have already argued, this stepmother is never described as “wicked,” but rather as behaving “wickedly.” She was never an evil threat to the knight she transformed, but a misguided woman with knowledge of the black arts.

This presentation of the witch suggests an understanding of human subjectivity that is a complicated mixture of performance and essence. Though a “witch” is someone who enacts black magic, and black magic is a malevolent force, this text suggests that it does not follow that a witch is malevolent. The woman’s performance can be separated from the woman’s essence. However, this separation only works because the black arts that the witch practises are a set of skills clearly and deliberately transposed onto the essential qualities of the woman through education. Because the reader is able to see the mechanisms through which the woman becomes a witch (the teaching or science behind what she is doing), they are also able to conceive of these mechanisms being undone and the essentially good woman being redeemed.

The familial relationship between Alphons and his stepmother, the
victim and his transformer, sets the scene for the intimate bond between the two. As I have demonstrated, the two also become linked through narrative technique. The scene in which Alphons is transformed back into a human reaffirms this close relationship. During the ritual transformation scene, in which the stepmother reads from a magic book and uses a talismanic ring to effect the necessary change, there are no other characters present. So vital is the privacy of this exchange between witch and victim, the poet reminds the audience of their seclusion three times in just 43 lines. Once Alphons has become a man again, his stepmother speaks tenderly to him, aware that he may be ashamed of his nakedness:

“I see well that you are ashamed, but there is no need to be; there is no-one in this room but the two of us. And on you, sir, I see no sight but what should be, nor do you fail to have anything that a man should have.”

The stepmother’s appreciation of her stepson’s naked body here strikes the reader as remarkably intimate. This serves two main purposes. First, it affirms the success of the transformation: Until only moments before, there had been many things on Alphons’ body that did not “falleth a man to have.” Second, it suggests a more natural and human relationship between the witch and her victim. She has now stepped into her (correct) role as a parent to him. She tells him not to be ashamed of his body in front of her, not because of any erotic or transgressive relationship, but because she is, finally, his “mother.” This is confirmed by her actions immediately following this reassurance: she leads him to a bath, washes, dresses and comforts him. This symbolic rebirth of Alphons as a human cements the parent/child relationship. I would argue, however, that this is not a wholly new relationship between them. It is, rather, a development of the close bond that has allowed the witch to be referred to as stepmother to both the beast and the man throughout the poem.

The importance of this highly personal and intimate relationship between transformer and victim suggests that transformation may be viewed as an intersubjective experience. Magic rituals necessarily involve a commingling of the identities of transformer and victim. I would argue that it is through this intersubjective relationship that we can come to understand the identity of the transformed subject. In *Metamorphosis and Identity*, Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that “there is no story if there is only change.” Transformation does not make sense unless there is some
continuity between the present and the previous form. Bynum continues by asserting that: “Unless the story is carried in some way in the present body or shape, we do not know what it was.” Though there are many devices used in *William of Palerne* to suggest a continuity between the human prince and the transformed werewolf state, I would argue that the most significant one is the relationship in which the victim stands to his transformer. He remains stepchild to the witch while “monstrous.” Through this continuous relationship, and its affirmation in the symbolic rebirthing of the man, we are able to view the subject as having some continuity with his previous and future selves.

In conclusion, the forgiveness of the witch by her stepson demonstrates the redemption and the validation of their relationship. Thus, through her relationship with the werewolf, the witch embodies both the transgression of societal norms and the potential for their reassertion.

**Notes**

1 G H V Bunt (ed.), *William of Palerne: An Alliterative Romance*, Bouma’s Boekhuis BV, Groningen, NL, 1985, ll. 130-1. All line references are taken from this edition. In direct quotations, I have used modern typography and replaced yoghs with g/gh and occasionally y, and thorns with th, but have otherwise followed Bunt’s edition. All translations given are my own.
2 ibid, l. 146.
3 ibid., ll. 4134-7.
5 Clark, p. 108.
7 Blunt, l. 199.
8 Blunt, ll. 4446-9.
10 Bynum, p. 177-8.

**Bibliography**


The Monstrous and Maternal in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*

*Inderjit Grewal*

**Abstract**

This paper will explore how Toni Morrison’s discourse depicts black motherhood against the backdrop of African-American slavery. It will offer a feminist analysis of her fictional representations concerning the maternal role of slave women. These are reflective of a historical period that brought into question the concept of motherhood itself, with use of offensive terminology like “breeder.” In *Beloved*, Morrison introduces a monstrous element: Sethe is a mother who takes an axe to her daughter’s throat. Yet, her violent actions are validated as “motherlove.” Morrison will not wholly condemn such an act; presenting the monstrous as a necessary means of resistance against a patriarchal slave system which views the black—especially reproductive—body as its possession. Sethe’s children are the lawful property of her white master who wishes to emulate the supremacy of the Holy Father while becoming the Colonial Father. His own monstrosity comes to light in this disturbing text. In opposition to the power of an objectifying slave system, the monstrous can be defined as the subjective voice of an African-American woman-mother. It reveals an important feminist statement against the violation of her body and identity. This voice is (albeit partially) Margaret Garner’s testimony: The slave mother guilty of committing infanticide and the original source for Morrison’s text. Perspective is key to a reading of *Beloved*. While her crime lay exposed across newspapers intended for the judgement of nineteenth century white readers only, Morrison now reunites Margaret with her experience and subjectivity. Beloved’s revelation is that at the cost of harming her “best thing” - her motherhood - the criminalized slave woman must unleash a dangerous monstrosity, so as to expose the greater evil of slavery in its denial of her the right to be a mother.

**Keywords**

Slavery, Racism, Motherhood, Christianity, Othering, Dehumization, Apotropaic Margaret Garner, Sojourner Truth

The unforgettable words of former slave, abolitionist and women’s rights campaigner, Sojourner Truth, return us to history and its terrible mistakes. “Ain’t I a woman?” she asked, defiantly, at a women’s convention rally in 1851, in Ohio. Her words convey the thoughts of many other African-American women who were also forced to question their place in the world. Her powerful voice carried through the protests of the gathered assembly as she continued:
That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

The recurring question in Sojourner’s iconic speech can be coupled with an equally important enquiry: If I am not a woman then what am I? African-Americans, while living their lives as slaves, were certainly denied human status by their white owners. They existed in the shadows and served as an inferior “Other” to their masters’ superior status. Sojourner’s hands worked hard to produce crops and her womb to create precious life, but this was not enough for her to be recognised as a human being. As bell hooks points out, slave women achieved merely a “breed[er]” status, yet Sojourner continued to call herself a mother and as Ruth Robbins notes, she “appealed to her maternity as the sign of her womanhood.” For as long as she could value herself a mother she could also call herself a woman. hooks further adds that “the lot of the black slave woman would always be harsher, more brutal than that of the black male slave” since she had more to offer and, therefore, more to lose of herself. Neither her body nor its reproductive function belonged to her as her offspring were destined to become the property of the white master - his future slave hands.

The trauma of thirteen successful births led to almost as many unsuccessful attempts on Sojourner’s part to mother her children. Whereas her voice, in freedom, became her weapon against any attempts to still oppress her identity, there is documented evidence of other methods that were employed by black women slaves in order to achieve the same purpose: freedom to be recognised as a woman and a mother. An objectifying nineteenth century newspaper article, written about Margaret Garner, offers one such example. Events surrounding her life provide the foundation for Toni Morrison’s Nobel prizewinning novel, Beloved. Rather than turn her weapon on a cruel slave master, Garner set about attacking her own motherhood. Beloved reproduces part of the Garner story so as to reunite its subject with her experience and present this complex text as her partial testimony.
A mother-child bond is regarded the world over as one of the most perfect and intimate of unions. Morrison, however, presents a dynamic of “motherlove” that is most disturbing and violent. Sethe, the mother, and Beloved, her child, are portrayed as a slave “gone wild” and her “devil child.” This maternal relationship becomes tainted by an undoubtedly monstrous element and Morrison delves deep to uncover its roots. This paper will focus exclusively on Morrison’s portrayal of Sethe’s motherhood. However, it must be acknowledged that the maternal experiences of other characters, including Sethe’s own mother and Baby Suggs, Ella, Beloved and Denver, also deserve thorough analysis. Beloved is the story of an African-American woman who escapes slavery with her children because she is determined to save them from the brutality she herself has had to experience. With the law to protect his interests, the slave master follows her trail and intends to return home with his property of five. The slave mother, however, begins attacking “her best thing” - her children - in order to “free” them from a life of cruelty.

Beloved counters critical views featured in the Garner article, which was written for an ideal readership of pro-slavery supporters while slaves themselves were kept largely illiterate to maintain a power imbalance. Whereas Margaret is branded a “brutal and unnatural murderer,” Morrison, will not condemn Sethe’s actions so easily. Instead, she comments: “It was absolutely the right thing to do […] but also the thing you have no right to do.” The events that precede the pivotal scene of infanticide are able to provide important fragments to complete the story of a black woman’s experience of slavery. While neither slaves nor women were recognised as valid members of society under the tenets of the commanding institution, a narrative set to reveal the perspective of a slave woman-mother, signals a retelling of history and also, an analysis of what was once purported as the Christian way of life. Ed Guerrero notes the world was seen through the “look” or “gaze” of the master race, bound up in the ideological belief of its own superiority. This gaze was both race and gender specific. hooks refers to white men in times of slavery as the self-professed “agents of God.” Rosemary Radford Ruether, arguing from a feminist theological perspective points to a similar conclusion:

[P]atriarchy is the social context for both the Old and New Testament and […] has been incorporated into religious ideology on many levels. Patriarchy itself must fall under the Biblical denunciations of idolatry and blasphemy, the idolizing of the male as representative of divinity. It is idolatrous to make males more “like God” than females. It is blasphemous to use the image and name of the Holy to justify patriarchal
domination and law [...] [Patriarchy is] the whole structure of Father-ruled society: aristocracy over serfs, masters over slaves, king over subjects, racial overloads over colonized people. Religions that reinforce hierarchal stratification use the Divine as the apex of this system of privilege and control. Indeed, blasphemy occurs whenever the name of the Holy Father is used and misused to justify the rule of the Colonial Father. A phallocentric representation of Christianity allowed for slavery to operate its ideological system of divine power, which ranked accordingly: Whites were largely privileged in comparison to all blacks, who were oppressed. Morrison’s narrator offers the justification that was put forward by the ruling race: Slaves “needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred.” As Sethe and her fellow slave companions learn: “Whitepeople believed that […] under every dark skin was a jungle.” Schoolteacher, whose irremovable collar fixes his godly status, makes it his mission to educate his slave possessions according to the script of white ownership. They are viewed as “trespassers among the human race.”

The themes of Othering and inequality also extend to gender relations. Feminism asserts Christianity’s shaping of motherhood also paved the way for male control of the female womb. A Kristevian perspective identifies the Christian concept of motherhood as being a conspicuous sign of the jouissance of the female (or maternal) body, a pleasure that must at all costs be repressed: the function of procreation must be kept strictly subordinated to the rule of the Father’s name.

Whereas white and black women’s experiences of inferiority and maternal powerlessness can be linked through history, as witnessed by Sojourner Truth, the white mother was always recognised as human while her black counterpart always remained “Other.” In Beloved, Sethe’s children are not expected live under the rule of their biological father, Halle, but that of Schoolteacher, who, as the Colonial Father, shows no care for their needs. Slave children would often be sold off by masters, thereby enforcing maternal separation and risking harm to their psychical development. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the quality of a mother-child relationship, especially in its earlier stages, goes on to later determine the child’s ability to form other social relationships. Ignorant to the psychological and physical harm that would inevitably be faced by slave children and their mothers, the greed of masters prevailed. The exhausted bodies of female slaves were expected to reproduce as frequently as possible.
Broken maternal relationships as a result of slavery are described by Andrea O’Reilly as having damaged the generational African “motherline.” She adds that “victims have been denied ‘their subjectivity and history […] and such a] loss, in turn, becomes psychologically manifest.” Traumatic “rememory” allows Morrison to return her characters to their past, with the aim of finally reconnecting their historical “motherline” and recognizing its African roots. Through this process, Sethe, described as “crazy” for having killed her child, is symbolically reconnected with her deceased mother who returns as the “woman with a flower in her hat” to witness Beloved’s murder take place. She is also identified as being “crazy” and the narrator discloses she too killed all but one of her children, because they were born as a result of her rape by white men. Later in the text, Sethe herself comments on Beloved, her dead daughter returned as offering: “[s]weet, crazy conversations.” While all three generations of this family are connected by an indeterminate “craziness” which has polluted their minds and forced their violent actions, it also confirms that their relationships live on. Nonetheless, slavery viewed black “motherlove” as an overindulgence that must be curbed. Sethe remembers of her relationship with her children: “I couldn’t love em proper in Kentucky because they weren’t mine to love.”

Since excess is seen as a privilege that belongs to slave masters only, Schoolteacher ensures his work hands will not “[eat] too much, [talk] too much.” Following the demise of his brother-in-law, Mr Garner, and a more humane or “special kind of slavery,” Schoolteacher intends to restore slave order and make Sethe a part of his pious operation. Ironically, Sethe is required for a mission that will be built on multiplicity. Morrison exemplifies how black motherhood was perceived through the gaze of white slave owners. Sethe’s fertile body marks her potential value as a vital part of the slave master’s ambitious plans for future income and profit. Schoolteacher sees Sethe as having already produced three future slaves for him at no extra cost, and so he prepares for the arrival of a fourth to add to his property. This is the disturbing truth of slavery; a practice that transformed the black reproductive body into a commercial interest. Despite Sethe being a valuable asset to Schoolteacher’s status, he still views her as non-human and soon she too becomes aware of his vision. Schoolteacher’s notebook confirms his view of the Negro as being animal-like. Sethe recalls, “[i]t was a book about us but we didn’t know that right away.” The power of his phallic pen, while scripting personal observations on Sethe, symbolically, also writes across her body, dirtying her in the process. However, Sethe believes “[w]hites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, […] the part of her that was clean.” That part of her is self-owned, has come from within her and must be protected at any cost.
Schoolteacher passes his racism down a generation through tutoring his two nephews. The trio are described by Sethe as initially possessing “pretty manners,” “talk[ing] soft,” and being “gentle in a lot of ways.”

When Sethe sees their reality, it becomes a bleak moment in which she discovers in herself what W.E.B Du Bois refers to as a “double-consciousness.” Kathleen Marks adds, Sethe “becomes aware of an outside look that is very different from the way in which she perceives herself.” Her sudden awareness of Schoolteacher’s perception of her as “Other” is in direct conflict with her self-perception as a “wife” and mother. While regarding herself as a human being and a subject, she is momentarily forced to see her identity altered into a dehumanized form. Their learning session outdoors transforms into the image of a disturbing wildlife trail; using a blank page they clinically dissect the female slave, with “her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right.”

While “definitions belong to definers,” Sethe comes to realise that her family and motherhood face uncertain futures. Mrs Garner clarifies for her, “[a] characteristic is a feature. A thing that’s natural to a thing.” Concepts of what is “natural” and therefore, what could be regarded as the truth belonged solely to the defining race.

Morrison’s fiction highlights that racial dehumanization by the white slave masters brought to light their own morphed features, ahead of those which were imposed upon black slaves: “The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin.” Sethe receives a beating from the men who attack her for having spoken out about their cruel exercise. The anger spills along with Sethe’s tears as she looks back on her past, and finally reveals the memory of her maternal body being horrifically violated by the nephews: “[T]hose boys came in there and took my milk […]. Held me down and took it.” Memories of the infanticide, which follows Sethe’s escape from Sweet Home and Schoolteacher’s arrival in Cincinnati to reclaim his property, also remain repressed within her mind, until forced out as fragmented bits. Sethe’s eighteen-year-long silence, following a moment of madness, allows for her to be studied as a hysteric. French feminist definitions of psychoanalysis, including Irigaray’s idea that “hysteria [functions] primarily as a form of protest against patriarchal law,” suggest there is intention and thus, certain clarity within such a muddled mind. Furthermore, when the woman hysterical is failed by words, she “senses something remains to be said that resists all speech.” Having taken an axe to Beloved’s throat, Sethe’s blood stained hands communicate in the place of spoken words and force Schoolteacher to retreat: “I stopped him,” she later declares in defiance as the words return to her mouth.

Morrison introduces maternal “terror” as the crucial event in her woman-centred slave narrative. According to Mark Ledbetter, terror-fuelled events are key triggers for her characters’ journeys of self-development. In
this case, maternal terror is the trigger for a black mother’s revolution. He suggests:

characters see and understand themselves in the world most profoundly when in the grip of terror […] the restoration of self develops through a spiritual journey that involves violence and chaos which take characters to the extremes of human endurance and, in turn, allows, even enforces, self-discovery. 37

Sethe’s act of terror transfers the slave master’s power to a slave mother. She emerges from this incident with a personal victory against slavery, but at the cost of losing a daughter. The motive behind Sethe’s murderous actions remains a debatable issue for readers and critics alike. Has she simply committed murder or a complex act of love? Stephanie Demetrakopulos reconstructs the infanticide as a protective, love-filled gesture:

Sethe attempts to return the babies to perhaps a collective mother body, to devour them back into the security of womb/tomb death much as a mother cat will eat her babies as the ultimate act of protection […]. For Sethe the children are better off dead, their fantasy futures protected from the heinous reality of slavery.38

“Motherlove” in its defamiliarised form is not an undoing of Sethe’s love for her children, but a severance of slavery’s enforced link with her motherhood. The dead child goes into her protective custody, “where [she can] be safe,”39 and, in her freedom from slavery, remains connected with her mother, in a symbolic reforming of their umbilical connection. The mother-child bond continues regardless of the absence of one caused by the actions of the other. However, Sethe is successful in severing her ties with Schoolteacher, through enacting a silent but rage filled revenge.

When viewed from an exterior gaze, Sethe’s killing of Beloved is considered illegal and immoral. However, Morrison delivers the personal testimony of a desperate mother and allows her to justify it as “safety with a handsaw.”40 Sethe creates the possibility of a non-enslaving future, by challenging Schoolteacher’s dehumanising project: “No notebook for my babies” she declares.41 As a black mother, she finally claims ownership of her “motherlove” and her children in this episode of deliberate madness.42 Since she regards her motherhood as her “best thing,” Sethe can be seen as turning the weapon on herself in the same way that Sula, in another of Morrison’s texts, inflicts self-harm sooner than experience it at the hands of a white boy whom she encounters. Marks examines Sethe’s actions as
apotropaic gestures, which are “aimed at warding off, or resisting, a danger, a threat or an imperative. More exactly, apotropaic gestures anticipate, mirror, and put into effect that which they seek to avoid.”

Sethe’s pre-emptive action severs Schoolteacher’s ability to harm her, but in this liberating moment she also replaces him as the perpetrator of an innocent other.

Morrison’s radical treatment of motherhood in the course of this novel is a bold step, indeed. She strips it of its ideological status and instead, delivers an ominous statement: “Unless carefree, motherlove was [and is] a killer.”

In the forms of Sethe, her nameless mother, and Ella, Morrison’s mother figures unapologetically transform the concept of maternal affection into instances of what can be perceived as maternal violence. Yet, for Morrison, these remain illustrations of “motherlove”: a love that hurts. This is as a result of the damage that slavery caused women and their motherhood, and was callously repeated throughout generations.

While it is stated “[t]his is not a story to pass on,” it must be shared so that the cruelty of slavery is exposed, the wounds of an African-American history are cleansed and a process of healing can finally begin. The monstrous element within this story is not only a mother’s murder of her child, but also a system of oppression which infected minds and provoked such actions. While it was purported as a positive way of life, it was, in fact, destructive to its core. Finally, the monstrous presence of slavery has been removed while black motherhood has both survived and prospered.

Notes

4 b hooks, p. 43.
6 ibid., p. 149, 261.
7 ibid., p. 251.
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11 b hooks, p. 29.
13 b hooks, p. 29.
14 ibid., p. 151.
15 ibid., p. 125.
18 b hooks, p. 29.
19 ibid., p. 265.
20 ibid., p. 149.
21 ibid., p. 67.
22 ibid., p. 162.
23 ibid., p. 220.
24 ibid., p. 140.
25 ibid., p. 37.
26 ibid., p. 251.
27 ibid., pp. 36-7.
29 ibid.
30 Morrison, p. 193.
31 ibid., p. 190.
32 ibid., p. 195.
33 ibid., p. 199.
34 ibid., pp. 16-17.
39 Morrison, p. 164.
40 ibid.
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41 ibid., p. 198.
43 K Marks, p. 45.
44 Morrison, p. 132.
45 ibid., p. 275.

Bibliography


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The Voracious Monster: Consumption, Jouissance & Reading The Textual Body

Thomas Michael Murphy

Abstract

This paper argues that Harry Crews is a front runner in changing the enlightened space of Kerouac’s road-trips into monstrous space of consumption and pleasure that reflects American postmodern cultural. Indeed, in Crews’ 1972 text, CAR: A Novel, images of car mass production and destruction invade the home in monstrous proportions in which the boundary between human/car blurs towards a cyborg identity. In “A Cyborg Manifesto,” Donna Haraway states that cyborgs are “couplings between organism and machine, each conceived as coded devices, in an intimacy and with a power that was not generated in the history of sexuality.” Moreover, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen states in “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” “[t]he monster’s body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy[…] As a construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read.”

CAR: A Novel marks the categorical crisis between consumers and consumed as the text maps the auto-centric cultural shift towards an emergence of human/car hybrid as a new textual paradigm. The car represents postmodern spatialization as monstrous in which the body and consumption are to be read. Crews’ text illustrates cars consuming human lives through accidents, meanwhile, the character Herman Mack, decides to strikeout on his own by publicly eating a new Ford Maverick square inch by square inch. Herman’s task of literally ingesting a car embodies Jean Baudrillard’s definition of consumption in The Consumer Society as “a powerful element of social control” in which the monster as consumption is transitory jouissance and acts metaphorically “as kind of a herdsman […] to keep a patriarchal society functional.” This paper’s triptych aim includes discussion of: Crews’ place in cyborg ontology, the importance of human/car hybrid shift in postmodern texts, and the dawning of a new machine age monster - the cyborg consumer - that enhances Crews’ CAR: A Novel.

Keywords
Car, monster, cyborg, ontology, automobility, Crews, hybridity, consumption, jouissance, body

1. Introduction.

Jack Kerouac’s road texts, On The Road and Visions of Cody, explore metaphysical moments, while in the course of automobility that leads to enlightenment. Kerouac states in his undated introduction to Visions
of Cody, “Instead of just a horizontal account of travels on the road, I wanted a vertical, metaphysical study of Cody’s character and its relationship to the general ‘American.’” Metaphysical becomes a feeling for the character or that event when it all changes that connects one with many or like one may experience a “gut reaction” to a situation that they understand becomes the right choice. In particularly, the term metaphysical applies a perceived awareness of understanding of a specific moment in time or text. Automobility, on the other hand, is a social theoretical construct that analyzes the urbanscape of architecture as the shift from pedestrian based city structures to cities constructed or restructured with mobility based roadways designed specifically for transportation cultures. However, Mimi Sheller and John Urry claim “Automobility is a complex amalgam of interlocking machines, social practices and ways of dwelling, not in a stationary home, but in a mobile, semi-privatized and hugely dangerous capsule.” Specifically, the automobile or more colloquially know as the car, this “dangerous capsule” is a spatial location in which Kerouac’s characters transcend the moment and achieve enlightenment.

I could feel the road some twenty inches beneath me, unfurling and flying and hissing at incredible speeds across the groaning continent…. When I closed my eyes all I could see was the road unwinding into me."

The road enters Sal Paradise, Kerouac’s alter ego, by means of the car body that sustains Sal “some twenty inches” above the surface where its twists and turns are “unwinding into” him that are read by the tire treads in which the road as the codex of life unfolds metaphysically into his body. Sal transcends life by means of the road’s codex that his mind not only reads and comprehends, but reports his answers to the masses much like Plato’s Philosopher King who once leaving the Cave must come back to explain real shapes to those still watching shadows on the wall. Indeed, these two texts invite readers to join a metaphysical quest to gain enlightenment.

Fifty years hence, technology and cars continue to mark the changes to American culture. Today’s automobiles have microchips imbedded into their system such that “[y]our car is crammed with sophisticated electronics, and the guy who fixes it needs a computer as well as a wrench.” Cars’ changes derive from three specific cultural events: First, the invention of the integrated circuit by Jack Kilby in 1958 and separately by Robert Noyce in 1959 that were first introduced into cars in the 1970 models, second, the JFK assassination in a convertible in 1963, and third, Andy Warhol’s Pop Art paintings Orange Car Crash Fourteen Times and Green Car Crash (Green Burning Car I). These “cultural moments” lead to the documentation of cars
moving from a locus of enlightenment to becoming monstrous that evolves to cyborg.  

This essay’s triptych aim includes discussion of Crews’ place in cyborg ontology, the importance of human/car hybrid shift in postmodern texts, and the dawning of a new machine age monster - the cyborg consumer - that enhances Crews’ CAR: A Novel. The text itself is only one hundred and five pages long, but a main-vein for cyborg ontology. In a sense, the mapping is really a time consuming collection of data from a wide swath of novels, films and artworks and as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen states in “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” a collection is “bound temporarily together to form a loosely integrated net-or, better, an unassimilated hybrid, a monstrous body.” That is to say, at these particular moments of texts, monsters represent a cultural problem, and as I tell my students, our job is to read the monster’s body to find out what is the cultural problem. Moreover, Donna Haraway states in “A Cyborg Manifesto” that cyborgs are “couplings between organism and machine, each conceived as coded devices, in an intimacy and with a power that was not generated in the history of sexuality.” In truth, cyborg ontology is about piecing together a rather large monster from smaller monstrous parts. I believe that the transportation craft engenders monstrous qualities and has since the first machine age and continues to do so through texts, films and art. Likewise, in Crews’ 1979 essay “The Car,” he relates his own passion as a young man for a variety of cars he’s owned.

[I]t was somehow my own body I was talking about. It was my speed and my strength that got rubber in three gears. In the mystery of that love affair, the car and I merged.

A love affair consumes time and energy however the rewards are the brief transitory moments of pleasure.

2. Consumption and Jouissance.

The automobile has lost the allure of Kerouac’s enlightenment and become the monster “with no consciousness” in which consumption and jouissance are seated on or within the body of the car. It is imperative to define how “consumption” and “jouissance” are being used throughout this essay. In The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures, Jean Baudrillard’s defines consumption as:

[A]n active, collective behaviour: It is something enforced, a morality, an institution. It is a whole system of values, with all that expression implies in terms of group integration and social control functions.
What fascinates me are Baudrillard’s usage of “enforced,” “institution,” morality,” “group integration,” and, finally, “social control.” In Cohen’s “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” these terms are equated with monsters or monstrous actions, as herdsman enforcing the patriarchal culture, a text to be read. Indeed, to consume is to control in which consumption of another is a form of group integration or assimilation, although, with monsters assimilation is never complete. At this juncture, I believe that a definition of *jouissance* is rather important. The dictionary definition of *jouissance* is “pleasure, enjoyment, delight; sensual pleasure, climax.” Moreover, the physical act of shopping or consumption is sexual, arousing and brings pleasure to some. Richard Howard echoes this definition with his distinction of Roland Barthes’ words in *The Pleasure of the Text* that “pleasure is a state … [and] *jouissance* an action,” an action of sexual ecstasy in which the climatic expression transfers a secretion of fluids from one body to another that leads to coding through DNA. Definitely, *jouissance* in its most crass form is merely a data transfer. Data transfer is utmost important between the human/car hybrid to maintain a *close-loop-system*.

However, to achieve *jouissance* a performative mating ritual of sorts leads to *jouissance*.

3. **Reading the textual body.**

Harry Crews’ *Car: A Novel* takes place in and around Jacksonville, Florida, in 1971. The text centres on the members of the Mack family, the father, Easton Mack, called Easy, his three children, Junell, and identical twin sons, Mister and Herman. For brevity’s sake, this essay concentrates on Herman Mack alone, though much can be discussed of Easy, Junell, Mister, and Margo’s consumption and *jouissance*. In Crews’ text, the Mack family owns and lives at “Auto-Town,” “forty-three acres of wrecked cars,” “the largest in the state,” in which the family lives above the building they call “Salvage House.” Moreover, Auto-Town has such descriptors as “mountains of wrecked cars,” “abrupt cliffs of automobiles,” and “the ground […] was not ground at all but an unknowably thick layer of glass shards, glass of all colours, rose, yellow, clear, tinted blue and pink, and black” that give Auto-Town a landscape of a romanticized American western milieu, rugged but dazzling with an ever presence of danger. Furthermore, the landscape achieves a hazardous waste zone transformed by machines whereas humans have shifted from machines inventors to caretakers. Bordering Auto-Town’s mountainous state is the “roiling excremental flow” of the Saint John’s River that is “[t]en feet of gasoline on top of fifty feet of shit” as Mister quotes his father, Easy Mack. The Mack family has been building the mountain ranges within the forty-three acres for thirty-one years. Part of the “categorical crisis” scribed on the monster’s body centres on
environmental consumption. The river’s destruction, the hazy air and the unnatural landscape of Auto-Town denotes a shift from the natural and machine connection that Mark Seltzer’s Bodies and Machines explores in 19th century texts, whereas now sexual coupling is no longer in a juxtaposition of “the natural and the technical and the garden and the machine” as rather the natural in the technical and the garden in the machine or like Herman and the Maverick, the natural with the machine. That is to say not only does the text connect sex with the car in which coupling cannot occur without a car’s involvement and, on a deeper level, an overabundance of each, sex and cars, has desensitized humans enough to become soulless once again.

Easy Mack describes his son Herman as “a harmless dreamer,” far from the truth; Herman’s actions physically tear the family apart. Early in the text Herman declares, “I will eat a car. I will eat a car from bumper to bumper.” To eat a car to be rid of cars is the indirect centre of Herman’s consumption of the Maverick. Herman realizes that to be liberated from cars he would have to eat all of the cars. In a parallel structure, Margo the “Hotel Whore,” who falls for Herman, explains that she tried to “get rid of fucking by fucking [...] by fucking everybody.” Herman’s positive response to Margo’s admission in the Rolls Royce Silver Cloud, under the mountain of cars, brings the focus back to the negativity of consumption, the difference between desire and jouissance. Judith Butler states that “desire is marked off from jouissance precisely through the mark of the law.” Butler’s “mark of the law” coincides with Cohen’s “monster-herdsman” enforcer in which Butler claims that “the law” “compels the shape and direction of sexuality through the instillation of fear.” Desire, as one desires or is desired, can be culturally taboo when acted upon, however, desire is only one of the signs of the monster. “The monster’s body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy.” Herman, now age thirty, had at age seven a physical relationship with five-year-old Myrtle in the back seat of the Silver Cloud.

“What did you play?” “Grown-up. [...] she’d read the map and watch the road signs for me, playing mommy and daddy. Then we’d get in the back seat and play mommy and daddy. [...] She’d show me hers and I’d show her mine.”

Soon afterwards Myrtle gets lost in the mountains and cliffs of Auto-Town and is later found dead under a Studebaker, “It mashed her bad.” Cohen’s “Thesis V: The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible” gives the reader a different scenario, one in which the Studebaker is a monster that kills Myrtle for straying from the path marked by Herman, the child patriarch. In essence, Myrtle “strayed” from more than the path and, thus, is killed because the monster is alive “to control the traffic of women [...] that keep[s]
a patriarchal society functional.” Because of her gender, it is Myrtle who is punished and not Herman. Although Herman vision is limited, he makes the connection, and has not strayed from cars since.

It is Myrtle’s demise that fuels Herman’s idea to make people think about their experience in cars. Herman’s “Car Display: Your History on Parade,” based upon his idea that “everything that’s happened in this goddam country in the last fifty years, […] has happened in, on, or around, with, or near a car.”41 The wife of a dead man named Fred comes to sit in the backseat of her husband smashed brand new Cadillac to mourn at the location of her loss. Also comes to Auto-town is the man whose son died in Viet Nam. He comes to see a 1949 De Soto’s backseat where his son was conceived on the very first date between he and his wife in his first car.42 Herman’s plan brings money to the family, but Easy Mack cannot stand the pain and emotion that fuels the wealth and puts a halt to the campaign. However, the outcome becomes evident that cars are killers, polluters, and are stronger than humans. Indeed, Crews’ novel could have easily been titled *Monster: A Novel*, or *Cyborg: A Monster*.43

After first eating a half pound of the Maverick’s front bumper, Herman feels himself dreaming with eyes open the vivid depictions of the transformation from human to human/car, meaning cyborg, rush by.

> He heard his blood roar in his ears, and he heard cars in the roar. He saw cars in his blood. They squealed and careened through long curving veinous highways. He took his hands off his stomach and held tightly to the bed. He had not expected this. […] [W]hen he was gasping and choking with cars, truly terrified that they would keep multiplying until the seams of his skin split and spilled his life, a solution-dreamlike and appropriate-came to him in his vision. He was a car. A superbly equipped car. He would escape because he was the thing that threatened himself, and he would not commit suicide.44

Herman’s transformation frightens him until realizing he’s become what he feared: A car. His fear has been a combination of attraction and repulsion. Herman’s transformation and his attraction and repulsion highlight Cohen’s “Thesis V: The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible” and “Thesis IV: Fear of the Monster Is Really a Kind of Desire” respectively.45 Besides providing Herman’s cyborg transformation testimony, the text also provides Herman’s consumption of the Maverick that is “linked to forbidden practices,” a coupling of consumption and desire that leads to a cyborg *jouissance*.46 The dispersal of the cars’ coding, like Kerouac’s example of “unfolding in him,” inundate Herman instantaneously, rendering Herman
cyborg not only because of the synergy between himself and the car, but the dispersal transfers data which assimilates Herman’s body. Moreover, Herman has become a cultural body an American cyborg, watched on TV from coast to coast and beamed over the satellite to Japan as well.

Before Herman began to eat the Ford Maverick, he realizes the connection between humans and cars, which began with Easy, his father, always telling them that their time would come and cars would “save them all.” [Easy] had said that America was a V-8 country, gas-driven and water-cooled, and that it belonged to men who belonged to cars.

Easy’s logic connotes that cars run and own America, meaning that machines have conducted a quiet coup d’état. Similarly, Haraway intones, “[o]ur machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert.” Moreover, cars mark the Mack family body that Herman tells his identical twin brother Mister how ingrained the mark has become. “Goddam cars are measuring me! Me! Don’t you see we’re on the wrong end? […] If there’s any measuring to be done I’ll do it.” It is Herman’s need of measuring that is interesting, as if the Rolls Royce speaks to him about comparisons of quality as a product. Herman feels himself as “a superbly equipped car,” hence during consumption or performance his measuring is complete and he is “at one with himself and the world.”

In addition, alone the particular line of thought that consumption equals performance becomes evident specifically when Easy Mack confronts Homer Edge, the Hotel Sherman’s owner and sponsor and promoter of Herman’s eating the Ford Maverick. Homer Edge cannot verbalize, “eat a car,” indeed, Edge describes Herman’s action to eat the Ford Maverick as “perform.” Consumption equals performance in this word exchange. Herman’s performance is a simulation of the car’s performance or consumption of the self. The cyborg’s performative repetition marks legitimacy and delegitimacy of “the realness norm which it is produced,” and its iterability constitutes a categorical crisis between the consumer and the consumed, blurring the boundary that creates “a new spiral.” Indeed, Car: A Novel, is about a man who tries to kill the monster by consuming one of them as they have consumed, but hybridity instead takes place and a new species is born. As the two are inseparable, eventually, Herman becomes Car as named in the title of the text.

Herman’s body is able to accept the Maverick without tearing of the glottis and the anus not only because of his greasing of both, but also because of his undying love for the vehicle. Unlike Mister’s body that bleeds badly from the whole process of passing half-ounce chunks of the car through his body after he and Herman switch places. The Maverick feels Herman’s connection, as both are placed on the second floor of the Hotel Sherman, the Maverick in the ballroom and Herman in the “Honeymoon Special.” At Herman’s request to be closer to the “brilliant car” as he calls the Maverick,
even Homer Edge asks Herman of his request, “you’re not getting freaky on me, are you, son?” Moreover, Herman’s adoration for the Maverick is more than a feeling; it is physical and when he has his first communion of metal, he reaches a state of jouissance.

Herman’s jouissance is with the car itself. He initiates a mating ritual between himself and the Maverick that starts with the gaze and moves forward with touch and eventually licks and even swallows the car. “[H]is cheek pressed tightly against the thing he loved. […] [H]is pink lolling tongue lapped out of his mouth and touched metal, touched the hood of the Maverick car.” However, with abundance of consumption and jouissance, Herman realizes that “[i]t’s poisoning me with pain” and that he “can’t stand that kind of pain from something I love.” And yet, though Herman is dying from consumption and jouissance, the Maverick waits for him to continue because the car itself enjoys the pleasure of being eaten.

The Maverick was waiting. The bumper was gone now. The grille had been eaten away. He had swallowed both fenders off the front and partly through the hood. The bowels and workings of the motor shone through the half-chewed-away hood.

Though jouissance is transitory for humans, it becomes obvious that for the Maverick that the duration of jouissance may be quite a larger period of time.

4. Conclusion.

In closing, Harry Crews’ CAR: A Novel depicts the monstrous merging of the human/car into a cyborg. CAR: A Novel is one text of a primary troika of texts that illustrates cyborg ontology, the other two being J. G. Ballard’s Crash, and Hunter S. Thompson’s Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. Secondary texts include E. L. Doctorow’s The Book of Daniel and Diane Johnson’s The Shadow Knows, all of which are from 1971-1974. The second wave of cyborg ontology consists of more seamless sources whose human/car cyborgs are mere textual passing that refuse to draw attention to the cyborg itself. A few examples are Bret Easton Ellis’s Less Than Zero, Mark Leyner’s Et Tu, Babe and T. Coraghessan Boyle’s The Tortilla Curtain. The integrated circuit modifies the human/car automaton actions that become a closed-loop-system, which allows data-flow through out the cybernetic system. The Maverick, as Herman has studied, has “[p]rinted circuits in instrument cluster” that indicates its ability for data flow. Moreover, the hybridity paradigm of human/car is not just a text, but also a cultural shift towards auto-centric.
The machine is seen as dominating the activities of human beings so that they are no longer agents who use tools to transform nature but figures which are used and transformed by the machine itself.64

The cyborg consumer, the car, is a fantastic monster and we are its thralls.

Notes
6 Kerouac, op. cit.
8 Sheller & Urry, p. 739.
12 J J Cohen, p. 6. “‘Monster theory’ must therefore concern itself with strings of cultural moments, connected by a logic that always threatens to shift.”
13 This is the third paper concerning the car/human relationship as cyborg that I’ve written. “Cyborg Ontology in Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas - On the Road to Consciousness: The Red Shark, The White Whale & Reading The Textual Body” asserts that Hunter S. Thompson’s text marks the shift of human/car relationship from monstrous to cyborg, “The ‘Optimized Lethality’ of American Car Culture: Hybridity and the Postmodern Text” asserts that the automobility of the human/car cyborg is a violent loci with three possible patterns of aggressive behavior, that is, within postmodern American fiction the human/car functions as transmitter/receiver engaging
monstrous action against other human/car cyborg monsters or the engaging interior action that rewrites the body.

14 Cohen, p. 3.
15 Haraway, p. 150.
16 Jameson, p. 35. Jameson states that Ernest Mandel “outlines” three steps of Capitalism based upon technology: “The fundamental revolutions in power technology - the technology of the production of motive machines by machines - thus appears as the determinant moment in revolutions of technology as a whole. Machine production of steam-driven motors since 1848; machine production of electric and combustion motors since the 90s of the 19th century; machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses since the 40s of the 20th century—these are the three general revolutions in technology engendered by the capitalist mode of production since the ‘original’ industrial revolution for the later 18th century.” (Mandel as qtd.)

19 Baudrillard, p. 81.
20 Cohen, p. 3. On morality, Cohen states in “Thesis IV: The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference” that one demonized with a “deviant morality” makes one a monster. This is only one example.
21 ibid, p. 3.
23 M Brottman, “‘The Last Stop of Desire’ Covent Garden and the Spatial Text of Consumerism”, Consumption Markets & Culture, vol. 1, no. 1, 1995, p. 61. Brottman states, “The shopping process can be described as a text of jouissance because it can be, for some, a passionate experience, an expressive act.”
26 Easy Mack is unable to stop a squeak in a brand new 1971 Cadillac and thus crushes the car out of wanting to maintain power and control. Junell drives a wrecker for Auto-Town and meets Joe her boyfriend/fiancé, an officer, at crashes where he feels her up in the back of his cruiser, eventually they consummate their relationship in the back of the Maverick in which they achieve jouissance by repeating all the parts that Herman will eat until they
scream together “BUMPER” and continue meeting for sex in the back of the car at night after Herman eats the car. Furthermore, they tried to have sex in a hotel room but were unable to proceed without being in a car; Mister’s job at Auto-Town is crushing cars and thus when he switches with Herman to keep their lucrative TV contract, the car begins to consume Mister from the inside out. Margo, the hotel whore, discusses the fullback “‘dragged me right up on top of that Vette and drove me. […] He didn’t get me, the Vette did,’” p. 367, 369.


28 Crews, pp. 334, 332.

29 Cohen, p 6. “[T]he monster notoriously appears at times of crisis as a kind of third term that problematizes the clash of extremes” as a “harbinger of the category crisis nature/machine in which raw natural resources such as metals, gasoline and excrement are supper saturating the natural landscape to create a machine landscape.


32 Crews, p. 339.

33 ibid., p. 436.


35 Cohen, pp. 13, 16.

36 Butler, p. 105.

37 Cohen, p. 3.

38 Crews, p. 413.

39 ibid., p. 414.

40 Cohen, p13.

41 Crews, p. 338.

42 Ibid., pp. 335, 337. What is also rather interesting that the man states about his obsession with the De Soto is much like Crews’ himself as documented in his essay “The Car.” From Car: A Novel, the man says, it “had twenty-three coats of paint on her. Put them on myself. And every coat buffed-hand-buffed-before the next coat was put on,” p. 337. From “The Car” Crews states, “It had twenty-seven coats of paint, each coat laboriously hand-rubbed,” p. 328.

43 Crews’ text could have easily been named either, America: A Car or America: A Monster. There is enough textual evidence to support any of the four renamings I’ve presented. And yet, that would be another paper to write.
The Voracious Monster

44 Crews, pp. 381-382.
45 Cohen, pp. 13, 16-17.
46 Haraway, p. 150. In "A Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway states that cyborgs are "couplings between organism and machine, each conceived as coded devices, in an intimacy and with a power that was not generated in the history of sexuality."
47 Gray & Mentor, pp. 222-223; Haraway, pp. 164-165.
48 Cohen, p. 3.
49 Crews, p. 386.
50 ibid., p 386.
51 Haraway, p. 152.
52 Crews, p. 364.
53 ibid., p. 381.
54 ibid., p. 345.
55 Butler, p. 130. Butler defines realness as “the ability to compel belief, to produce the naturalized effect. This effect is itself the result of an embodiment of norms, a reiteration of norms, an impersonation of a racial and class norm, a norm which is at once a figure, a figure of a body, which is no particular body, but a morphological ideal that remains the standard which regulates the performance, but which no performance fully approximates,” p. 129. In other words, “realness” concerning cars is based on body of the car, not a particular make or model, but as Crews title suggests: Car.
56 Cohen, p. 7.
57 Crews, pp. 421, 433.
58 ibid., p. 362.
59 ibid., p. 361.
60 ibid., p. 364.
61 ibid., pp. 417, 424.
62 ibid., pp. 414-415.
63 ibid., p. 379.
64 Jancovich, p. 6.

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"a white illusion of a man": Snowman, Survival and Speculation in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*

Roger Davis

Abstract

The protagonist of Margaret Atwood’s 2003 dystopian novel, *Oryx and Crake*, calls himself Snowman after the Abominable Snowman. An isolated survivor of the destruction of humanity, Snowman is Atwood’s vehicle to speculate on the future of humanity given the current debates about potential catastrophes: Environmental degradation, unchecked scientific progress, rampant consumerism, human exploitation. Contextualized within Atwood’s longstanding interest in survival as a Canadian master narrative and within the divided critical debate about the potential hope of the novel, this paper will read Snowman as a site of negotiation between several contradictions arising from European colonial history and the history of late modernity. Representatively, Snowman invokes the purity of whiteness and the optimism of science and progress of European Enlightenment, yet he simultaneously suffers bodily failure as he starves and suffers attacks from creatures and disease in the post-apocalyptic world. He represents the possibility of leading humanity into an altered but potentially better existence while he simultaneously resents and fails to take responsibility for his situation and actions: an almost willful neglect of power.

Keywords

whiteness, dystopia, Canadian Literature, speculation, survival

Margaret Atwood is arguably Canada's most significant literary export. Her 2003 dystopian novel, *Oryx and Crake*, addresses the potential for environmental and technological catastrophes in the near future; consequently, its publication spawned much critical debate, both popular and academic. The novel ends with the main character forced to make a choice about his future interactions with other survivors of a global catastrophe. The open-ended conclusion has led to considerable critical speculation about the future possibilities that this novel suggests. The critical reception is varied about whether or not Atwood sees hope for humanity's future. Missing from the critical discussion of the novel is a sustained consideration of the novel's central character and apparently sole survivor of humanity: Snowman. This paper will argue that, while Snowman may generate some sympathy from the reader, his unexamined and largely unspoken whiteness - and by extension some of the critical readings of Snowman - risks further colonization of a variety of discursive arenas: Political, racial, gendered, national, globalised.
For the purposes of time, I will give a very brief and selective summary of the novel. The novel opens with Snowman waking up in his new reality: A post-apocalyptic world where his childhood best friend, Crake, has unleashed an apparently sexual-enhancement pharmaceutical upon the world that has had the real effect of destroying humanity. Snowman appears to be the only survivor. As a character, Crake represents the mad scientist who ostensibly works for the betterment of humanity but ultimately leads to its destruction. His great project was to genetically engineer a new race of green-eyed humanoids called Crakers who have been altered to eliminate the undesirable qualities of humans: racism, for example, has been edited out. Moreover, they can exist in the environmentally degraded ecosystem created by human industrialization. Snowman is ultimately left to shepherd the Crakers into the new post-human, post-apocalyptic world. The last chapter of the novel opens with almost exactly the same wording as the first chapter, suggesting a narrative circularity, and the closing pages see Snowman discovering three other survivors, which begs the question of whether he will re-enter the human community or remain an isolated outsider.

In the pre-apocalyptic scenes of the novel, Snowman is named Jimmy, and it is only after humanity's destruction that he selects his new moniker. He names himself after the

Abominable Snowman - existing and not existing, flickering at the edges of blizzards, apelike man or manlike ape, stealthy, elusive, known only through rumours and through its backward-pointing footprints.¹

In most of its mythical formulations, the abominable snowman is a hybrid between human and animal, and it raises questions or anxieties about the purity of the human and whether or not there is evidence of a more direct link between the human and the animal, which resonates with the potential for genetic engineering to alter humanity's constitution. Deliberation upon the etymology of abominable reveals important links to the dystopian and speculative genres. Abominable comes from Latin and Old French and means "bad omen." In English, however, an alternate spelling occurred from the 14th through 17th centuries: Abhominable (with an h), and it was explained as "away from man" or "inhuman."² Thus, abominable means both "bad omen" and "bad man" or "bad (for) man." In this misspelling, the temporally prophetic quality of the omen acquires corporeality and humanity or, one could suggest, masculinity (depending on how we want to read or translate homme). Therefore, the white body of Snowman embodies the abomination of humanity, which implies that he is a manifestation of the negative drifting away from humanity. Atwood's choice of a white body to represent the Last
Man as a representative for humanity opens a critique of whiteness within technological, industrial and colonial projects in the Western world.

Of genetic engineering, Atwood, in an interview, has commented about gene splicing: "If you're going to do it on humans, what you have to ask yourself is, do you want the human race to remain human?" The novel questions definitions of the human and whether or not we can identify fundamental human traits: biological or cultural. Atwood's cautionary desire to "remain human" implies that she imagines some kind of essence to humanity, and the anxiety to change or alter the basic genetic pattern may be abominable. While the category of human is different from other categories such as race or gender, her caution may be extended to thinking about other forms of hybridity, an obvious example appearing in the historical and continuing anxieties surrounding inter-racial relationships. As the novel itself asks, "Why hyphenate, why parenthesize, unless absolutely necessary?" The novel questions what constitutes the "absolutely necessary." If Snowman is the last hope for humanity, we must similarly ask which qualities we might wish to retain, recuperate or possibly excise from his character. However, such questions must be cautious against unspoken assumptions within current thinking, in this case Snowman's whiteness or more general problems with issues of eugenics, segregation or other forms of oppression. Similarly, Snowman must not become synonymous with the human. Yet, the linguistic or rhetorical focus of the question - "hyphenate [...] parenthesize" - suggests that narrative is essential to the debate, thus reinforcing the novel's critique of the degradation of the humanities within an increasingly technocratic world.

Jimmy's transformation into Snowman is thoroughly grounded in whiteness. He presents some problems for his own historical analysis since he wishes to erase history: "He needed to forget the past - the distant past, the immediate past, the past in any form. He needed to exist only in the present, without guilt, without expectation. As the Crakers did. Perhaps a different name would do that for him." Snowman's formative moment of naming occurs with a denial of history and an avoidance of guilt. True to his name, he desires a whitewash of history, to bury history's wrongs and his wrongs under the pure, driven snow. Stated elsewhere, he wants to "turn all memory to white noise." These images of whiteness - "white noise," white snow, the white-out of blizzards, white man - speak to a colonial history in the West, specifically Canada. Jimmy's identity shift into Snowman represents a willed ignorance of these issues. In this regard, Snowman becomes a representative of a particular brand of Canadian identity, namely one that represes the colonial oppression of Canadian history and absolves itself of the responsibilities for such wrongdoings. Thus, Snowman's own survival rests on his ability to deny his association with history. He reinforces a predominantly white understanding of Canada, one associated mostly with
divisions between white concerns such as French-English relations rather than racialized concerns with, say, aboriginal issues. White is the unspoken norm that cannot or should not be questioned and challenged.

As David S. Owen observes, "whiteness defines the normal functioning of modern social systems[...]. When whiteness is normalized and overt forms of racial prejudice and discrimination are seen as extreme and rare, whiteness functions behind the scenes, so to speak, to shape the world to the advantage of those racialized as white."7

Jimmy's transformation into Snowman stems from his own feelings of inadequacy and helplessness in light of the corporate, scientific and genius world of Crake. Feeling that he has to measure up, Jimmy asks, "But measure up to what? There was never any standard; or there was one, but it was so cloudy and immense that nobody could see it, especially Jimmy."8 Such is the duality of whiteness: It is not visible, at least not to most white people, but it is there as a standard against which everything is measured. The narrative further states, "there's nobody to measure himself by. He's lost in the fog. No benchmarks."9 Like a fog, whiteness envelops everything and pervades the social system as an unacknowledged standard. Snowman's encounter with a toothpaste slogan thematizes whiteness: "For a Whiter Smile, he reads. Fine with him, he needs a whiter smile, though he can't at the moment think what for."10 Again, the imperative is to be white, yet the reasoning is unclear. It is not surprising, then, that Jimmy's response to his feelings of inadequacy is to become more white, to transform into Snowman. But, to reiterate, the transformation is one of denial and repression.

Snowman is a conflicted character. On the one hand, he enjoys the privileges of belonging to the dominant white, wealthy class. On the other hand, he fails to embody the ideal of that system. He feels powerless within his own power, and, to some extent, he feels victimized. For example, when Oryx asks him to take care of the Crakers should anything bad happen in the future, a reluctant Jimmy responds, "Okay then. Cross my heart and hope to die. Happy now?" It didn't cost him anything, it was all purely theoretical."11 He denies both history and the future, and he reduces any concerns to pure speculation, thereby eliminating any material history or responsibility to that history. Such contradictions are consistent with a particular Canadian identity, as identified by Erin Manning in the context of whiteness: "This version of Canadian history emphasizes the narrative of Canada as a generous land open to immigrants (where the other is welcome on our soil)."12 In other words, Canada imagines itself to be a multicultural community, yet multiculturalism
is born from white dominance in Canada and dictates certain social codes or customs grounded in the history of whiteness. The white settler history has normalized itself as the original history of Canada rather than as a colonial power conquering the land. Similarly, Jimmy is reluctantly willing to accept the Crakers, yet he resents their presence, all the while ignoring his historical displacement of aboriginal culture or other forms of exploitation that contribute to his privilege as a white person. The Crakers are a burdensome byproduct from Crake's technocratic world that Jimmy begrudgingly bears.

We can partially explain the varied critical response in terms of Snowman's whiteness. A brief survey of analyses of the novel reveals that some critics view Snowman positively. Of the positive readings of Snowman, Coral Ann Howells calls him "a morally responsible man and the novel's unlikely hero, who regards the prospect of entering again into human relationships with a kind of fearful excitement." Danette DiMarco argues that the novel's ending removes "the oppressive and degenerative nature of man-made barricades, divisions, separations, and enclosures," and she optimistically hopes that "Just because Snowman questions whether he should risk entering a community does not mean he will not." Other critics read him positively yet qualify the overall project of the novel. For example, Helen E. Mundler argues that "Jimmy/Snowman's mission is the reinscription of the creative subject, after Crake has attempted its wholesale removal." She also argues that the potential weakness of the novel may be its attempt to universalize the human experience beyond individual sites of action and interaction, which is consistent with the problem of a uniform, unspoken norm of whiteness.

Of less generous readings of Snowman, J. Brooks Bouson reads him as "a kind of living human joke trapped" in one of Crake's experiments and interprets the ending as "deliberately ambiguous." Earl G. Ingersoll notes that "Snowman is disabled from being an 'I' in this novel," and "He is a castaway in a culturally vacant cosmos, with no hope that his message-in-a-bottle could ever find a reader." Similarly to Bouson, Ingersoll claims that the "novel seems in the end not quite sure how to end and what kind of future it wants to project." Stephen Dunning attempts to turn around the novel's bleak outlook: "while Oryx and Crake may not offer much by way of substantial hope, it stands as a clear warning of what we must hope to avoid."

Thus, on the one hand, we have optimism for Snowman's ability to reconstruct the human; on the other hand, Snowman is likely doomed to live out his days in suffering as the last witness to humanity or to end humanity in an act of violence. Of concern to all readings is Snowman's responsibility to his situation: Is he a victim of circumstance or architect of his own downfall?
In "Home and Nation in Margaret Atwood's Later Fiction," Eleonora Rao correctly identifies Snowman's self-serving denial of his culpability and his attempt to deal with it: "Non-acting has, of course, its consequences […]. [A]t best, he can repress memory, but it has the uncanny habit of returning." 23 In characterizing Snowman, Rao repeatedly uses three descriptors: "The ultimate outcast," "like a foreigner," and "like an exile." 24 While it is understandable how Rao contextualizes Snowman as an outcast and exile from humanity who experiences a strange new world like a foreigner, the larger argument places Snowman in the position of the outsider and possibly the oppressed. Snowman's plight is not a result of external oppression like colonial or racial histories. Rather, his plight is arguably largely born of his own ignorance, apathy and misogyny. In fact, it is difficult to find qualities in Jimmy's life that would constitute social disadvantage. True, he comes from a broken family, yet Crake and others experience similar situations. Perhaps his only disadvantage is his designation as a "word" person rather than a "number" person, respectively the division between the humanities and sciences in the novel's intellectual hierarchy.

Through her use of simile, Rao potentially risks substituting or equating Snowman's situation with the situations of other oppressed groups. This is one of the mechanisms associated with whiteness. As Owen states, "One of the more significant features of whiteness is its hegemonic colonization of all aspects of the social world," 25 in this case the role of victim. On this reading, Snowman colonizes the language and position of the oppressed and employs the discourses to explain himself. Of his own ignorance, he states,

> How could I have missed it? Snowman thinks. What he was telling me. How could I have been so stupid?
> No, not stupid. He can't describe himself, the way he'd been. Not unmarked - events had marked him, he'd had his own scars, his dark emotions. Ignorant, perhaps. Unformed, inchoate.
> There had been something willed about it though, his ignorance. Or not willed, exactly: structured. He'd grown up in walled spaces, and then he had become one. He had shut things out.

In this reflective moment, Snowman contemplates his previous life as Jimmy and his walled, white life that effectively shuts out every form of difference. Scars mark the white body, and emotions are "dark" or non-white: These are traces of a lived life that stick out from the imaginary, pristine white body.
and psyche. At this point, Snowman partially recognizes his own whiteness, yet such a recognition does not necessarily absolve him of responsibility.

Crake's view of the future is one without race, yet his very desire is born of whiteness. He attempts to eliminate race from the Crakers: "For instance, racism […] had been eliminated in the model group, merely by switching the bonding mechanism: the Paradise people [or Crakers] simply did not register skin colour." Crake's vision (literally and imaginatively) for the green-eyed Crakers is one of colour blindness, yet this vision effectively ignores or effaces difference. Moreover, Atwood subtly undermines Crake's idealism for colour blindness when she reveals that Oryx, who is initially charged with teaching the Crakers, must wear "luminous-green gel contact lenses [because] the Crakers would have found her brown eyes off-putting." While the Crakers may not register skin colour, they do register eye colour; therefore, the negative recognition of difference appears an easy step towards the very oppressive structures and attitudes Crake is trying to eliminate. Thus, while elsewhere in the novel Atwood claims that dreaming and singing are hardwired into humanity, she also hardwires in negative qualities of discrimination or prejudice.

Snowman demonstrates a similar racial awareness when he encounters the three other humans at the end of the novel: He describes them as "Two men, one brown, one white, a tea-coloured woman." He immediately classifies them in terms of gender and skin colour; moreover, he is the observer who is able to make decisions. He is in a position of relative power and unthreatened by the others' lack of knowledge of his presence. In terms of gender, Danette DiMarco reads the woman in specifically sexual terms: "It is important to remember that Jimmy has not been with a woman in quite a while." Not only is the woman ambiguously racialized as "tea-coloured," but also Jimmy's past sexual exploits immediately position the woman as object of desire. She is further degraded as damaged by time and history: Snowman says, "Must have been pretty once, before she lost all that weight; now she's stringy, her hair parched, broom-straw." While DiMarco leaves open the possibility for Snowman to build community, his personal tendencies may potentially write a different future history.

Perhaps Snowman's most significant insight comes when he questions his new identity:

Maybe he's not the Abominable Snowman after all. Maybe he's the other kind of snowman, the grinning dope set up as a joke and pushed down as an entertainment, his pebble smile and carrot nose an invitation to mockery and abuse. Maybe that's
“a white illusion of a man”

The "white illusion of a man" that Snowman identifies is the embodiment of European colonialism as manifested in exercises of consumption, expansion and oppression. Thus, the novel signals the fleeting nature of empire and critiques the bad omen of the embodiment of technological, masculine and colonial practices as the unspoken and white ideals of progress. Snowman's brief but incomplete grasping of his role in the historical processes will hopefully create a future different from a history where "Human society…[is] a sort of monster […]. It never learned, it made the same cretinous mistakes over and over." 33

Notes

1 M Atwood, Oryx and Crake, Seal, Ontario, Canada, 2003, p. 10.
4 Atwood, p. 85.
5 ibid., p. 414-415.
6 ibid., p. 401.
8 Atwood, p. 59.
9 ibid., p. 287.
10 ibid., p. 278.
11 ibid., p. 387.
15 ibid., p. 193.
17 ibid., p. 98.
20 ibid., p. 171.
21 ibid., p. 172.
24 ibid., p. 108-09.
25 Owen, p. 213.
26 Atwood, p. 224.
27 ibid., p. 367.
28 ibid., p. 373.
29 ibid., p. 441.
30 DiMarco, p. 193.
31 Atwood, p. 442.
32 ibid., p. 271
33 ibid., p. 293.

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“a white illusion of a man”

Literary Monsters: Gender, Genius, and Writing in Diderot’s On Women and Shelley’s Frankenstein

Cecilia A. Feilla

Abstract
Denis Diderot’s essay On Women is ostensibly a review of Antoine Leonard Thomas’s Dissertation on Women and, thus, an occasion for his own meditations on the nature of women. But under Diderot’s pen, the text also becomes a complex exercise in style as well as a study of the nature of genius. Genius in men is represented through Diderot’s equation of the mastery of language (style) with the mastery of women (sex). This gendered notion of genius - based upon a conflation of the act of sex and the act of writing - posits the female body as the uncanny site of both man’s mastery and the limits of his mastery, as the natural and the unnatural, the familiar and the absolute other. Haunted by visions of women in “hideous” and “disfigured” states of transport (in moments of inspiration, orgasm, or hysteria), Diderot’s text defines genius in women as something monstrous, outside and at the limits of the human. This paper explores Diderot’s notion of disfigurement in particular and what it can add to our understanding of the concepts of the monstrous and of genius in the late eighteenth century. Key to Diderot’s notion of monstrosity, for example, is the juxtaposition of contraries. I then turn to a discussion of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and her account of the novel's origin in her preface in order to argue that Diderot's image of monstrous female genius provides a useful framework for elucidating issues of genius, disfigurement, and writing raised in and by Mary Shelley's writing.

Man perhaps is the monster of woman; woman of man. –Denis Diderot

This paper concerns the way in which “genius” is constructed along gender lines at the moment it takes its modern form as a natural gift in the late eighteenth century, and how the “inspiration,” “prophecy,” and “possession” that characterize Romantic genius take on a negative valence when applied to women writers, often emblematized as sibylline and read as signs of hysteria and monstrosity. More specifically, I focus on the transformation in the first half of the nineteenth century in the way female authorship is represented, from that of a passive receptacle of divine speech to an active owner of her creative production. For example, this change is evident in the depiction of the French novelist Germaine de Staël as a possessed “priestess of Apollo” at the end of the eighteenth century and Charlotte Brontë’s description of her sister Emily, fifty years later, as an
author who “possesses the creative gift.” Mary Shelley, I will show, played a key part in this transformation. Her novel, *Frankenstein*, rewrites the notion of possession - in terms of both ownership and haunting - in important ways that negotiate a new place for women and genius in the novel. In her 1831 preface to *Frankenstein*, she engages the inherited Enlightenment discourse of genius, not by rejecting or subverting it, but rather by literalizing its dominant metaphors of female creativity and writing as monstrous. I will compare Mary Shelley’s novel and preface to Denis Diderot’s short text “On Women,” which reflects the dominant discourse regarding women’s creativity and potential for genius, in order to show the way in which Mary’s choices and strategies are informed by a keen awareness of herself in relation to social and literary expectations based on gender. This paper is thus not about monsters in writing so much as about certain kinds of writing as monstrous.

By the time Mary was writing, the notion of genius had taken its modern introjected form as a part of psychology. Until the mid-eighteenth century, genius retained its Roman heritage and meaning as transcendent figures (spirit or mind) that all individuals have. In the 1750s, however, theoretical debate began to reflect a belief that the inspired person does not need to have a genius, but rather *has genius* or *is a genius*. Mythical ideas of genius as the mediators between gods and men, *daimon*, began to cede to a new focus on original creation. Ken Frieden, in his book *Genius and Monologue*, maintains that the ancient myths did not disappear but were turned inward, an internalization evident in eighteenth-century expressions like Edward Young’s description of genius as “that god within.” The trope and figure of genius thus became, according to Frieden, a category of modern psychology.

Frieden does not, however, address the gendered nature of this transformational moment in the conceptualization of genius. What I find interesting is that the figure most associated with women writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is the sibyl or prophetess. This identification of women writers with the figure of the sibyl is troubling since it displaces female agency and ownership of her creative production by embracing notions of divine possession. The discursive mark of this psychological internalization of the sibyl is that of inspired or possessed speech. Leading women writers in fact identified themselves with the figure of the sibyl, and used it to describe others: for example, Germaine de Staël posed for a portrait in the guise of “Domenicho’s Sibyl” like her character Corinne; Charlotte Brontë described the great actress Vashti (based on the French stage siren, Rachel Félix) in *Villette* as possessed by “Pythian inspiration” and “prophet-virtue”; and George Eliot was described by her friend F.W.H. Myers and by a contemporary reviewer as “the sibyl of Mercia.”
In order to understand the links in Mary Shelley’s writing between possession, genius, and the monstrous, it will be necessary first to explore the origins of the trope of female genius in the eighteenth century. Denis Diderot’s essay, “On Women (Sur les femmes),” provides a particularly relevant and useful text in this regard. Diderot wrote the essay in response to another treatise on women by his friend, l’Abbe Antoine-Léonard Thomas: *Essai sur le caract è re, les moeurs et l’esprit des femmes*. Diderot does not offer a systematic response to Thomas, rather his text is a complex and playful meditation on the “nature” of women that is also a reflection on writing and the exercise of style. From the first line, Diderot establishes his authority on the subject of women by invoking his carnal knowledge of them; he then links this heterosexual activity with having style. Thomas, he makes clear, lacks authority and, worse, lacks style because as an abbot he is celibate (d’Alembert cannot write, he suggests later in the essay, because he is homosexual). Social and sexual intercourse with women is what gives men their style. As the naturalist Georges Buffon wrote, “Le style est l’homme même (style is the man).” Man distinguishes himself through his style in writing, and the subject fashioning this style is woman.

Thomas doesn’t say a word about the benefits of interaction with women for a man of letters. He’s an ingrate […]. They accustom us to giving charm and clarity to the driest and thorniest matters. We address our speech to them constantly; we want to be heard, fear to tire or bore them, and thereby develop a particular facility for expression that passes from conversation into style.

Diderot slyly performs a linking of style, authority, and seduction that manages to unite the rhetoric of possessing women sexually with the (male) author’s possession of style. The female body, in other words, is the medium through which man achieves his “voice” as he moves easily from charming conversation into stylish, and therefore manly, writing. Thomas, on the other hand, he writes, “wanted his book to be without a sex. And unfortunately he has succeeded too well. It is a hermaphrodite.” Diderot rejects the hybrid identity of the hermaphrodite book to assert a clearly male and heterosexual notion of writing that allies women with ornamental, conversational, and figurative language over which the male writer must prove his mastery. (The personification of poetic language as a woman whom the poet masters physically and sexually is a common conceit found in eighteenth-century poetry, by Pope and Swift among others).

If women provide charm, clarity, and ease to men’s writing, what do women bring to their own writing? Can the female body and style pass into writing, or are women style without substance, signs that say nothing (which
is one possible interpretation of Diderot)? Or is the only writing available to them the hermaphroditic or homosexual writing Diderot rejects in men?

Diderot allows for a circumscribed place for female writing and female genius in his essay. It comes, not from interaction with the opposite (or the same) sex, but rather her style and inspiration comes from commerce with spirits animal or divine. She does not possess others and thus style, she is rather possessed - by lovers, gods, or natural powers. Not surprisingly, her creativity is described in terms of classical references to ancient sibyls and seers. “Never has a man sat, at Delphi, on the sacred tripod,” Diderot writes. “The role of pythia only becomes a woman.” In a state of exaltation and agitation she “find[s] the true discourse.” Speech is from her body but is not her own. It flows without conscience, without reason, and is allied with the speech of lunatics, described by Diderot in *Rameau’s Nephew* as follows: “If we say something good, it is like fools or the inspired, by chance.” Like the ancients, Diderot locates the capacity to receive divination in the womb, the uterus. “Woman has inside her an organ, subject to terrible spasms, which rules her and rouses in her phantoms of every sort […]. All her extraordinary ideas spring from this organ unique to her sex.” The womb is the source of creation (reproductive and poetic) in women. Because it is unique to her, it allows women a capacity for insight unavailable to men, yet this capacity is also marked by malady: hysteria. Diderot identifies the link explicitly when he asserts, “Nothing is more closely related to hysteria than ecstasy, visions, prophecy, exaltation, and fiery poetry.”

It is precisely notions of “prophecy,” “inspiration,” and “possession” that would be hailed as the hallmarks of the male Romantic genius at the end of the eighteenth century. Christine Battersby, in her book *Gender and Genius*, has shown the ways in which the early nineteenth-century man of genius appropriates qualities associated with the feminine, further pushing women outside the bounds of genius. The same qualities in women meanwhile were equated with hysteria. Diderot admits a certain beauty and originality in women’s poetic creations, and concedes that “when women have genius, I think their brand is more original than our own.” But the possessed state in which she writes propels her outside of herself and outside of the human, as beast or angel, grotesque or sublime. In such states, she is “infernal or divine […] carrying within her the fury of a wild beast.” She transgresses the borders of the rational and the human as either lack or excess, providing the bookends of the human (male) and of reason. The womb does not create children, rather it creates phantoms which haunt and inhabit her, like the wandering womb of hysteria; a notion which recalls Mary Shelley’s description of the origins of her novel as, “I could not so easily get rid of my phantom, still it haunted me.” Poetic creation is thus seen as a perversion of the womb’s natural procreative function.
The female body thus figures as the uncanny site of both man’s mystery and the limits of his mastery, as the knowable and the absolute other, as the natural and the supernatural or unnatural. Diderot’s text is itself haunted by visions of women in “hideous” and “disfigured” states of transport - in moments of poetic inspiration and production, orgasm, or hysteria. It defines genius in women as something monstrous, outside and at the limits of the human and knowable. He writes, “the contrast between the violence of their gesture and the sweetness of their features renders them hideous” and continues, “More civilized than us externally, they have stayed simple savages within.” It is the contrast between the human and civilized exterior with an animal and savage (or divine) interior that “makes [him] shudder.” The anxious focus on the contrast between interior and exterior, spirit and body, human and animal of the inspired woman is echoed in the image proliferated of Mary Shelley’s mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, as a “hyena in petticoats.” The disturbing figure of the female author who defies human and gender categories to become a monster hybrid can also be discerned in the perennial question posed to Mary Shelley, and which she seeks to answer in her preface to *Frankenstein*, “How I, then a young girl, came to think of, and dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?” Indeed, the contrast of inside and outside is precisely what her novel dramatizes as it complicates the question of who and what is a monster.

I am not suggesting any direct connection or influence from Diderot to Shelley; rather, Diderot’s text serves to map in brief the pervasive ideas that circumscribed women’s potential for writing within their “natural” sex roles as procreative mothers. Women who wrote were considered monstrous because unnatural: Their wombs produced phantasms not children. Mary makes the connection between procreation and literary creation clear in referring to her book as her “hideous progeny” and “offspring” as well as in the story’s central act of Victor’s monstrous birth of the creature. The monster provides a figure of the monstrous progeny her imagination produces (and here we might recall Marie Helene Huet’s discussion of *Frankenstein* in the context of the maternal imagination as a cause of monstrosity in offspring). Battersby notes the way in which the early nineteenth century saw the woman writer, because of the link of creativity and hysteria, as only able to experience “those phantasms created by her own self, not the universal Truths of the mad male visionaries.” Women’s wombs made them liable to emotions and fantasies of a delusory type, which meant that they invented fictions instead of perceiving truths. Thus women had access only to their own individual psychologies, and not to universal truths.

In her preface, however, Mary complicates this easy dismissal of the female as particular. Her account of the monster’s, and thus the novel’s, origins is important here. She writes,
my imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind. I saw with shut eyes, but acute mental vision... the idea so possessed my mind.

It does not possess her body, but her mind. It is the production of her own faculty of imagination that possesses her, a gift, as she says, allowing her to see clearly (not physically but with insight). She is not the passive medium of inspired speech but a self-possessed and perceiving eye/I which records what it perceives in a separate act of writing. Inspiration and creation are not simultaneous, as with the sibyl or prophetess. The creature is moreover described throughout the novel as a daemon, a genius which haunts her and which is the source of her writing. This monster and daemon is both a hideous figment of her imagination and the Romantic figure for the mediator between the poet and the Truth, the human and divine realms (a figure her husband invokes often in his poetry). Blurring the boundary between particular and universal, female and male, human and monster, good writing and bad, Mary’s preface and novel - through the figure of the monster serves to question the prevailing gender and value systems. Indeed, monstrosity and the monstrous pervade her text in a way that shows it to be not just an effect of the sphere of women, but of the human.

Much more could be said here about the monster as daimon and mirror of female writing, and of Victor as the “author” of his monstrous and haunting creation. But for the sake of time, I would like to conclude by addressing the introduction Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote, in Mary’s persona, to the first edition of the book in 1818, and Mary’s response to it in her own preface to the re-edition of 1831.

In the “Author’s Introduction,” Percy attempts to gloss over the origins of the story, and particularly the gothic genre it adopts from the beginning. He starts by appealing to the truth of the novel’s central action - the animation of dead matter - in terms of scientific possibility, distancing it from the “disadvantages of a mere tale of spectres or enchantment” or “series of supernatural terrors.” He then inscribes the novel within a male literary tradition of epic and dramatic poetry from Homer and the Greek tragedians through Shakespeare and Milton, apologizing for the prose by claiming that some novelists, like this one, can turn prose into “the highest specimens of poetry” (novels, after all, were what women wrote and read). In effect, he tries to de-sex the book, or, as Diderot did with Thomas’s essay, he tries to turn Mary’s hermaphroditic text into a male one.

Mary’s preface, on the other hand, does not mention the scientific merit or viability of the novel nor does it allude to her book’s place within literary history or of the author’s place among a cast of literary luminaries.
Rather, Mary discusses the novel’s origin and purpose as a ghost story. She embraces the gothic genre of her work and, though acknowledging Percy’s influence, finally claims ownership of her novel. Where Diderot claimed women are always possessed—by lovers, or natural or supernatural powers—Mary Shelley presents the woman writer as self-possessed. She undermines the essentializing discourse of the Enlightenment as well as her husband’s attempt to sex (or de-sex) her writing, and opens a way for an understanding and acceptance of female writing and female genius not limited to, but also not denying, the monstrous female body. Mary makes literal the pervasive horror of the creative/procreative female body in the dominant discourse regarding women writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Rather than imitating or rejecting men’s writing, she accepts her position, her text, and her creature as monsters, and thus founds a place for women’s writing in the liminal space of the monstrous. Like a Romantic daemon, the monster mediates between human and divine worlds, and in the case of Frankenstein, opens a breach in the canon of literature through which the monsters were let in.

Notes
1 As quoted in M C Vallois, Fictions féminines: Mme de Staël et les voix de la Sibylle, Anma Libri, Saratoga, 1987, p. 4.
3 K. Frieden, p. 66.
6 These are not real jabs at his close friends, Thomas and d’Alembert, so much as witticisms on Diderot’s part that demonstrate and perform the style he claims they lack.
8 D Diderot, Oeuvres complètes, vol. 2, J Assézat (ed.), Garnier frères, Paris, 1875, pp. 261-62. All translations from the French are mine unless otherwise noted.
9 ibid., p. 251.
10 ibid., pp. 252-53.
11 ibid., p. 253.
13 Edward Bevan explains: “The principal material means by which the oracular ecstasy at Delphi was believed by the Greeks to be induced was a kind of gas or vapour that, it was asserted, rose from a fissure in the ground beneath the Pythia and entered her womb.” E Bevan, Sibyls and Seers: A
14 ibid., p. 255.
15 ibid., p. 255.
17 Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, p. 256.
18 ibid., p. 256.
20 op. cit., p. 253.
21 M Shelley, p. 9.
23 Battersby, p. 33.
24 M. Shelley, p. 9.
25 In the Greek context, Hesiodic daimones are essentially spirits mediating between gods and men. Mary Shelley uses the Latin spelling, daemon, when referring to the creature in her novel, although in many editions it has been changed to “demon.” She retains the ancient spelling to indicate the creature’s role as mediator between human and divine realms.

Bibliography

PART 2

Monstrous Performances
Jumping, Yelling and Screaming: The Spooky Art of John Carpenter

José Gabriel Ferreras Rodríguez
Juan Carlos Martínez Rodríguez

Abstract
Horror films are nearly as old as film itself. With the arrival of the motion picture industry, the first horror movies were brought to the screen. Since those very early days, filmmakers have been trying to improve and polish their filming techniques for better thrilling, creepy and spine-chilling effects on the viewer. In fact, one of the main goals of the horror genre lies in fright-giving. However, there has been a huge shift in the mechanisms used for this purpose since the beginning of film. Currently one of the genre’s most influential figures is the American director John Carpenter. Having produced some of the latest, most memorable classics in the field, and with a long-lasting career going back to the 1970s, Carpenter is regarded today as one of the very few filmmakers who has achieved a certain renown amongst critics outside the horror genre. He excels other horror directors when it comes to scare the devil out of the audience - which places him among the first-line heirs of Alfred Hitchcock, arguably the master of this art. He has said with remarkable pride: “People yelling and screaming and jumping. That's what it's all about, man: Throw that popcorn in the air and let rip a scream!” In the present paper, we have focused on some of his thriller hits (such as Halloween, The Fog or The Thing) so as to identify and study some of his filming techniques to manage tension and suspense and how he eventually gets the audience to scream. We find out that he uses certain principles and a certain film-making philosophy when searching for a specific effect. It’s not that a magic set of rules ensures success, but there is a certain pattern that is common to most scenes.

Keywords
Horror, Film, Carpenter, Genre, Filming Techniques, Scares.

Horror films are nearly as old as film itself. With the arrival of the motion picture industry, the first horror movies were brought to the screen. Since those very early days, filmmakers have been trying to improve and polish their filming techniques for better thrilling, creepy and spine-chilling effects on the viewer. In fact, one of the main goals of the horror genre lies in fright-giving. However, there has been a huge shift in the mechanisms and
tools used for this purpose since the beginning of film. Currently, one of the
drama’s most influential figures is the American director John Carpenter.¹
Having produced some of the latest, most memorable classics, and with a
long-lasting career going back to the 1970s, Carpenter has become one of the
most accomplished and outstanding figures of this genre. Aside from Alfred
Hitchcock, he is regarded as one of the very few filmmakers who has
achieved a certain renown amongst reviewers and critics outside the horror
genre. He excels other horror directors when it comes to scare the devil out
of the audience - which places him among the first-line heirs of Hitchcock
himself, arguably the master of this art. Proud of himself, Carpenter put it
this way on one occasion:

People yelling and screaming and jumping. That's what
it's all about, man: Throw that popcorn in the air and let
rip a scream!²

In the present paper we have focused on some of his thriller hits
(such as Halloween, The Fog or The Thing) so as to identify and study some
of his filming techniques to manage tension and suspense, and how he
eventually gets the audience to scream. The situations vary greatly from one
another when it comes to creating dramatic effects. They range from those
based on the easier, better-known tricks to the sharpest, more complex ones;
this fact allows us to speak of a certain film-making “philosophy” when
searching for a specific effect. It is not that a magic set of rules ensures
success when put into practice, but there is a certain pattern that is common
to most of his scenes. Therefore, the more closely we stick to the rules, the
more successful we will be. Naturally, we are speaking strictly in terms of
filmmaking and audiovisual narration, taking into account tools like editing,
camera movement and angles, lighting, sound, score, etc.

With a view to properly structure the points to be dealt with in this
paper, we have established four categories regarding the basic and
commonest situations in Carpenter’s films when it comes to send a shiver
down the audience’s spine. This subject-matter has not been studied or
theorized enough yet and, therefore, our categories intend to be only a
suggestion amongst others that could be made. We will try, however, to go
beyond the traditional distinction between “surprise” and “suspense” found
in Alfred Hitchcock's well-known theory - talked about over and over again
throughout his career.³

Our categories are the following: First, we refer to the commonly
known cheap tricks or common frights that achieve their goal by means of
using some of the most widely-known situations in the history of this genre,
such as the arms appearing unexpectedly behind a character, doors banging
closed all of a sudden, et cetera. Second, there is what we call false
expectations. We refer to situations where the viewer thinks that something is going to happen in a certain way, at a certain moment. Notwithstanding, the director works right in the opposite direction with the intention of catching the audience unaware. Next, we develop what we have termed *anticipation frights*, which are based on the conflict between the expectations of the characters and those of the viewers. Whilst the character is oblivious of the danger lurking behind, the audience has more information about the “threat” and, what is more, are given clues about it in a explicit way. Our last category includes what we have called *identification frights*. They are all about fear entwined with dramatic dimensions that go over the frightful situation itself. Thus, their effects have narrative and emotional-dramatic repercussions on the plot, the characters and, by extension, on the way the viewer perceives the story as a result of the emotional identification with the characters. The greater the links with such identification, the greater the results to get the viewer to go through restless worry and fear.

The first category refers to what is otherwise more broadly and pejoratively known as *cheap tricks*. We mean those frights based on some of the oldest tricks of horror film history, such as an arm falling suddenly off the ceiling, or a hand touching unexpectedly the back of a character at a certain point in the development of a scene. These moments are often highlighted by a special or high-pitched sound effect that helps scare the hell out of the viewers and leave them in a complete state of shock and out of breath. This type of fright lacks authentic dramatic consistency or narrative complexity. It only contributes to take the viewers by surprise in the easiest way possible, with almost no complications from the point of view of the film-making process. However, these frights are commonplace in Carpenter’s films since, as we have read above, he sees the genre as one based on fun and entertainment. He does not feel embarrassed to include them in his films.

*Halloween* is probably the best-known film by Carpenter. Starring a very young Jaime Lee Curtis, making her debut in film, and British actor Donald Pleasance, *Halloween* made two great achievements. It put Carpenter’s name amongst those of the top horror filmmakers of the 70s, and established the so-called slasher genre (one where the plot turns around bloody killings committed by some villain, normally against teenager victims). Due to this and other reasons, *Halloween* has become a milestone in the history of film. But, amongst other things, the film interests us because it contains a wide range of cheap tricks. On one occasion, Carpenter himself described the film as follows:

> True crass exploitation. I decided to make a film I would love to have seen as a kid, full of cheap tricks like a
haunted house at a fair where you walk down the corridor and things jump out at you.⁵

With this idea in mind, Carpenter builds the film around numerous frights that catch the viewer unaware. One of them takes place early in the film, in a sequence with Doctor Loomis (the character played by Donald Pleasance) and the sheriff from Haddonfield. Loomis, newly arrived in Haddonfield, tries to track down run-away mental patient Michael Myers, whom he had been taking care of for a number of years at the sanatorium. So he visits the house where, more than twenty years ago, Myers - then a child - killed his sister. The family left the place at that time and since then nobody has lived in it - the reason why it is empty and in an almost decrepit state. One night, the doctor and the sheriff visit the house. The two inspect the place almost in the dark - with the only help of a torch. After finding a dog's carcass in the living room, they go upstairs and into Myers' sister's former room. Loomis evokes what took place in the room and the cheap trick is unleashed: All of a sudden a cable falls off the ceiling smashing into pieces the window pane behind Loomis. The primitivism of this scary scene bears a resemblance to those of the old TV horror serials or even the first movies of the genre - when the first attempts at scaring the audience were being endeavored.⁶

Still on the same film, we could not leave aside the sequence resembling a walk down the corridor of the haunted house or ghost train at a funfair with everything jumping at you. It is a sequence where Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis), the young girl who is stalked by Myers, finds the corpses of her friend in a near-by house where she used to take care of some children on Halloween night. Michael Myers has come into the house before and has murdered Annie, a friend of Laurie's, who took care of some kids there, too. After that, he killed Lynda, too, another friend of Laurie's, and her boyfriend when they came into the house later on. As nobody answers the phone, Laurie decides that she should go and see what is going on. Nobody opens when she knocks, so she has to go in through another door which opens into the kitchen. Inside the house, Laurie starts looking desperately through the rooms, but to no avail. She goes upstairs and into the bedroom to find Annie’s dead body with her arms spread on the bed. Terrified by the view, Laurie walks back a few steps to lean on a wardrobe. At that very moment, the corpse of Lynda's boyfriend falls behind her. Laurie walks away from the wardrobe in a complete state of shock and, suddenly, when we do not expect anything else to happen, a cupboard door opens to reveal Lynda’s body. Just another old-school cheap trick.

The second category implies, however, a greater complexity when it comes to create the dramatic effect to frighten the audience. We have named it false expectations. It is all about misleading the viewer concerning the way
and the time when something is supposed to occur. Up against a suspense situation, the normal thing for the viewer to do is “protect” themselves as a way of avoiding being shocked by fear. The strategy, therefore, consists in misleading the audience and have them relax again so as to scare the hell out of them when they least expect it. We can distinguish four steps that are normally followed for this type of fright:

- The first step has the director establish a threat for the protagonist(s) in the scene. The audience, in this way, are conscious of first threat, but at the same time, they do not know how or when the attack will take place.

- Next the director has the viewer believe the wrong time or place for the fright. The adrenaline and anxiety levels of the viewer start to go up until the point where the dramatic effect is supposed to take place.

- At that point, the director tries to have the viewer lower his guard and relax momentarily. Normally, a little longer than the time the fright was expected is enough.

- Finally, he surprises the viewer by having the fright happening differently or coming from a different place or at a different moment. The filmmaker makes sure that the viewer lowers his guard and therefore the degree of accomplishment of the dramatic effect is great. The fright will be efficient, not only if it takes place when least expected but also if it comes from a different direction to that expected by the viewer.

If we talked about *Halloween* in the previous paragraphs, we will now focus on the following movie filmed by Carpenter, *The Fog*. Both movies can be considered almost as a treatise in the art of spooking the audience. Starring Adrienne Barbeau, Carpenter’s wife at the time and, again, Jamie Lee Curtis - turned into “queen of the scream” at the time, as a result of her appearances in *Halloween* and *Terror Train*. *The Fog* took as source of inspiration the comic book series *Tales from the Crypt* and a whole universe of writers such as H.P. Lovecraft. Although Carpenter has never had it amongst his favourites, he admits it to be a “little horror classic” for the fans of the genre. With a remake in this decade (the same as *Halloween*), *The Fog* gives us some of the best examples of *false expectation* frights within his author’s career.

The first sequence of the film we are going to focus on takes place while Nick (Tom Atkins), a local of Antonio Bay and Elizabeth (Jamie Lee Curtis), a girl he met at the beginning of the film, are inspecting the ship where, allegedly, three fishermen friends of Nick’s were killed. In a previous scene, we have seen a mysterious fog bank engulfing the ship. Some ghostly silhouettes come out of it and kill the crewmembers. The next day, concerned about their friends’ delay, Nick goes to sea to look for his friends. Elizabeth
goes with him and, a few minutes after leaving the harbour, they come across the lost ship. Once there, the ship seems to be completely empty, not a single trace of the crew; the protagonists wonder what might have happened. They start searching the ship for clues and go downstairs into the cellar, where they have to switch on a torch to find their way in the darkness. They find no clues; everything seems to be surrounded by mystery. As things are, they sit in the half-light of the cellars for a while and Nick tells Elizabeth a story about his father - an old sailor from the village. During the conversation, the camera shows us a locker in the background, preparing the viewer for what may be coming out of it. Then the camera focuses very closely on the locker slowly opening without the characters noticing it. The adrenaline of the viewer rises and rises until it opens noisily - but only to show a few unimportant objects fall from it. The viewer goes relaxed again and, at that very moment - when Elizabeth bends over to close it - the corpse of one of the crewmembers falls off behind her catching the audience by surprise. As can be seen, the aforementioned pattern can be followed rather closely.

The film includes another situation which, in our view, is accomplished with great skill. It takes place at the weather station of Antonio Bay. The fog bank and its sinister ghosts go there to take another victim. Previously, we have seen the attack on the three sailors. That night, when the fog approaches the weather station, the weather man is speaking on the phone with Stevie (Adrienne Barbeau) - the phone operator of Antonio Bay that broadcasts from the local lighthouse. The man mentions the fog bank approaching the village and, all of a sudden, there is a general black-out at the station. Through the glass of the door we can make out the fog, engulfing the place with its particular shine. Stevie suspects her friend is in a perilous situation and tries to tell him; but it is too late. The weather man has put the receiver on the table and gone to see what is wrong with the lights. Suddenly, we can hear a knock at the office door. Under the door slips in some fog and the same shine can be glimpsed again. Unaware of the danger, the character approaches the door. Again, the viewer's tension goes up as the character comes nearer and reaches its zenith when he finally opens it. At that very moment, however, nothing happens. Nobody is there after the door is opened. But a second later, when he tries to close the door, a mysterious arm takes hold of him from the right of the frame and one of the fog creatures puts an end to his life by sticking a hook in his neck. Once more, the previously described steps for this kind of fright can be traced faithfully.

Let us move on to what we have labelled anticipation fright. More often than not, the narrative dynamics of horror and fantasy films are based - however tangentially - on codes and structures having to do with the anticipation of the origin of fear and horror. We will focus, then, on the study of the anticipation only when is visible or clear to the audience - but not to the fiction characters. Furthermore, the reason for fear plays a very important
role on the *mise en scene*, too, as the characters are oblivious to the fright and do not even expect it. The anxiety effect becomes more dilated and intense in the audience - provided that the director’s narrative and arranging skills are duly taken care of. In the case of Carpenter, we find an excellent example of this typology in a very respected film of his latest period - *In the Mouth of Madness* - a feature film that we take as a good example of the mature phase in the director’s career.¹¹

The same as *The Fog* and other works by him, *In the Mouth of Madness* was influenced by the work of H.P. Lovecraft. The title, in fact, can be interpreted as a play on words on one of the best-known novels by the American author, *At the Mountains of Madness*. This brilliant feature film - with a script by Michael de Luca - contains an excellent sequence that includes a perfect example of the so-called *anticipation fright*. It occurs at the beginning of the film, when both the characters and the main dramatic conflict are still being introduced. Detective Trent - played by Sam Neill - is having breakfast in a cafeteria in town in the company of his sidekick. Both converse in a tranquil atmosphere about the disappearance of Sutter Cane, around which the plot is built. In our opinion, Carpenter’s mastery is shown as he introduces us to the physical scenario for the dramatic action of the sequence. We find ourselves at a big, noisy city, as shown by the heavy traffic and busy street. On the other hand, it is pure daylight in an urban setting - conventional, contemporary and recognizable. The two main characters are sitting at a table in a cafeteria - one facing the other. Behind them, a big window shows us the crowded street. There are a few more tables outside on the pavement.¹²

In principle, this sequence would serve as a mere step of narrative transition, whose main function is to deal in a little more detail with the plot and let us know more about the detective. Apparently, this setting has nothing to do with the traditional conventions or codes of horror in general and fright in particular. Carpenter’s and De Luca’s achievement lies in turning convention upside down as a harmless urban scenario changes into a horror setting with no paragon through an anticipated fright that provokes genuine anxiety in the viewer. At a certain moment in the conversation, with the voices of the characters still being heard, Carpenter - by means of a static long shot - shows us a shop that is right opposite where the characters sit. Out the door, comes a sinister character wielding a huge axe in his hands. Some passers-by notice it and run away. The event happens to the complete oblivion of the cars and, what is more, with the major characters of the scene remaining unaware of the situation. The dark mentally-disturbed figure walks calmly but purposefully across the road in such a way that most people in the street do not even notice his presence. This detail emphasizes even more the anticipating character of the fright. The tension that has just been created is kept with great skill during the whole sequence. The grounds of the
anticipation fright are thus already solidly established: setting, characters and threat. The axe-wielding man walks calmly to the café, focussing on the characters that are speaking. The anticipation escalates into a climax of tension and reaches one of its greater peaks with the maniac jumping over a fence on the pavement scaring off the diners sitting outside. The action intensifies gradually and some of the passers-by stop to watch what the disturbed man is going to do. At this point, the audience is very much aware that the maniac does not have good intentions towards the detective.

When dealing with this sort of fright, one of Carpenter's virtues lies in prolonging the anticipation in order to give it more depth. This way, the viewer goes deeper into the situation and becomes involved in the explicitly-threatened defencelessness of the characters. Just as the detective learns from his companion that Sutter Cane has disappeared - which adds a whole new turn to the plot - the axe-wielding maniac is about to attack. This harmonious and balanced set of simple elements gives the sequence a special intensity as far as horror movie conventions are concerned - a good instance is the moment with the madman standing still in the middle of the frame with his "prey" not noticing anything at all. This is arguably one of the most representative shots having the ability to condense the nature of the so-called anticipation fright. The horror breaks out when he suddenly raises the axe and smashes it against the window pane, causing a total chaos. From this moment on, we come into the narrative achievement of the sequence: The people inside the café seized with panic and the passers-by watching the dante-esque scene with curiosity; a curiosity, in fact, comparable to the one the audience is going through. This climax takes us to a denouement with the potential murderer being shot to death by the police.

Carpenter leaves his mark on the film through a very simple planning. He hardly uses camera movements - only a slight forward and backward travelling with the maniac as the reference. The audience get a better perception of the effect of the images by phasing in the movements being played in the shot. The staging is austere, clean and brief. The lighting is naturalistic, the scenery realistic and the performance believable. Everything helps to give a more suspenseful dramatic effect since we end up seeing a terrifying element of distortion in the midst of an apparently ordered scenario: the street and the café. Knowledgeably, the director avoids any kind of superfluous effects and uses the anticipation fright with moderation - with the intention of provoking anxiety and anguish in an elegant and subtle way. At this point, we must make clear that the anticipation of the fright is carried out by showing clearly and explicitly the reason for the fright: A monster, a murderer, et cetera. (in our case a mentally unstable person with the intention of attacking the detective). In fact, we are shown the threat very clearly from the very first moment. Then, Carpenter changes the shot scale as the perturbed man approaches his victims to finally lead us to the climax.
Not only can horror films instigate fear in the mind of the viewer but they can also go further when the implications of the frights affect the characters’ psychology, emotions or relationships directly. We are talking about the so-called *identification frights*. In fact, that psychological/emotional dimension offers a rich range of dramatic possibilities when we get the audience to identify with the characters. We could go deeper into this interesting question - what would call for further analysis - but that goes beyond our intentions with the present paper. However, it is worth pointing out that emotional identification between the characters and the audience is an essential and very important resource when it comes to fiction in movies. The audience’s involvement and delight when watching a film depends mostly on this identification with the characters and their emotions - which can vary greatly and be very different regarding intellectual, aesthetic and emotional levels. This identification can be either specific (recreation of a concrete situation that the viewers recognize as their own) or abstract (the fear as a universal feeling - regardless of the situation that is stirring it up).

We must agree that the *identification fright* presents a two-fold dimension: The situation of fear itself and, accordingly, the situation of emotional tension amongst the characters. Of all of Carpenter’s films, we will focus on *The Thing* to deal with this question. This is one of the most brilliant films in his career - if not the best, according to many. With our purpose in mind, it represents an ideal example concerning the script and the plot as a whole. In addition, it offers a very interesting and illustrative sequence in which the category we are dealing with is performed.

Apart from *Escape from New York*, *The Thing* is nearly the first high-budget film produced by Carpenter. It is an adaptation of the novella *Who Goes There?* by John W. Campbell, Jr., which was also inspiration for Howard Hawks’ film *The Thing from Another World* that was directed by Christian Nyby in 1951. Fortunately, the two films have almost nothing to do with each other. In fact, Carpenter’s has such film and aesthetic quality that most critics and viewers like it over the original one. Let us remember what Carpenter’s words were to this respect:

> I didn't try to pay homage to Hawks [...]. There is very little of his dialogues. I wouldn't have dare to remake the movie of a master.¹³

*The Thing* tells us a hybrid story between science fiction, fantasy and, of course, horror. An American Antarctic research station is infiltrated by an alien creature with the ability to turn into any kind of living human or animal on Earth (first, it infects the living organism and then emulates its physical appearance). This peculiar behaviour of the alien plays a key role
concerning the dramatic effect. As opposed to the distinctive appearance and way of acting of zombies, for example, the infected are apparently human and their behaviour is normal - being very hard to tell the “impostor” from the other humans. The director takes the most advantage of this asset of the script in a superb and intelligent way in order to successfully carry out identification frights.

The crew at the research station are isolated in the middle of a hostile winter environment. The characters are consequently obliged to stay together inside the facilities although they know that the “thing” could be anyone of them. We are not told much about the life and personality of the scientists at the station; it is not really necessary from a narrative point of view either, as the dramatic effect - full of mistrust and fear - is developed with real skill.

A great example of an identification fright occurs in the well-known scene with “the blood test.” The action takes place when the plot is developed and everyone knows and assumes the existence of the dangerous, shape-shifting organism. At this point, there have been many episodes of cruel fight against this alien being. We have already seen many situations where the scientists become extremely wary of one another. In some cases the initial sense of trust of the team is altogether destroyed. They have fights against each other many times and the dramatic tension is highly intense. The audience succumbs to this distressing situation. It provokes a constant flow of anxiety and a permanent feeling of threat towards the characters’ own physical survival. With this disturbing scene and the plot well advanced, we come to a sequence in which MacReady - played by Carpenter’s habitual collaborator Kurt Russell - one of the scientists, tries to take control of the situation by having his fellow workers take a blood test which will determine who, out of them all, is the “thing.” They will each have to extract some blood and get it touched by fire. If it is the monster's blood, the reaction will be violent - revealing thus the “impostor's” identity. The mere fact of proposing the test causes even more arguments between the crew members as to take it or not. In the midst of the disagreement, Mac Ready eventually makes clear that he will have his own way in an expeditious way: shooting one of his fellow scientists.

The test takes place in a tense atmosphere as we know a fright is probably coming next. However, the audience does ignore who is going to be the infected one and - what is more important - the audience identifies with the anguish the scientists are feeling. The dramatic identification is great and provides the fright with a more intensive narrative transcendence. When it is the turn for a character called Clark to take the test, the director uses an ingenious attention-distracting strategy: Through a dialogue he hints that another character may be the infected one. But when MacReady puts a burning wire in contact with the blood of the “thing,” the reaction is positive
and Palmer’s body begins tearing open, revealing the monster's identity. If the physical conflict is clearly posed, the dramatic conflict gets, in a restrained and hidden way, a superb intensity as the scene moves forwards. The faces of the characters exude fear, anxiety and also hatred, which disturbs and corrupts their relationship and emotional bonds. While the infected organism is moving, some characters are strapped to a near-by couch and cannot break free. Besides, MacReady’s flame thrower stops working, giving the monster time to attack. The sequence reaches its climax with the alien in flames blasting out the door and MacReady blowing it up. Next, the shot continues with the rest of the team taking the test and the anguish situation reinforced by some characters screaming to be untied. In this way, the dramatic identification is specially intense when a character called Garry, who has been quiet during nearly the whole of the sequence, lets off his anger and screams to be released in the midst of sobs. This character's feelings of isolation, loneliness and restlessness are successfully conveyed by means of a medium shot of him tied, followed by a fade-to-black.

Once again, Carpenter stands out for his measured and austere direction. Practically the whole sequence is carried out with static images and there is only one camera movement that shows us gradually the faces of the characters at the beginning. This is intended to highlight the emotional identification we are talking about. As the action takes place for the most part in a closed room, mid shots and close-ups of the different characters are the predominant note. They look at each other - which serves for establishing a tense emotional correlation amongst them. Therefore, this sequence works as the quintessential example of the identification fright, since what is at risk in the fiction is the characters’ own physical survival, depending on their human or non-human identity. The preamble to the fright is reinforced by stressing the relationships the characters have with one another and the distrust and resentment arising accordingly. Such fright causes not only the logical horror reaction in the audience but also a realignment of the dramatic forces in the action. Likewise, it strengthens the emotional identification with the experiences of the characters.

We are coming to the end of this tour which has allowed us to have a look at the varied range of situations capable of making the audience jump and scream when watching a horror film. We have seen how different the tools a director uses to attain this goal can be - from the traditional conventions of the genre, cheap tricks, to those involving the application of very specific and rigorous principles with the ultimate aim of effectively causing the intended dramatic effect. The success will always be determined by a series of factors such as the director’s style and experience when planning the sequence or the timing sense - concerning the exact moment to get the audience to scream. In this respect, John Carpenter stands out in the contemporary horror scene by being a master when it comes to create tension.
with a few basic elements and a low budget. He really knows the keys he has to press to send a shiver down your spine. Obviously, it is getting more and more difficult for a director to scare the audience providing filmgoers are more used to this kind of movies. However, Carpenter’s films still achieve it with an austere and distinct planning in which every element has a clear function.

Thus, it is no wonder that Carpenter is considered one of the few remarkable figures of his generation following in Alfred Hitchcock’s footsteps. Even though the latter did not make any films about zombies or aliens, the comparison is not out of place if we consider that both directors’ approach and philosophy to fear is quite similar. Quite often, some directors believe that they will achieve the intended horror or dramatic effect by means of gushes of blood and gore. However, these two directors have proved on numerous occasions that the horror depends far more on an appropriate use of cinematographic tools and *mise en scène*. The director can do without rotten corpses and gore when creating suspense. In fact, they are reduced to the bare minimum in both Hitchcock’s and Carpenter’s films. It is actually a very valuable lesson that can be drawn from both filmmakers, although there are also other leading figures to be taken into account in this regard.

**Notes**

1 John Howard Carpenter was born in New York in 1948 and brought up in Bowling Green, Kentucky, where he moved with his family in 1953. At an early age, he started developing a fondness of movies and began producing short films in 8 mm format when he was barely 14. Titles such as *Revenge of the Colossal Beast, Gorgo vs Godzilla,* or *Terror from Space* belong to that time. His father, a violinist and music teacher, tried to get him to study music. However, Carpenter studied film at the University of Southern California, where he attended lectures by John Ford, Orson Welles, and even Alfred Hitchcock. Carpenter dropped out before finishing his degree. Nevertheless he won an Oscar award for Best Live Action Short Film in 1970 with *The Resurrection of Broncho Billy*, a short film shot while studying. His first long film was released four years later with the title of *Dark Star* (1974) but, due to its low budget, he found serious difficulties to distribute it. In 1971, his second film was released, *Assault on Precinct 13*, which did not succeed in the United States, but became a big hit in Europe, after receiving excellent reviews at the London Film Festival the following year. Next, Carpenter filmed the independent low-budget movie *Halloween* (1978). The success of this film was huge and made him internationally famous at once both among reviewers and audience. Its protagonist, Michael Myers, would then appear in a number of other films. Since then, Carpenter has been producing films regularly. In the 80s: *The Fog* (1980), *Escape from New York* (1981), *The Thing* (1982), *Christine* (1983), *Starman* (1984), *Big Trouble in Little China*


3 We can find it, for example, in the book the French director François Truffaut dedicated to the British master: “The difference between suspense and surprise is very simple. Actually, I talk frequently about it. However, there is often a confusion between these concepts. While we are talking, our conversation is very normal, nothing special happens but there is a bomb under the table and suddenly: ‘Boom!’ An explosion goes off. The audience is surprised, but the scene prior to the explosion was a completely normal one, lacking any interest whatsoever. Let’s now focus on suspense. The bomb is under the table and the audience knows it, probably because they have previously seen the anarchist setting it up. The audience knows the bomb will explode at one o’clock but they also know it is a quarter to one (a clock is shown in the frame). The same tedious conversation suddenly becomes very interesting because the audience is taking part in the scene. They would like to say to the character on the screen: ‘You should not talk about such banal issues since there is a bomb about to explode under the table.’ In the first case, the audience has been given a fifteen-second surprise at the moment of the explosion. In the second case they have been given fifteen minutes of suspense. The conclusion of all this is that we must inform the audience whenever possible, except when the surprise is a ‘twist,’ that is to say, when the unexpected of the conclusion represents the grounds for the anecdote.”


4 *Halloween* is about the story of Michael Myers, a mentally unstable man confined in a sanatorium after killing his sister when he was a child. At the age of 21, he escapes from the asylum and returns to his hometown in Haddonfield, Illinois, with the intention of committing more crimes. An investigator, Dr. Sam Loomis (Pleasance), who took care of the boy when he was brought into the sanatorium, follows him to Haddonfield and tries to track him down. In the town, Myers stalks a girl, Laurie Strode (Curtis). On Halloween night, the festivity after which the film is named, he kills Annie (Nancy Loomis) and Lynda (P. J. Soles), two friends of Laurie’s and her
boyfriend (John Michael Graham). After that, he terrifies Laurie and the children she is taking care of. In 2006, the United States Library of Congress regarded Carpenter’s film as “culturally significant” and included it in that year’s list of films to be preserved at the National Film Registry. A remake of this film is expected to be released in the summer of 2007 by American filmmaker Rob Zombie.


6 There is a similar situation involving the same characters later on in the film. Hidden behind some bushes, Loomis is watching Myers’ house at night. After scaring some children passing by dressed-up for a Halloween party, Loomis is the one getting the spookiest fright when, all of a sudden, the sheriff comes up from behind and lays a hand on his shoulder.

7 The action of The Fog unfolds in Antonio Bay, a little fishing village located in Northern California. The locals are preparing for the celebration of the village’s centenary when a series of mysterious events takes place, among them the brutal murder of three fishermen. All the events seem to be linked to the strange fog approaching the village from the sea. Seemingly, some ghostly figures come out of the fog and kill certain people. In fact, the fog bank contains the ghosts of some old pirates coming back for the centenary of the foundation of the village. They want to take revenge by killing six people, symbolically standing for the six founders of the place who killed them and took their gold a hundred years before.


10 When Carpenter saw the film edited for the first time, he was not quite satisfied and felt it was necessary to add more gory effects to increase the impact of the story. Consequently, many of the most graphic moments of the film were added after the shooting was finished. For example, the images of hooks piercing necks and arms.

11 In the Mouth of Madness tells us the story of Sutter Cane, an incredibly successful horror novel writer. Shortly before giving his editor his new novel, Cane vanishes leaving no trace. At the same time, some of his fans are turning very violent for no apparent reason. Cane’s editor sends detective John Trent to track him down. He thinks it is all about a publicity stunt to promote Cane’s next book. However, when he is drawn to Hobb’s End, the line between fiction and reality begins to blur and his sanity starts turning into madness. The film won, amongst others, the Best Review Award at the Festival de Cine Fantástico Fantasporto (Portugal) in 1995.
At the beginning of the sequence, the camera shows a bus with a piece of publicity advertising Cane’s latest novel. This element both reaffirms us and provides information quickly. We know that Cane is a best-selling writer and - as can be inferred from the publicity placard - his novels are integrated in people’s social habits. As the action moves forward this fact will reveal itself as a potentially dangerous one.

Despite being a box office failure - unfortunately a common characteristic for many other masterpieces in the history of film - this director produced, in his own words, the “dark and unpleasant” film he wanted to make. He added: “I made what I thought it’d be a great film and I was condemned for that, as people thought it was very exaggerated.” E Guillot, Escalofríos: 50 películas de terror de culto, Midons, Valencia, 1997, p. 154-155.

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Divas Undone:  
The Transgressive Heroine as Operatic Monster  

Holly Baumgartner

Abstract
Some of the greatest tragedies to grace the stage are those of opera. In these dramatic performances, tension often resides in the dynamic relationship between the female protagonist, who encompasses such memorable roles as Tosca, Carmen, and Mimi, and the male antagonist, who, like Tosca’s Scarpia, is cast in villainous proportions made even more monstrous by the stripped down action and stylized form of the opera libretto. This presentation scrutinizes the highly-gendered interaction between these characters and deconstructs the villain’s ability to subvert the heroine’s strengths, reflecting them back in a mirrored inversion culminating in violence and tragedy. It is too easy to blame hubris, a tragic flaw, an essential weakness of the larger than life heroine, but it is her strength, her core, that clashes with the strengths of her antagonist. The repulsive machinations of the villain are a foil for her virtues—from piety to patience; however, they become distorted, bringing about her downfall. At the same time that the villain functions as a character foil, he is also foiled by the heroine, even though her success is simultaneously her destruction. These heroines, through the combustible threads tying them to their wicked counterparts, are, on the surface, those of the stereotypical damsel-in-distress; after all, many of the best operas are well past their 100th anniversaries. Yet even when historically contextualized, the ruthless connection between these prominent players complicates any easily reducible gender roles. The progenitors of despair serve up lessons on the performance of courage, the repercussions of choice, but, most ironically, in a medium that is all about voice, the need for voice.

“Nine by knife, two of them suicides; three by fire; two who jump; two consumptives; three who drown; three poisoned; two of fright; and a few unclassifiable […] That is just the first sorting.” At first glance, they might be mistaken for a list of horror movie casualties, the terrible by-product of the monster on the loose, but this “repetitive spectacle of a woman who dies” isn’t bleeding across the cinematic screen; the stage here is opera, and the monster arises from the border transgressions performed by the diva herself. Barbara Creed, in her book The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis, explains that “the concept of a border is central to the construction of the monstrous in the horror film” and though the manner in
which that border is constructed varies, “the function of the monstrous remains the same - to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability.” In horror films, the monstrous might be inhuman, bestial, supernatural, or evil, but Creed also suggests that the monstrous may be “produced at the border which separates those who take up their proper gender roles from those who do not.” Although Creed focuses on films like *Psycho* and *Dressed to Kill*, her observation applies equally well to the long tradition of familial and romantic performance of which opera is a part. For women especially, traversing the sedulous lines of gender role distinction is an egregious act. In fact, the errant female who must face retribution for her transgressions so that order, symbolic and social, may be restored is a remarkably long lasting fixture in the tradition of dramatic performance from ancient Greek plays to the Breen Code and its residual effects on contemporary films.

Throughout the history of performance, the monster manifests as a locus of everything from abjection to pity. Ken Gelder points out in *The Horror Reader*, that “culture can [...] be read through the monster.” Without a doubt, in the mythic plays of the ancient world, the monstrously transgressive female took centre stage, an obvious embodiment of all the most severe fears of Greek society. On closer inspection, a large number of those tragedies revolve around the family. Quite literally, from *Medea* to *Clytemnestra*, the family drama was a horror story.

Composers and librettists picked up the plays from the Ancient Greek stage and converted them to opera, thereby reinstating the messages of the earlier time. Marianne McDonald, who has traced the spirit of ancient Greek tragedy in opera in her book *Sing Sorrow*, explains that opera heroines performing the classics are the markers of a particular era’s view of the human condition. In her analysis of the opera *Dido*, for example, she argues that Henry Purcell’s version, *Dido and Aeneas* (1689), “lays out morals for young girls and warns them against overstepping their bounds”; therefore, the Queen of Carthage must be destroyed. In opera, those as yet unwritten moral strictures separating the acceptable from the abhorrent are evident, with the woman’s death both necessary and expected.

The powerful, bloodthirsty images of women who flourished in the ancient world became more difficult to suss out in the proliferation of modern narrative categories that included the “chick flick” and the “family drama.” For the first time, in 20th century Hollywood, the unacknowledged precedent of castigating the transgressive female was codified in authoritative “agreements” with the force of law. Indeed, as stated, “Law, natural or human, should not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.” The Production Code of 1930, according to film historian Robert Sklar, attempted to establish a uniform and universal “standard for
moral values in [film],” requiring that immorality, judged by “traditional standards,” had to be “balanced” through the concept of “compensating moral value”: if “bad” acts [were] committed, the offending character must face either “reform and regeneration” or, more commonly, “punishment and retribution.” While this section of the code was often invoked to insure “morality” in horror or gangster pictures, it also ensured a precedent for what was or was not permitted in films deviating from established gender norms.

Even though the echoes of the 1930 Production Code resonate in movies about the family to this day, the Code was only a written expression of a 2,500 year old value system that limits the transgressive female to two trajectories, both of which lead to a restoration of order. The first, the “reform and regeneration” pathway, occurs infrequently, usually involving an errant mother who must make a maternal sacrifice, saving her children by devoting her full attention to them or relinquishing all claims to them, thereby removing them from her contaminating influence. Reform and regeneration, it should be noted, occur almost uniformly as the result of intervention from one or more male authority figures: husband, father, psychiatrist, policeman, or priest. Far more emphasized is the second trajectory, “punishment and retribution.” For the errant female, retribution may involve her own death or, if she’s a mother, the loss of her children. (Think Richard Eyre’s Notes on a Scandal, as a recent example).

As in film, trajectories set down in the Production Code provide a disturbing framework by which to read opera. The errant mother is also entrenched in the opera canon. Cio-Cio-San, the so-called Madame Butterfly of Giacomo Puccini’s opera Madame Butterfly (1904) encapsulates both reform and retribution. Already marked by being a geisha, she, in essence, betrays her own culture in her illegitimate marriage to Pinkerton. She crosses the boundaries of race and class, but in the end is redeemed through the maternal sacrifice when she gives her illegitimate child over to Pinkerton and his legitimate wife. Instead of the option of walking away, her transgressions insist upon death, and she obliges, stabbing herself.

Another mother to grace the opera stage is Norma in Vincenzo Bellini’s Norma (1831). As high priestess of the Druidical temple, Norma not only breaks her vows of chastity, but her two children are fathered by a Roman foreigner. In the end, after a Medea-like impulse to kill her children in revenge to her unfaithful lover, she sacrifices herself jumping upon a blazing pyre, significantly after confessing her sins to her father and releasing her children to his care. Her ex-lover Pollione joins her in the bonfire, praying to his God for atonement for both of them. Like Cio-Cio-San, Norma is punished and reformed in the process, her children saved from abjection by maternal sacrifice. Norma, one of the most difficult opera roles to sing, demands a voice that is able to be, according to opera critic David
Littlejohn, “a strong, natural-sounding contralto” coupled with “some of the highest coloratura ever written […] mercurial-birdlike and witchy-dramatic.” Norma’s singing reflects her border-breaking, with vocal tensions only resolved, as order is, in the final dénouement.

The music in opera works in tandem with the libretto, conjuring the same images of transgression and its resultant trajectories. Without a doubt, in opera the punishment of the transgressive heroine entails not just a tragic but expected death, but a restoration of order encompassing an ordering of the music. Herbert Lindenberger, in Opera: The Extravagant Art, explains that:

The deaths in which most nineteenth-century operas culminate often seem mitigated in a way different from those of non-musical tragedies [...]. The high strings that accompany the final scenes in many Verdi operas help invoke an order in which forgiveness and reconciliation replace the violence that has gone on.

The musical themes linked to each role in these operas tell listeners how to regard the diva before she even sings. In fact, these roles, such as Isolde’s or the more familiar Carmen’s, often feature themes that are “threatening” to “a world of social order and control,” especially in their chromaticism. They must be resolved, that is, “a tonal piece must establish closure.” Cultural theorist Catherine Clément has even demonstrated that the need for the closure of the diva’s disquieting themes leads an audience, musically, “to desire her death.”

In one early study of opera deaths, François-René Tranchefort determined that male and female characters appeared to die in equal numbers. However, on closer scrutiny, if the death involves suffering, what researcher Michel Poizat calls “characters in torment,” women die twice as often as men. If the timing of the death, that is, where it falls in the opera, is also analyzed, female deaths conclude operas at least one-third more than male deaths, making them more memorable and significant. Symbolic horror, according to Kirk Schneider in Horror and the Holy, “enriches and vivifies the experience of the observer.” In this case, the placement of these deaths adds to the symbolism and therefore the depth of the observer’s experience.

Very rarely will the observer experience the good woman who actually upholds social borders. Euripides’ Alcestis (c. 438 BCE), adapted by Christoph Gluck in 1767, being one of the few examples. Although Alcestis survives her impending death thanks to her noble attempts at self-sacrifice,
most other female characters do not achieve that perfection, leading to their deaths to satisfy the demands generated by their errancy.

Perhaps the errancy and the murderous desire it unleashes is not always submerged. In the early history of opera, the word “monstrous” as a descriptor, whether in discussions of the genre or reviews of individual performances, was not unusual. Not only was opera seemingly in opposition to all of the goals of Enlightenment intellect - in fact its emotionality unmistakably situating it as “other” - it was also “a blurring of categories that ought to be kept strictly compartmentalized.” With the entire genre considered suspicious, the leading roles naturally aroused a certain scepticism, too. The mark of the monstrous feminine on the opera heroine is riveted to her outsider status; she is a pagan or a Jew or confuses lines between race or class. “That is what catches them in a social system that is unable to tolerate their presence for fear of repudiating itself.” Such is the case in one of the very earliest operas, Claudio Monteverdi’s Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda (1624).

Tancredi, a Christian crusader, falls in love with Clorinda, a Saracen. Almost the entire opera is concentrated on the battle to the death arising between the two lovers after Tancredi challenges a masked warrior, the disguised Clorinda, who defies his authority. The bible of opera, the definitive Kobbé's, provides a succinct summation of her multiple offences: “She is a brave and skillful warrior and, dressed in a man’s armour, has assaulted and burnt, with one companion, a Christian fortification.” She is also an outsider in both race and religion. In opera, the heroine’s outsider status becomes a kind of transgression all by itself.

It appears in a detail, a profession, [...]. But always, by some means or other, they cross over a rigorous, invisible line, the line that makes them unbearable; so they will have to be punished.

Clorinda, like so many others, is. Tancredi kills her. She, of course, forgives him and asks him to baptize her Christian before she dies, receiving punishment, restoring order, and eliciting sympathy all at the same time.

Besides the more obvious Clorinda or the beleaguered mothers of opera like Norma and Cio-Cio-San, many heroines endure punishment, from self-inflicted to divinely inspired. The popular composer Giuseppe Verdi tenders multiple operas committing the monstrous act of border blurring. His first success, Nabucco (1842), capitalizes on the bizarre love triangle of Abigaille, believed to be the elder daughter of Nabuco, king of Bablyon, and his other daughter Fenena, both of whom love Ismaele, nephew to the
King of Jerusalem. Disrupted borders here are of the highest consequence, like *Tancredi e Clorinda*, with not only those of the foreigner, but also those of religion at stake. The greater order of the Judeo-Christian tradition reasserts authority over the paganism of the Babylonians. It is hardly surprising that Fenena, who converts to Judaism, will win her heart’s desire, consecutively saved from execution by her father when he prays to Jehovah as well. On the other hand, Abigaille, who usurped the throne and imprisoned her father, drinks poison (punishment) and begs forgiveness from God at her death (reformation). Only Abigaille is the unsympathetic character. She represents all that is monstrous suggested in the opera - from pagan idols of pure abomination to deposing of the regent - both acts usurping power from father figures. As an aside, Franz Werfel states that the chorus from *Nabucco* makes an interesting and telling appearance more than a century later in Dario Argento’s Italian horror film *Inferno* (1980) during which a pair of black-gloved hands cuts the heads off a series of female paper dolls.  

In another of Verdi’s operas, his adaptation of *MacBeth* (1847), Lady MacBeth is the ultimate in transgressive behaviour. Jane A. Bernstein, in a *Cambridge Opera Journal* article, has explored how the role of Lady MacBeth, as early as 1785, comes to eclipse the role of MacBeth in various productions of the opera, especially through Sarah Siddons’s portrayal of her in London of that year where she was “an intense, terrifying force.” By Verdi’s version, he romanticized MacBeth and “position[ed] Lady Macbeth as the chief perpetrator of the crimes.” Most interesting of all is that Verdi constructs her so that “there are no characters who would make the prima donna passive - that is no father figure, no villainous male, and most important no primo tenore.” In Verdi’s opera, she “is damned for her transgressions,” her usurped authority, revoked.  

Another of those radical and transgressive women is found in Georges Bizet’s aforementioned *Carmen* (1875), the “woman who makes decisions all alone,” who “refuses masculine yokes and who must pay for it with her life.” Carmen is also a woman who works, even if it is only at the lowly cigarette factory; as Virginia Woolf encourages, she is a woman with money and a room of her own. Not only is she a single working woman, she is a foreigner in the form of the gypsy outsider. “The Gypsy’s first transgression: she takes the initiative in lovemaking.” As the seductress of Don José, she’s the disruptor of the family, breaking up his engagement to the “good woman” Micaela. She also destabilizes social order through her links with an outlaw band of smugglers, seducing Don Jose from the proper authority, the military police, to join the renegades in the process. However, “Carmen is prey to social pressure, whose appointed representative is José.” In the end, stabbed by him, Carmen receives her deserved retribution, while
he, willingly, is arrested, that is, retreats inside the established social and authoriative boundaries. Order is restored.

An even more compelling monster is Salome. In his article, “Operatic School for Scandal,” David Levin describes her in Richard Strauss’s opera of the same name (1905) as “a prototypical femmefatale - a spoiled, hysterical psychopath.” A former Director of the English National Opera asserts that “Each and every change of this emotionally unstable character is reflected in the music,” indicating again that the female character’s monstrous disruption is mirrored in both music and libretto.

In fact, one of Salome’s more potent transgressions is “the extraordinary vocal expressivity” given over to her abject desires. Levin adds that “Herod not only exacts revenge for her transgressive desire for Jochanaan […], but also exacts revenge for her transgressive response to her own reaction.” For her punishment, death, she is to be “killed impersonally, crushed by the collective and anonymous force of the soldiers’ shields.” The German libretto translates as “one [must] kill this woman,” making the need for and manner of her death a demand by the greater good, not any one authority figure, the impersonality a comment on all such women rather than simply Salome alone.

Finally, even in Puccini’s seemingly more innocuous opera, Tosca (1900), the central relationship is not really between Floria Tosca and her lover Mario; it is with the monster she faces: The jealous Scarpia - murderer, dictator, traitor, and chief of the Roman police. But, Tosca also transgresses. She has her own career as, ironically, an opera singer. Her own obsessive fit of jealousy, which takes place in a church, inadvertently sparks her own betrayal of her lover even as she lays flowers at the foot of the Virgin. It is her jealousy that ultimately leads to Mario’s arrest. Finally, the desperate diva, in her own act of manipulation and murder, kills Scarpia, who remains a sign of authority no matter how corrupt. Even though she drapes a crucifix over him in atonement, Tosca must be punished for order to be restored. When Mario is executed on the deceased Scarpia’s orders, she commits suicide, leaping to her death, yet it is Scarpia’s henchman Spoletta, intent on arresting Tosca, who, as a symbol of authority, is the last figure on stage.

Countless other dramatic operas feature similar divas undone. However, opera buffa or comic opera may seem to question or challenge these trajectories, but Umberto Eco has shown that even comic operas “are not instances of real transgression: on the contrary, they represent examples of law reinforcement.”

Opera, then, is in the interesting position of adapting almost all of the ancient tragedies to the operatic stage as well as upholding and furthering the messages of female transgression and the needed restoration of order which will be codified in the 1930 Production Code. In spite of the
contention that opera, “as an art form of the past, has little to do with present-day culture,” the evidence suggests otherwise. Claiming it does not ignores the firmly ensconced “institution of the opera house” and its accompanying repertoire which remains virtually unchanged over the last several centuries. Such arguments also fail to recognize that many listeners who are not necessarily schooled in musical cognition, are not “consciously aware of what is at stake, thus without seeming to be accountable.” Even more importantly, those latent codes still point to a monstrous feminine. Evil has been defined as “a monster…it has a strange coercive force…a temptation, a mystery, a horrible charm.” Words, not surprisingly, likewise used to describe both the roles they sing as well as the great opera divas themselves. At the same time, horror can be “curiously inviting,” acting as an “horizon […] of our furthermost possibilities.” Though the messages of opera uphold the codes of other media, demanding the death of the diva who dares to transgress, they do not control this art and genre completely. If singing is the great breath, it seems no coincidence that the Latin word spiro, to breathe, is the foundation of “respire,” “expire,” and “inspire,” words which invoke the powerful contours of the diva as well.

One month before this conference, I stumbled across Catherine Clément’s book, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*. Since I had picked almost the same choice of words for my title even with a different focus, the irony did not escape me nor did the fact that our efforts are almost 30 years apart. It suggests that opera is still fertile ground for research, and that, in the closet or under the bed, there is, indeed, something there.

Notes

3 I hesitate to use the clunky and overdetermined term “western tradition”; however, other terms require more explanation than a paper of this short length may reasonably support.
11 Clément, p. xiv.
16 ibid., p. 125.
17 Clément, p. 59.
18 Tancredi was actually published 14 years later in 1638.
20 Clément, p. 59.
23 ibid., p. 35.
24 ibid., p. 36.
26 ibid., p. 50.
27 ibid., p. 51.
29 Earl of Harwood, p. 810.
30 Levin, p. 248.
31 ibid.
32 ibid., p. 247.
33 U Eco, cited in W. Maierhofer, ‘Transformations on Stage Only: Anfossi’s Circe in Weimar’, in R M Marvin & D A Thomas (eds), Operatic Migrations:
Divas Undone: The Transgressive Heroine as Operatic Monster


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“What claimed our love and compassion was misshapen humanity in all its forms”: Sick Caliban’s Story

Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik

Abstract

The paper offers a brief account of Caliban’s origin, place and role in Shakespeare’s The Tempest and the historical context of the figure of the “poor monster”; all that in order to problematize the notions of humanity and monstrosity in the Renaissance England as reflected in the play. The second part of the presentation will briefly consider chosen contemporary intertexts of The Tempest in order to (1) attempt a comparative analysis of the seventeenth and the twentieth century approaches to monstrosity, and (2) fashion a tentative explanation of the twentieth century literary obsession with “sick Caliban.”

Keywords

Renaissance monsters, theatre criticism, anthropomorphisation of the monstrous, William Shakespeare, The Tempest

The poor monster's my subject, and he shall not suffer indignity.2

William Shakespeare, The Tempest

Who is Caliban? The question pervades numerous interpretations of Shakespeare's Tempest and attempts at establishing Caliban's origin are repeatedly reflected in the plethora of performances and contemporary critical readings of the play. Caliban has become the object of query for literary critics, writers, artists and theatre directors alike, as this, after all, minor character has turned out to play a crucial role in the roughly contemporary interpretations of the play. As numerous literary allusions profess, he has started to live a life of his own, as a cultural icon of sorts that embodies bestial humanity on the one hand and human-like monstrosity on the other. One might ask, why? For one thing, Shakespeare's Caliban is not a true rerum avis, as even his ontological ambiguity does not render him more appallingly monstrous or threatening than, say, Frankenstein's monster or Dracula. Historically, there has even been a tendency to sentimentalize the whole of the play and ignore its ambiguities, with Caliban at the lead. The interest in this particular character was not continuous; it waned around the eighteenth century when the figure of the “poor monster” was deleted from the adaptations of the play as not altogether matching its sweetened content, to rekindle almost a century later and continue with added strength to this
day. The reason for that strange recurrence in the interest in the figure of Caliban is that, to put the matter in Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan's words, “none of these characters, nor any other in Shakespeare's canon, has undergone the extreme range of metamorphoses that have marked Caliban's tumultuous career.” A tortoise; a giant fish; a monster of the most grotesque kind; a missing link in the history of the human race; pre-allegorical form of a psychic process; a (de)humanized representative of colonized nations subjugated to the will of cruel Prosperos, a socio-political allegory Caliban has become the core of Romantic, Darwinian, psychoanalytical, allegorical, autobiographical, and postcolonial interpretations of *The Tempest*, and ultimately a grateful object of such passionate comparative cultural studies as *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*. At the same time, the figure of Caliban has won its own place in major literary works of the time, and started to serve as a synecdoche for a virtually human disorder. Although precise attitudes towards monstrosity in the early seventeenth century are not recoverable, *The Tempest* and its various contexts allow us for a glimpse of what constituted the Renaissance notion of the monstrous with respect to Caliban. The purpose of this paper is to look at the intersection of history, stage history, literature, and the shifting critical attention that Caliban has been endowed with throughout the ages in order to offer a brief account of Caliban’s origin, place and role in Shakespeare’ *Tempest* and the historical context of the figure of the “abhorred slave” which will allow me to problematize the notions of humanity and monstrosity in the Renaissance England and today. However, for the lack of space, in this presentation I consider only chosen seventeenth century contexts of Caliban's monstrosity and provide a generalized comment on the twentieth century approaches to his figure and the reasons for a qualitative change in the treatment of Caliban that can be found in post-colonial Shakespeare criticism on the one hand, and modern culture on the other.

1. **Caliban’s Monstropomorphosis: Monster Transformed, The Artificial Changeling Historically Presented.**

*The Tempest* is a text that has long intrigued its readers and audiences with its ambivalent and antithetical interpretative potential. A broad range of approaches towards the play certifies to the fact that its very nature is arguable, as it generically is ascribed to an experiment in a mixed mode of drama, tragi-comedy, or a romance, whereas its content has been described as an amalgam of diverse stories, or a textual hybrid. As A. D. Nuttall puts it:
One of the reasons why *The Tempest* is hard to classify lies in its parentage. It has two sets of sources, first a body of romantic, fairy-tale literature and second a collection of travelers' reports. If its mother was a mermaid, its father was a sailor.  

This peculiar marriage of the fantastic and the circumstantial well professes to the ambivalences that surround the interpretations of the context of the play, its text, and every single of its characters, with the notable example of Caliban. The shipwreck luring us into the story and the question of Caliban's origin introduce into the play a whole range of connotations with European attitudes towards newly discovered lands and peoples. It is not a sheer coincidence that the play originated around the time of the formation of the Virginia Company and proliferation of such exploration narratives as Sylvester Jourdain's *Discovery of the Barmudas* (1610) or William Strachey's *True Reportory of the Wrack* (first published in 1625, but available in a manuscript form already in 1610). The topoi of miraculous survivals, cannibalism, half-human bestiality and monstrousness of the encountered natives abound in travel narratives of the time and are well-reflected in the iconography of the Brave New World; No wonder, it has been repeatedly inferred that they might have easily influenced the contemporaneous reception of the play in general and the interpretation of Caliban's character in particular.

On the other side of the contextual continuum rest more familiar analogues such as folktales of wild man or wodewose that functions as a social symbol of nature curbed only by the civilizing forces of royal authority. Such is the position of the wodewose in Edmund Spencer's *Faerie Queene*, where this “wilde and salvage man”

Yet was no man, but only like in shape,  
And eke in stature higher by a span,  
All ouergrowne with haire, that could awhape  
And hardy hart, and his wide mouth did gape  
With huge great teeth, like to a tusked Bore:  
For he liu'd all on rauin and on rape  
Of men and beasts; and fed on fleshy gore,  
The signe whereof yet stain'd his blody lips afore.

Both this passage and the mode of characterization of Caliban in the play suggest that the wild man was a manifestation of the “Other” equated in popular imagination with a monster. Indeed, one of the first preserved comments on Caliban, coming from Ben Jonson's Induction to *Bartholomew Fair* provides an allusion to Caliban as a “Servant-monster,” whereas in the
1623 Folio edition of *The Tempest* Caliban is described in the cast of characters as “a salvage and deformed slave.” This introductory description suggests a two-fold approach to the conception of Caliban, informed by his natural deformity and his low social standing. Caliban's non-defined physical deformity on the one hand and slavery on the other are categories that position him in-between the animal and the human realm; and his professed lack of language places him at the border of the human or even beyond it. The undecidability of the bestial/human is repeatedly invoked in the play, as reactions of other characters repeatedly invite and frustrate characterization of Caliban as either a human being or an animal. The play titillates the reader/the audience's imagination with obsolete description of the “monster's” bodily traits, allowing for wild speculations as to the nature of the “thing” composed of human and animal features, which in turn is evocative of the medieval tradition of the monstrous. Caliban then exists in an aporetic refusal to divide nature and culture; the bestial and the human. What seems to be at stake in the play is the issue that is reminiscent of Aristotelian (homocentric) doctrine of natural slavery. Caliban is perceived by the majority of islanders as human “in a diminished sense,” since he seems to be unable (or unwilling) to exert rational control over his passions. The obvious and unquestionable indicators of his resulting monstrousness are violence, lack of temperance or *ingenium*, and finally, libidinouosity that is focused on Miranda.

It has been repeatedly claimed that *The Tempest* is a psychomachia, in which good and evil struggle over the possession of one's soul. Such a reading can be transposed onto plainer regions of political allegory, in which the Island itself is suggestive of the stage mirroring the body politic of the state, and Caliban representing the “moon-calf” of post-Reformation England; the rebellious barbaric Protestant element struggling to remove dissident drama from the stage. The context of *The Tempest* provides ample ground for speculation on the correlation between the major plot of the play - the Royal marriage of Miranda and Fernando - and the wedding celebration for James I's daughter. It remains a matter of speculation whether “James and his family are represented in *The Tempest* through the issues of peaceful succession, royal genealogy, interpretation and the union of the kingdoms,” but if we consider Caliban's rape attempt and his overall insubordination in the light of what Gary Schmidgall calls “courtly aesthetic,” it will become clear that the aggressive descriptions of Caliban are constructed around the political notions of breach of sovereignty, usurpation and power struggle. *The Tempest* provides an exotic spectacle in which the rebellious ruled is cast as a monstrous character as he no longer wishes to assume the position of cultural marginality he has hitherto occupied. In this way he personifies social evil discussed in Tudor homilies on disobedience.
Thus, as an agent of subversive forces, working to transform the established order, Caliban becomes an exponent of monstrosity - this time articulated in moral and social terms.

2. **Sick Caliban's story: Leaky distinctions.**

On page thirty-two of the 1778 Samuel Johnson and George Stevens' annotated edition of *The Tempest*, we find the following assertion: “The *metathesis* in *Caliban* for *Cannibal* is evident. FARMER.” The annotation was introduced by Rev. Richard Farmer, principal librarian of Cambridge University and master of Emmanuel College. The “indisputable” anthropophagic etymology of Caliban's name that turns out to be a product of a single annotation set a trend in interpretations of Caliban that can be roughly dated post-1803 editions of the play. Still, cannibalistic exploits of Caliban are rather dubious, as multitude of post-colonial readings rather convincingly argue.

Originally viewed as a *monstrum horrendum*; a vicious, brutal creature with beastly qualities and subversive intent that relegated him to the epicentre of the seventeenth century *civitas*, Caliban would gradually become involved in a slow, turbulent but steady process of anthropomorphisation. As a force questioning the given social order, Caliban became a “natural man,” “a noble savage,” then, a missing Darwinian link, and finally, an embodiment of a colonized, but undeniably human “Other.” The final stage in the anthropomorphisation of Caliban would be appropriation of his character by a number of "self-proclaimed Calibans," non-white non-European artists, among whom we need to mention George Lamming, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Aime Cesaire and Roberto Fernandez Retamar. Their readings of *The Tempest* obviously have a clear political agenda at the back, but what they stress in the process is the fact that Caliban can be interpreted as an exemplar of subaltern human values that forms a part of the colonial discourse on the Brave New World, as he becomes subsumed by the ethnocentric values of Prospero. To sum that up,

Although to some literary critics he is still a monster or benevolent wild man, he now most frequently symbolizes the exploited native - of whatever continent and whatever color - who struggles for freedom, dignity, and self-determination from European and American Prosperos.

3. **“See the monstrousness of man, When he looks out in an ungrateful shapet”**

In our consideration of reception history of *The Tempest* we need to remember that the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century aesthetics was to a large extent influenced by the sense of disillusionment with the ideals of
neo-classical rationalism, as well as by disorganization occasioned by the chimeras of both revolutions - the French and the Industrial one. By no means homogeneous in their treatment of the human subject, post-romantic anthropologies would oftentimes take up the notion of monstrosity that they endowed with a potential for endless destruction. Still, growing insistence on self-reflection led to a shift in the perception of man not only as the Blakean “divine image” but also as (Blakean) “perverse image,” ultimately bringing about a denial of the powerful statement about the discontinuity of man and nature that had been made by Christianity. In the time of political and technological upheavals ambivalence concerning rationality, morality, the nature of man and power resulted in increased concern with the margin and transgression of (social, conceptual) boundaries; transgression that would include a degree of fear and trepidation on the part of the (leaky) subject. This allows us to understand why the figure of the “dispossessed” Shakespearian monster was awaking an increasingly positive reception in the readings of Caliban's story first in the nineteenth and then in the twentieth century. From the advent of the irrational, dark romanticism(s) onwards, monstrosity has been perceived as a kind of self-imposed de-demonized projection of human fears and anxieties, a Satanic rebellion against social injustice and privilege; at times taking the form of a psychoanalytical double that plays out, in Martin Tropp’s words, “the Romantic drama of the mind, the myth of self-exploration.” Such is the concern expressed by Edwin Muir in his poem “Sick Caliban.”

Emile Cioran would say that man is a sick animal because of his ability to think. That then seems to be the propensity of a (post)modern monster: We can no longer be rational Prosperos of the Enlightenment and innocent Mirandas of sentimentalized Romanticism; our condition is the misshapen lot of a Sick Caliban. The Tempest is a masque, whose allegorical potential allows us to utilize it as a mode of expression for contemporary cultural dilemmas. What then is our cultural dilemma in the age of leaky distinctions? It seems that in “Sick Caliban’s” story it is the catastrophic incident of speech; the language that we are forced to learn in order to express our carnal appetites and immoderate desires that leaves us with no other choice but to “see the monstrousness of man, When he looks out in an ungrateful shape” and then to narrate it - with curses.

Notes
4 W Shakespeare, p. 175.
5 The title of the section alludes to John Bulwer’s _Anthropometamorphosis, “Man Transformed; or, the Artificial Changeling Historically Presented”_ (London, 1654) that is discussed in such studies as D Hillman & C Mazzio, _Body in Parts_, Routledge, New York, 1997.
16 A T Vaughan and V M Vaughan, p. xxii.
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Myths of Monstrous Maternity in Japanese Horror Film: Kurosawa’s Sweet Home (Suite Homu, Japan, 1989)

Colette Balmain

Abstract
While the concept of the “good wife” belongs to the Edo period in Japanese history (1683-1867), it was during the Meiji period (1868-1912) that being a “wise mother” responsible for the education of children became part of the duties of woman. Hence the phrase ryôsaikenbo, which translates as “good wife and wise mother,” used to define woman’s responsibilities in the household, and by association, wider society and the ie system. Representations of women in Japanese horror cinema post World War Two and the Allied Occupation (and enforced democratisation) work within this construction of the dutiful woman and wife. The popularity of the mother film, hahamono, with its suffering and sacrificing central female protagonist as in A Japanese Tragedy, constructs the mother “as a kind of scapegoat, for nobody’s fate could possibly be worse than hers.” In this paper, I consider another type of mother film - the homicidal hahamono - using Kurosawa’s haunted house mystery, Sweet Home, as a case study. In Sweet Home, Lady Mamiya, the epitome of monstrous maternity, murders infants by throwing them in a furnace until one day, confronted by the villagers whose children she stole, commits suicide. The monstrosity of these actions is undercut by her devotion to her own dead infant, and her belief that these children will join her child in the afterlife so that it will not be lonely. This can, I argue, be understood by reference to Japanese cultural and religious myths around motherhood, in which the demonic child-eating mother, and Buddhist deity, Kariteimo, derived from the Indian Hariti, is transformed into Kannon, the guardian of children, through the loss of her own child. The representation of monstrous maternity in Japanese popular culture should not simply be dismissed as an example of patriarchal anxiety over female sexuality, but needs to be understood in terms of myths around motherhood and the (over)valorisation of the mother in Japan.

Keywords
Motherhood, ryôsaikenbo, haha-mono, Tales of Ugetsu, Godzilla, Kurosawa, Yama-uba, hibakusha, Izanami, archetype, fairytale

1. Good wife, wise mothers (ryôsaikenbo).

With the advent of the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5, the demands of heightened nationalism saw a further reassessment
of women's roles as wives and mothers in terms of the interests of the state rather than as caretakers of the ie. It was at this time that the slogan “Good wife, wise mother” [ryôsai kenbo] came into currency.4

The phrase “good wife, wise mother” (ryôsaikenbo) was adopted during the Meiji Period (1868-1912), as a mechanism through which to ensure loyalty and devotion as necessitated by the State at a time of unprecedented change in Japan’s economic and political structure. Although enforced democratisation during the Allied Occupation (1945-1952),5 in the aftermath of the defeat in World War Two gave women equal rights, traditional concepts of appropriate femininity remained entrenched in Japan’s socio-political structure, especially myths around the maternal bond, as Ohinata writes, “People’s devotion to the concept [mother] comes close to that of a religious faith.”6

This myth of the “good wife, wise mother,” continued to be a staple of Japanese popular representations in the postwar period. This is nowhere so evident as in the popularity of the haha-mono (“mother film”), at its height in the 1950s, “wherein saintly mothers are martyred in their undying devotion to their errant children.”7 An example of this is the self-sacrificing figure of Miyagi (Kinuyo Tanaka) in Tales of Ugetsu who has to die in order that her husband, the feckless and unfaithful Genjuro (Masayuki Mori), can relearn what it means to be a man and a father.8

This over-valorisation of motherhood was not just articulated in those films that took the maternal and the family as its central theme, such as A Japanese Tragedy, but could also be found in the quasi-religious iconography of films such as Godzilla9 and The Ghost Story of Yotsuya.10 In Godzilla, I am thinking of the scene with Emiko Yamane (Momoko Kochi) cradling a child in the make shift hospital in the immediate aftermath of Godzilla’s rampage on Tokyo. As she looks up towards the camera, bright lighting is used to give this image its iconic status. A similar image can be found at the end of The Ghost Story of Yotsuya, in the final shots, which are of Iwa, returned to her former beauty, holding her son tenderly in her arms, surrounded by bright light. In these films, the imagistic system calls to mind the Buddhist deity, Kannon - mother of the Buddhas - who is often depicted in Chinese robes, and holding a suckling baby in one arm.

This particular image of Kannon nursing her child is not of Buddhist origin, but is thought to be of Western origin. Scholars have pointed out her similarity with images of Madonna and Mary and Child. When Christianity was outlawed and followers persecuted (they could be put to death) during the Edo Period, statues of Kannon were worshipped (these became known as Maria Kannon). Indeed, Barrett suggests that the image of mother and child
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in *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* could be seen as a direct reference to Kano Motonobu’s painting of *The Sad Mother Kannon* (*Hibo Kannon-zu*). As such, there is an obvious similarity between the Mother Kannon of Buddhist belief, the embodiment of suffering, and that of the Virgin Mary in Western religion.

2. **Myths of Monstrous Maternity.**

The closeness of the bond between the child and mother is often put down to the fact that the fathers tend to be at work, day and night, leaving all responsibility to the mother. The education system has led to the education mother (*kyōiku mama*), mother complex (*maza-kon*).

From a defeated nation, Japan’s economic miracle, known as the *Buddle Economy* - from the early 1970s until the Stock Market crash of 1990 - caused a seismic shift in gender relations in which mothers became ever more dependent on their maternal roles as men’s working patterns meant that fathers were very rarely home. In television drama, the demonic mother displaced the “good wife, wise mother,” from centre stage, as men and women’s roles became even more polarized. Goldberg writes that

> [T]he flipside of the idealized representation of Japanese motherhood, found in the *haha-mono*, is the *bukimi’na haha*: The nightmare mother who has a special link to madness or the supernatural.

Although the nightmare mother can be found in early Japanese cinema, such as *A Page of Madness*, as Goldberg contends, her omnipresence in Japanese horror cinema from *Onibaba* onwards is not just a displacement of war trauma, her ruined face as embodiment of the scars of the *hibakusha* as I have argued elsewhere, but also articulates patriarchal anxieties around gender roles in particular in the light of the defeat of masculinity during World War Two. Not only did the war leave hundreds of thousands of women destitute, without husbands and fathers for their children, but it is often commented in discussions of postwar cinema that the loss and/or impotency of the father figure is a dominant trope. In her discussion of the Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature, Napier points out that in postwar Japanese literature, unlike in pre-war literature, women no longer offered a refuge from modernization, instead “women seem to have become increasingly Other, unreachable, even demonic.” Napier continues,
As is evidenced by the works set during the Occupation, postwar Japan was undergoing a [...] fundamental “reorganization of culture” even than during the Meiji Period, and this time women can be seen as part of the problem, living reminders of male powerlessness, initially in the face of an American conqueror, and later on vis-à-vis an economic juggernaut which transformed society at the expense of individual fulfilment.21

The demonic mother figure has precedents in the archetype of the Great Mother in Japanese fairy tales, in which the negative side, usually represented as Yama-uba (yama: mountain, uba: old woman or crone). This monstrous representation of maternity is found in fairytales such as “The Woman who eats nothing” and “The Two Kannons.” Kawai points out that such images,

[F]unction to compensate the general trend in Japan to evaluate motherhood extraordinarily highly. It has been taboo to talk ill of or to neglect Mother. In contrast, fairy tales portray so vividly her dreadful devouring power.22

In Japanese horror cinema, as in fairy tales, this negative archetype of monstrous maternity is found much more frequently than her opposite, “the good wife, wise mother.” The prevalence of mother imagery associated with darkness and monstrousness provides not just the narrative motivation of many contemporary Japanese horror films such as Ju-On: The Grudge23 and Dark Water,24 but also dominates the mise en scene of these films - with images of wells as representative of the maternal womb (linked to the concept of the underworld, or the land of Yomi), water imagery signifying the amniotic fluid. An earlier example can be found in The Embryo Hunts in Secret,25 in which an unknown man tortures and rapes a young women repeatedly. Towards the film’s violent conclusion, the walls of the room that entrap the couple starts to pulsate and as the suffocating walls begin to enclose him, as the man cries out “mother,” implicating evoking the archaic generative mother of Japanese mythology.

3. Home, Sweet, Home?

Kurosawa’s Sweet Home26 is one such example of the demonic mother film, in the manner of the haunted house film, such as The Haunting,27 The Legend of Hell House,28 and Poltergeist29 in which a group of people find themselves together in a decaying old mansion at the mercy of a mysterious
murderous force, and have to defeat this demonic entity in order to survive the house’s murderous intentions. In *Sweet Home*, the group of people are a television camera crew, intent on discovering the rumoured last fresco by a famous artist. The crew comprises Taguchi, the camera operator; Asuka, the reporter; Aki, the director and finally, Kazuo, the producer, and his daughter, Emi. They gain entry to the old family home in order to film a documentary about it. Once there, they find themselves at the mercy of a malevolent force, which causes the extremely bloody and gory deaths of Taguchi and Asuka, before trapping Emi in its dark and dank maternal womb. It is only with the arrival of Mr Yamamura, a drunk gas station owner, the archetypical wise elder, that Aki and Kazuo learn of the house’s mystery and with the help of Yamamura, who sacrifices himself, manage to free Emi from the murderous vengeful spirit of Lady Mamiya, the wife of the artist, Ichiro Mamiya. Thirty years in the past, she unwittingly killed her own longed-for child when she turned on the furnace one day without realising that her child was playing it, and seriously burnt herself in the process. Lady Mamiya kidnapped children from the villagers and threw them into the furnace in order to keep her own child company in the after world. When confronted by the villagers, she threw herself into the furnace following the children to hell. Unable to find her child, whose body is buried outside in the mansion grounds, and protected with a talisman against the vengeful mother’s curse, Lady Mamiya is trapped between the worlds of the living and that of the dead, doomed to endlessly seeking the child she lost. (Of course, as is usual in the haunted house genre, the hapless television crew had desecrated the grave of the child when they arrived at the mansion, therefore liberating Lady Mamiya).

The tormented ghost of Lady Mamiya inhabits the living shadows that engulf the mansion, shadows which reach out with their hair like strands, burn and dismember any who come within her reach. If the imagery of the good mother as we have seen works within the religious imagery of Kannon, that of the bad mother, evokes the complementary form of Kariteimo (Kishimojin).

There are many tales of Kariteimo, but all agree that she is descended from the Indian ogress Hariti, who kidnapped and killed the children of Rajagriha, and fed them to her own children. Depending on the version of the tale, Kariteimo has either five hundred (sometimes one thousand, sometimes more) sons, or ten demonic daughters (*Jurasetsu-nyo*). In all variants, Buddha steals her youngest child and hides him/her in order that Hariti can empathize with the sufferings of the mothers and fathers from whom she stole the children. Schumacher points out that “At once this demonstrates her great concern for her own children while conversely revealing her disregard and unmindfulness of others.” 30 Her child returned to her, Hariti is transformed into the goddess of mercy, iconic symbol of maternal love and
infinite compassion. Kawai draws together these two sides of the maternal, Kannon and Kariteimo, as two sides of the original archaic generative Mother:

In Japan, Kannon, who accepts everything, is the positive Great Mother, and Yama-uba, who appears in fairy tales as the all-devouring mountain witch, is the negative image. Izanami, a great Goddess in Japanese mythology, gave birth to the land of Japan, but afterward she became the deity of the land of death; her image is of the Great mother who has two sides, positive and negative.

Lady Mamiya’s monstrous maternity is not just captured by the cinematography but also forms the mise en scène: The key to the house lies in the middle of layers of pinkish red fabric which resemble the female labia and/or the maternal womb; the fresco of mother and child painted in rich reds, pinks and yellows; and the story of her tragedy which is captured on the walls of the dining room; the red pulsating bedroom where Emi disappears, the putrefying and boiling flesh of the dead, and the flashes of red that occur periodically through the narrative including the red gloves that Aki wears when she tries to retrieve Emi from the deadly clutches of Lady Mamiya. The red gloves that Aki wears when confronting her nemesis clearly signals a link between the two as mothers. Aki inhabits the space of the “good wife, wise mother,” a space left empty by the non-diegetic death of Kazuo’s wife and Emi’s mother. This is made clear when Aki dresses in an old nightdress of Emi’s mother when she confronts the demonic maternal in the basement of the house, a nightdress that earlier Emi herself had worn. Emi’s mother, and by association Aki, are constructed in terms of light, their white clothes signalling their positive status. However it is made clear that darkness and light, Kannon and Kariteimo, are complementary forms of the same archaic mother, rather than direct opposites. In the end, Lady Mamiya is defeated, or more aptly released from her torment, when she is reunited with her child.

As such, the plot of Sweet Home follows the transformation of monstrous maternity and the demonic mother into symbol of iconic maternal love and compassion. This can clearly be seen in three key scenes, which offer iconic images of mother and child throughout the narrative. In these short scenes, we see both the positive and negative sides of the Great Mother, Kannon and Kariteimo, Protector of Children and Devourer of Children. The first image of the mother evokes the imagery of Kannon, when the artist’s last fresco of mother and child is unveiled under 30 years of dust. This however is one image among many, as the film unfolds, the crew uncover other more violent images which visually portray the story of Lady Mamiya, including the burning of her child in the furnace and confrontation by the villagers.
When we meet the vengeful spirit of Lady Mamiya after she has kidnapped Emi as substitute for her own lost child, her image is horrific conjuring up similar images of Medusa and Karitemo, as her hair takes on a serpentine configuration and the other lost children emerge from her transforming body. In this transforming form, she is horrific, far removed from the iconic mother and child of the earlier fresco. Her disfigured face here, I would suggest, continues Japanese cinema’s representation of historical trauma through the scars on the face of female characters. Like many woman in Japanese cinema, she is situated as the archetypal suffering woman rather than merely the nightmare or demonic mother. In addition, the use of sound in this sequence emotes the unholy suffering of Lady Mamiya.

When Emi returns the dead child to Lady Mamiya, mother and child are engulfed in blinding light and here I would argue that she is transformed into the iconic image of the first fresco, that of Kannon, and is thus redeemed and can continue upwards to heaven.

4. Conclusion: Beneath the Mask.

Woman, it appears, is not readily forgiven for her fall from grace. She is worshipped as a maternal goddess, but feared as a demon. When the maternal mask is ripped off, a frightening spirit is revealed.33

Lady Mamiya in Kurosawa’s Sweet Home can be understood as emblematic of the figuration of the demonic mother in Japanese horror films, which owe their archetypal form to traditional fairy tales, and religious figures. Yet as much as she is horrific, Lady Mamiya is paradoxically a sympathetic figure, as her reclamation into the iconic Kannon makes clear. While as Goldberg suggests American horror in the 1970s offers similar figures of monstrous maternity-she draws a parallel between Nakata’s Ringu (1989) and Friedkin’s The Exorcist (1973), the two should not be collapsed into each other, as to do so would deny the cultural specificity of horror cinema. In these terms, Lady Mamiya would become one more face of what Barbara Creed terms “the monstrous feminine” in her book of the same name. The over-valorisation of the maternal bond, which produces feelings of amae (passive dependence), in Japan, which has given rise to media and moral panics around suffocating mothers as responsible for the growing trend in violence in young people in Japan. This demonstrates the way in which the figure of monstrous maternity in popular Japanese cultural artefacts and forms, in films as in real life, is situated as a scapegoat for the ills of society. As I argue elsewhere, the form of the haunted house film negotiates
contemporary concerns, specific to Japan, through utilisation of iconic religious images and archetypes.

It is clear to see how upheavals in Japanese society, brought about by rapid modernization, have lead to a breakdown in the traditional structure of the Japanese pre-modern family structure, as embedded within the wider ie system that regulated the relationships between people within the broader context of the community and the nation. Societal breakdown as signified by domestic violence, child neglect and abandonment of the elderly, is negotiated through recourse to traditional Japanese mythology and folktales, within the generic frame of the Haunted House narratives.34

Notes
1 K Kinoshita, Nippon no Higeki, Shochiku Kinema Kenkyû-jo, Tokyo, 1953.
5 “Reform gave women full legal equality and ended the authority of the clan over the family and the father over adult children. Compulsory education was extended to nine years, further reducing paternal influence. So-called reform exceeded what American society would have accepted for itself at that time, indicating that the purpose was more to undermine the patriarchal basis of Japanese society than to reform it.” C Noreiga, ‘Godzilla and the Japanese nightmare: When Them is U.S.’, in Asian Cinemas, A Reader and Guide, D Eleftheriortis & G Needham, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2006, p.43.
7 ibid.
8 K Mizoguchi, Ugetsu monogatari, Daiei Studios, Tokyo, 1953.
9 I Hondo, Gojira, Toho Film (Eiga) Co. Ltd., Tokyo, 1954.
10 N Nakagawa, Tokaido yotsuya kaidan, Shintoho Company, Tokyo, 1959.
13 Ibid.
14 Goldberg, p. 373.
17 “Although the ‘A Bomb Maiden,’ [hibakusha] came to prominent international media attention in 1955, when twenty-five young, single hibakusha women were sent to the United States for plastic surgery and medical attention, similar women have continued to inhabit Japanese literary, televisual and cinematic renderings of Hiroshima up until the present day.” A Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and The Modern Horror Film*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005, p. 86
21 Ibid.
31 The Shinto creation myth tells of a brother, Izanagi and his sister, Izanami, who were born along with seven generations of Gods, and together gave birth
to the world and numerous lesser deities - “Izanami gave birth to the
Japanese islands as well as to a large number of deities.” But during the birth
of the God of Fire, Izanami was so badly burnt (in some variations of the
myth, she dies) that she flees to the underworld, or the Land of Yomi. Even
though Izanami warns Izanagi not to follow her, nor to look about her, he
follows her to the Underworld where he saw “her putrefying body swarming
with maggots,” to which he exclaimed “What a hideous and polluted land I
have in to unawares.” Izanami sends the Ugly Daughters of Yomi after him,
but Izanagi manages to flee and blocks the passage between the world and
the underworld with a large rock. In fury, Izanami threatens to kill a thousand
people a day, to which Izanagi replies that he would ensure the birth of
fifteen hundred children a day. See I Bumuma, Behind the Mask: On Sexual
Demons, Sacred Mothers, Transvestites, Gangsters and Other Japanese
Balmain, op. cit..
32 H Kawai, p. 15.
33 I Buruma, p. 47.
34 Balmain, op. cit.

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Human Monstrosity: Rape, Ambiguity and Performance in
Rosemary’s Baby

Lucy Fife

Abstract
In this paper, I am going to discuss the manifestation of monstrosity in Rosemary’s Baby in relation to the character of the husband, Guy (John Cassavetes). Although on the surface the narrative is concerned with an eruption of Satanism in New York I would like to suggest these elements operate as a kind of “McGuffin,” the supernatural offering a hyperbolic representation of everyday matters of marriage and maternity. In giving weight to these concerns I hope to show that the film’s depiction of monstrosity represents a departure from paradigmatic horror structures. I will be scrutinising the film’s depiction of rape as pivotal scenes representing the extremes of supernatural and real in relation to Guy and the way in which he makes Rosemary (Mia Farrow) a victim. By using close analysis, I hope to demonstrate how this is dramatised largely through facets of performance. In this case, the particulars of performance which contribute to the construction of the character’s authenticity are revealed to be crucial in their affect on our engagement - Guy’s duplicitous behaviour helps to make this particularly clear.

1. Ambiguity.

Rosemary’s Baby centres on a young married couple and their impending parenthood. The narrative is largely shaped through Rosemary’s experience of events and when pregnant this involves extreme physical discomfort, an increasing feeling of distance from Guy, and eventually fears of satanic neighbours. Her fears and the question of whether they are justified provide the film with a central hesitation between the existence of witches and what her husband dubs “the pre-partum crazies.” The only certainty is that Guy is the cause of Rosemary’s victimisation in either explanation of the film’s events: He either offers her body to be impregnated by The Devil, or, more disturbingly - as I would like to suggest - he rapes her and, once pregnant, emotionally abandons her.

According to Robin Wood the basic formula of all horror films is “normality is threatened by the Monster.”¹ In his outline the monster is a defining feature, a central convention of the genre. Wood’s systematic approach also recognises the importance of ambivalence, specifically in relation to the characterisation of the monster, who he claims is often a film’s emotional centre and “much more human than the cardboard representatives of normality.”² Alternatively Wood acknowledges that the monster can be
unambiguously evil, but categorizes the impulse as part of a reactionary narrative: “The ‘progressiveness’ of the horror film depends partly on the monster’s capacity to arouse sympathy.” Wood relates the principle of ambivalence to the spectator’s emotional responses, describing our fascination with horror resulting from the way the narratives perform “our nightmare wish to smash the norms which oppress us and which our moral conditioning teaches us to revere.”

In a significant departure from generic expectation, Rosemary’s Baby does not comfortably fit within the structures Wood offers. The paradigm of monster menacing normality is dissembled. Instead, the film’s narrative and stylistic systems are formed around Rosemary’s understanding of events which slip between normality and the supernatural. There is no obvious monster available from either of Wood’s definitions. The apparent Satanists are more obviously separated from social norms, but generally they are characterised as eccentric rather than frightening, the tone of their representation distancing them from monstrosity and thus sustaining the ambiguity of the narrative. Equally Guy is neither physically fearsome, evil nor do his actions threaten normality as it is defined in this argument - as representative of dominant social norms. Although he matches the complexities that Wood describes, Guy is emphatically not the emotional centre of the film, rather he is consistently distanced, a point which I will come to later.

Normality itself is not easy to identify within the film. If embodied by characters separated from Satanism - Rosemary and her friends - there is no depiction of coherent normality within this group comparable to that which Wood suggests. Indeed, it could be argued that the patriarchy embodied by the Satanists represents the most consistent set of values, to which Rosemary, herself, is a threat. Within the scope of the narrative, their plot simply requires the use of Rosemary’s body, and does not seek to demolish any aspect of normality she represents. Thus the film diverges drastically from many satanic movies, like The Omen, where the birth of the antichrist marks the obliteration of conventional values.

To further detach it from the norms of horror structures, and significantly for this paper, Rosemary’s own concerns are principally based in reality, specifically her relationship with her husband, rather than the supernatural. The centrality of Rosemary and her experiences, not to mention the vulnerability demonstrated in Farrow’s appearance and performance, results in our emotional responses being closely tied to her. This emotional, and frequently physical, engagement with her constructs investment in her safety, rather than desire to see her destroyed. With emphasis on the narrative’s reality, the film has been read by Lucy Fischer as “a skewed
Lucy Fife

‘documentary’ of the societal and personal turmoil that has regularly attended female reproduction.”

My approach will demonstrate a departure from most accounts which turn on Rosemary and her demonic pregnancy, in suggesting that the husband’s role in the narrative deserves to be more fully discussed, specifically in relation to the film’s dramatisation of his responses to pregnancy and the effect upon their marriage. Guy changes almost as much as Rosemary, as he becomes more physically and emotionally withdrawn from her, seemingly unable to even look at her, his distancing a cruel indication of his self-obsession. This spotlight on Guy should reveal the extent to which the film can be taken on its everyday premise, and how this is much more complex and horrifying than the distractions of Satanism.

Through making Guy the focus of my discussion, I would like to further suggest that his representation by Cassavetes embodies the duality of the narrative, revealing the skill of his performance, a detailed portrayal of actorly self-absorption and betrayal, which was almost universally condemned by contemporary reviewers. Robert Chappetta for example wrote: “The weakest part and the weakest performance in the film is Cassavetes.”

His multifaceted performance invests Guy with a degree of charisma, which serves to somewhat obscure the full extent of his disregard for his wife. The ambiguity in Guy created by Cassavetes complicates engagement with him, whilst the manner in which the film presents his performance exposes his actions and skilfully condemns him.

2. Performance.

Before moving on to the detail of the film, I would like to briefly emphasise the importance of performance specifically in relation to authenticity, a crucial element of our engagement with Guy, whose behaviour necessarily invites scrutiny from Rosemary and us. Douglas Pye notes in his writing on point of view, a concept explicitly concerned with the reliability of what we are presented with, that

the interior lives of characters is derived not from what the film spells out but from inferences that we draw from the rhetoric of performance and from the image and sound context in which performance is presented.

Thus the manner in which information is presented, and crucially limited, through performance is central to our perception of characters and engagement with them. Guy’s expressive authenticity is damaged by two limitations relating to a lack of access to his interiority: First, Guy is continually subject to others, primarily Rosemary, and thus very rarely
encountered by us on his own or outside of her experience; second, Guy’s status as an actor, combined with the various levels of performance he generates throughout the film (from professional rehearsals to private performances or impersonations of their neighbour, Minnie). The film deliberately complicates notions of access and authenticity through its awareness of both Cassavetes’ and Guy’s performances, emphasising a lack of reliability through acting and deception. Indeed, Pye’s use of the word rhetoric takes on a further implication, articulating the level of skill and artfulness present in both, which directly impacts and deprecates the authenticity of interiority, and therefore reliability, pertaining to the character and his actions.

3. **Playing a part.**

Although previous scenes lay clues to Guy’s manipulation of Rosemary, his appearance in her nightmare is the first that foregrounds his victimization of her. Guy appears sporadically, but at each point there is menace in his presence, building the implications of his involvement. The violation of Rosemary’s body - a significant moment of horror in the film - maintains the central hesitation of the narrative: She is either raped by The Devil in her nightmare or by her husband while unconscious. As the film presents it, however, Guy is the cause of both explanations, initially signalled by him undressing her, both in reality and the dream. In this way, the film relates his actions to actuality and not just part of the fabric of her unconscious. Farrow’s nakedness here highlights Rosemary’s defencelessness. Rather than actively leading to her role as the victim, as suggested by Helena Goscilo: “Whereas the protagonist’s girlish mini-skirted outfits merely index the immaturity she exhibits in other ways, her nakedness, more significantly opens her up to possession/impregnation by Evil,” the detail of the dream explicitly shows that it is Guy who removes her clothing and thus exposes her to impregnation: *He* makes her a victim.

9 I will now discuss a very brief clip of Guy’s final appearance in Rosemary’s nightmare, where he is fully integrated into the action and his behaviour is most conspicuously threatening.

**CLIP 1:** Guy walks towards the camera and transforms into
The Devil – 0:45:10 – 0:45:25

Whereas prior to this moment Guy’s presence within the naked coven was sexualised only through the group’s shared role in the ritualized insemination, here his deliberate movement and isolation renders his nakedness suggestive of sexual intention, his physicality threatening. Guy moves towards the camera, his eyes down and his face quickly obscured by shadow, strategies
which keep us at a distance and ensure that he remains inscrutable. Next, a close-up of The Devil, as embodied by Guy, offers a direct contrast: His face overpowers the screen as he gazes into the camera. His transformation is a brief moment, yet it is explicitly and materially there, the close-up allowing us to recognize Cassavetes’ face, in spite of the transformative make-up. He is explicitly monstrous: His physicality is changed and accordingly his powers extend to his spatial positioning, his face dominating the screen. The change is furthered by the quality of his violation of Rosemary’s body: His claws violently scratch her (repeating Guy’s caressing of her torso as he undressed her earlier). Guy’s actions are represented here at their most extreme, the decision to have him embody The Devil in this manner is particularly suggestive in a way that preserves the narrative’s ambiguity and has logic through both explanations. It provides a material monster to satisfy the supernatural explanation, whilst at the same time making possible a reading that Rosemary has cast him in this part, seeing him as the perpetrator of her rape nightmare implies the reality of his actions as well as demonstrating something more disturbing in their marriage.

4. **Performance malfunction.**

Despite the visceral horror of this sequence, and Guy’s appearance in it, the presentation of his everyday behaviour is more horrifying, as demonstrated the morning after Rosemary’s impregnation. Indeed, the scene registers as alarming without the context of the nightmare, because of Guy’s behaviour. It exposes the full extent of his emotional distance and disregard for his wife, all the more unpleasant for being obscured by his duplicity, which becomes increasingly transparent with attention to performance.

**CLIP 2:** Guy wakes Rosemary and she discovers scratches on her back 00:46:28 – 00:47:57

In this longer sequence we can clearly see the controlled nature of our access to Guy and Cassavetes’ performance through attention to the camera’s positioning. It starts with a moment where we have privileged access to him, placed in close-up in the foreground of the frame, one of the rare moments where we are placed outside of Rosemary’s experience. This sudden alignment is, as a result, significant. As he sits up in bed, he leans forwards, breathing in and out deeply, his hands clasped together in front of him and his eyes shut. The deliberation of Cassavetes’ gestures and breathing makes it seem as though Guy is collecting himself, presenting a conscious attempt to ready himself for interaction with Rosemary, as an actor would prepare for a scene. The visibility of Rosemary’s figure in the background of the frame places his gestures in the context of what he has done to her, crucially
indicating what has happened while we are placed in close physical alignment with him.

However, our access to Guy is rapidly diminished as there are only three shots of him in the remainder of the scene, the camera staying predominantly with Rosemary. Consequently any engagement with Guy is drastically withdrawn and the emotional resonance of the scene is played out through her. The camera enhances this by gradually edging towards Farrow throughout, intensifying Rosemary’s vulnerability as the indisputable scratches on her side reveal her victimization. Her naked body is explicitly vulnerable, whilst Guy’s pyjama-ed body reinforces the undertone of concealment and contributes to the development of his duplicity. The decision to have the camera remain largely on Rosemary specifically foregrounds her reaction, placing us in spatial and emotional alliance with her. Even when Farrow later turns her back on the camera, shutting us and Guy out almost completely from her experience, its continued alignment maintains our engagement, as well as presenting Guy’s presence as interference, at first visually and then merely audibly. The way the camera shapes the scene both invites specific responses to the characters as well as enhancing what is happening through the actors’ performances.

With detailed attention to performance Guy’s self-consciousness becomes more explicit via his responses to Rosemary, largely through the deliberation of Cassavetes’ movements and the rapid changes in Guy’s tone. Even before the actuality of her violation is revealed, Cassavetes demonstrates the contrivances of Guy’s behaviour. Guy’s attempts to light a cigarette come across as a strategy to keep busy through Cassavetes’ agitated movements in the frame, as though Guy is performing a piece of actorly business. He responds to Rosemary, but keeps his eyes down, only looking at her when her back is towards him. These avoidance tactics affect our sense of Guy’s authenticity specifically in relation to Rosemary, his evasions appearing as signs of culpability towards her.

When Rosemary finds the scratches, the threads of Guy’s fabrication start to show more clearly, before unravelling as he struggles to successfully interact with her. Guy’s responses occur too fast: He comments on them before she does, as though jumping his cues. This continues as he manages to respond despite the spatial separation of the bathroom. The registers of his responses, as demonstrated through voice and gesture, alter dramatically throughout the sequence. To begin with he treats her violation light-heartedly, exaggeratedly apologizing. Then, Cassavetes switches to a more direct approach, looking off camera at Rosemary, watchful of her response. The insistence of his gaze, particularly after his previous avoidance, appears to be a conscious construction towards his change in attitude. Guy’s smile drops and he stares towards her, tilting his head slightly and opening his arms in a gesture that evokes sincerity. Cassavetes’ appearance, in
crumpled pyjamas and ruffled hair, supports this softening as Guy excuses his behaviour.

That Rosemary’s reactions do not change in response to his explanations further emphasises the artificiality revealed by Guy’s fluctuations. In the face of her unyielding shock, Guy switches his approach again, laughing off her open-mouthed reaction and backing away into the bathroom. Whilst his responses are bad enough if he had done as he said, in the context of the supernatural explanation his duplicity and evasion is just as condemning. Guy’s throwaway remark about necrophilia demonstrates that he has severely underestimated the damage he has caused, either as rapist or devil-worshipper. At this point, his emotional deformity is as clear as it was physically in his nightmare incarnation.

These last moments provide very little opportunity to remain engaged with Guy, both through Rosemary’s responses, his interaction with her and the film’s framing of him. During his final attempts to appease Rosemary, Guy is almost entirely off-screen, that his appearance in the frame operates as interference demonstrates both how distant he has become from Rosemary and the film’s insistence on minimal engagement with him. As his hand appears in the frame and strokes Rosemary’s back, the gesture clearly evokes the scratching of her body in the dream as she visibly winces, revealing the extent of Guy’s lack of awareness of her feelings. Both the camera’s positioning and framing of Cassavetes works in synthesis with his performance to reveal the insidiousness of Guy’s behaviour towards his wife. In this way the film goes to great lengths to maintain both epistemic and emotional distance to Guy, resulting in a significant lack of sympathy for him by the film’s conclusion.

5. Conclusion.

By carrying out a reappraisal of Cassavetes’ performance, I hope to have demonstrated that it is possible to read the satanic structures of *Rosemary's Baby* as transparently metaphorical. Thus the truly disturbing element of the narrative is located in reality through an exploration of marriage and the gaps between male and female experience. I hope to have shown that strategies of close analysis ensure Guy can be reclaimed as a multifaceted and ambiguous figure. Thus our engagement with him is tempered by the questions of authenticity and reliability raised by this approach, revealing that he is dominated by self-obsession and duplicity. By demonstrating that the detail of Cassavetes’ performance clearly rewards this level of consideration, I hope I have illustrated that such material engagement with performance enables an intricate response that draws attention to the slippages between real and supernatural, and thus complicates the film’s relationship to the apparent rigidity of monstrosity typical of horror structures.
Human Monstrosity in *Rosemary’s Baby*

2 ibid., p. 72.
3 ibid., p. 171.
4 ibid., p. 72.

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"I live in the weak and the wounded": The Monster of Brad Anderson's Session 9

Duane W. Kight

Abstract
In Brad Anderson's Session 9, an invisible authority rules an insane asylum, its panoptic gaze disciplining the inmates, who in turn internalize that gaze and the dictates of its authority. We could certainly be in an institution familiar with the work of Michel Foucault. But, in this case, the inmates are (at least initially) sane, not mad; the authority whose gaze they internalize is a supernatural entity intent on using its power to disrupt and destroy. Anderson's film, in fact, presents its asylum as an inversion of Foucault's from the outset, as the panoptic monster's throne is slowly yet vertiginously righted before the narrative begins. At the centre of this asylum's irrational structure, a monster stalks its victims to draw them into a void of obliterating madness. Along with its deconstruction of Foucault's model, Session 9 offers a critique of the conventions of the horror genre, in particular insisting on "acoustic horror" rather than on that inherent in the body. The final scene of a mad protagonist surrounded by the tatters of the narrative, talking on a broken cell phone, offers no sense that a modern monster has been domesticated and expelled so that life can go on.

Keywords
Brad Anderson, Session 9, Foucault, madness, acoustic horror, asylum

It would be hard to argue that the problem of evil is other than insoluble: The infinity of literary, philosophical, religious and cinematic texts dedicated to solving the problem, to say nothing of the manifold historical actions either generating them or generated by them, provides all the evidence we need. Because insoluble, the problem of evil understandably provokes great anxiety: Particularly in a post-Enlightenment world, it is disturbing to confront something that is intractable to human reason, whose frontiers lie beyond the borders of human space, whose depths cannot be plumbed by all the resources of human measurement and science. Yet human reason continues to develop strategies that might make evil tractable: we attempt to pray our way past sin to salvation; we try to define clear moral differences - and establish degrees of possible indifference - between the suffering occasioned by a small boy's torturing of a fly and that occasioned by genocide (even though both kinds of suffering can, in the end, be reduced to the common denominator of pain and death); we use science to stabilize the blurred psychological line between a troubled individual and a
psychopath; we create prisons and asylums to separate the supposedly abnormal from those thought to be normal. Tracing those boundaries, categories and hierarchies of evil, however, always leaves an excess that cannot be accounted for in our schemata: The monster that expresses this excess always occupies a space between, beyond, beneath human reason, and its resistance to an incarnation that could pin it down and allow for its colonization, control domestication, domination and ultimate expulsion, dooms our strategies to failure. Dracula, no matter how many times he is staked and falls to dust, remains undead and returns. This is the tragedy of human existence confronted by the monstrous, in all its shapes: We continue fighting to come to terms with it, even if the battle is a futile one and even if we don’t always choose to recognize its futility.

The horror film is often the field on which this battle is engaged, and Brad Anderson's *Session 9* is an example of the genre whose interest lies in part in Anderson's willingness to detail reasonable strategies to control the monster only to reveal, in the end, their inadequacy. *Session 9* does not offer the comfort of closure or the rational explanation of cause and effect on which many horror films depend to dispel the anxiety in the presence of evil that they raise (if only until the next sequel). Instead, Anderson, by showing how the monster resists containment, first by the panoptic asylum detailed by Michel Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish*, and second, by the conventions of the horror genre itself, leaves us with the bleak but honest realization that while evil “lives in the weak and the wounded,” its immanence there paradoxically points to the fact that it, like the God conceived of by medieval theologians, is ultimately everywhere yet nowhere, present in the material world yet always unbounded by it, unattainable and therefore unconquerable.

*Session 9* had the misfortune of going into general release around 9/11, hardly a propitious time for horror films when real horror filled the evening news and people's lives. In consequence, it attracted little public or critical attention beyond a few reviews, and has benefited little, if at all, from closer analysis. Because *Session 9* is unfamiliar, a barebones summary of its plot would seem to be in order. A group of working-class men, who specialize in the removal of hazardous materials from buildings, is hired to cleanse the abandoned Danvers State Mental Hospital so that it can be used as a new site for municipal services. The group is disparate, and consists of the boss, Gordon; Phil, Gordon's right-hand man; the other members of the hazmat team - Hank, Mike, and Jeff (Gordon's nephew). In the course of *Session 9*, we learn some details about the crew's lives outside the work site, but most of those relate to Gordon's home life: He is married to Wendy and has an infant daughter, Emma. In a series of flashbacks, we discover that Gordon has murdered his family after the first day of work, and his conversations with Wendy during the course of the film are figments of his
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disordered mind. As they work on the building, Mike discovers a cache of tapes and documents relative to a former inmate, Mary Hobbes, institutionalized for having murdered her family. Mary suffers from Multiple Personality Disorder, and, according to the tapes, is influenced by three alters: Princess (a female child), Billy (a protective adolescent boy), and Simon, whose nature is ambiguous (beyond his gender). As the film progresses, Gordon, urged on by Simon, descends into the madness initiated by the murder of his family, eventually killing the entire crew, and is left alone at the conclusion.

One might expect from this brief synopsis that Danvers would play an important part in the film, but perhaps only as a setting to orient events and anchor personalities in the narrative, its material elements contributing thematically, but peripherally, to the narrative as those of the Bates house in Psycho do. However, Anderson makes Danvers a virtual character: The film begins in the asylum with a shot of the empty restraint chair; our first sight of the asylum occurs before most of the leading characters have been introduced, placing it among the cast; each on-screen announcement of the day of the week during which the film occurs fades in over a sequence of shots of the building; its bat-like form and careful organization of spaces into wards and wings are evoked both visually and verbally throughout, in more detail than the lives of the human characters; an aerial shot of Danvers concludes the film. It is clear that Anderson wants to draw our attention, not to a building in need of being cleaned of asbestos before being given another function, but to an asylum whose existence and function as asylum persists even when emptied of patients. Moreover, he underscores that this is not merely an asylum, but its inversion: The opening shot of the restraint chair, which crystallizes what the asylum has been (and continues to be), is first seen upside down, and then slowly rotates. This is an asylum, one whose conventional functions have been emphatically inverted or perverted and which exists in symbiosis with the film's characters, not apart from them.

The best way to illustrate the extent to which Danvers is an anti-asylum is through the filter of Foucault's Discipline and Punish, which articulates with great cogency the parameters of the asylum/prison as conceived in Enlightenment thought. In Foucault's conception, the asylum is an enclosure designed, first of all, to separate the sane from the insane, the exterior from the interior world. While Foucault does not identify it specifically as such, this is a fantasy space, where rules established by the outside world - criminologists and psychologists have determined who should be incarcerated - are interpreted within the laws specific to the asylum, determined by its directors. Within the enclosure, further differentiation between the more and less insane are established, a categorization including the directing personnel as well as the inmates. As Foucault argues, the controlling force of the asylum is thus divorced from the material bodies
I live in the weak and the wounded

... enclosed. The presumption is that ultimately all the inmates can be cured and returned to the outside world, that the distinction between irrational and rational inmates of the asylum can be erased through reason, producing a homogeneous group from a heterogeneous collection ranging from the most insane through the less insane of the inmates to the rational directors. In other words, the asylum can reduce the sane/insane binary to a single, unified term: Identity.

This reasoning power emanates from the gaze, rather than the material body, of an invisible entity, located in a central tower from which it can observe everything within the asylum. This panoptic gaze controls the inmates from outside, but also from inside, inasmuch as it inspires self-regulation in them. While relying on imposing bodily discipline in the form of a routine of work, prayer, and solitary contemplation, along with therapeutic encounters with professionals, the panoptic gaze is fundamentally benevolent, as befits the institutional premise that insanity can be cured: the return to reason is to be achieved without physical restraint or other technological intervention, its goal to regulate chaos, to shape Bedlam into a simulacrum of the Enlightenment world outside.

Anderson's film subverts the particulars of Foucault's conception in almost every way. First of all, Danvers has not fulfilled its function as a separating enclosure; rather than disciplining inmates into sanity, then releasing them, it has merely expelled them, with the process half-completed at best: When it was abandoned, inmates were simply ejected, and as Griggs, the supervisor who gives Gordon and Phil their introduction to the building, says, many of them return to the empty building, as if seeking further discipline that has been denied them by the asylum's directors. Danvers' current inmates - Gordon and his crew - are undifferentiated in terms of rationality, resisting the categorization fundamental to the Enlightenment asylum; characters illustrating different kinds of irrational behaviour - capacity for murder (Gordon), drug use (Phil), violence (Mike), egotism (Hank) are juxtaposed, and Gordon, seemingly exempt from these behaviours through his dispassion and measured, rational direction of the task at hand, is lumped together with the inmates, as if there were no distinctions - the dehumanizing hazmat suits frequently make it difficult to distinguish one character from another. The building itself is malevolent to the core, the opposite of the Enlightenment model: The crew's presence there is to remove the dangers that exist at every level, yet these are so numerous that they seem uncontainable, and hazardous asbestos contaminates the air they breathe. Anderson's emphasis on masks and hazmat suits underscores the degree to which the crew must protect itself from Danvers, rather than relying on the help that Enlightenment philosophers thought it should offer in normalizing their irrational impulses; the fact that they frequently forget to wear their
masks underscores their vulnerability to the asylum's influence, and the
derge to which they mask, rather than work through, madness.

Danvers is a perverted version of the asylum because its director,
Simon, is a monster, rather than the benevolent despot from whose body the
panoptic gaze that gave the 18th-century asylum its meaning emanated.
Like his predecessor's, Simon's gaze is disembodied - everywhere but
nowhere (we presume that the numerous aerial shots of Danvers represent his
omniscient viewpoint, since they cannot be attributed to any character within
the narrative) - central - it is founded in the empty restraint chair from which
Gordon first hears Simon's voice, which the opening shot establishes as
fundamental, and to which subsequent shots draw us back (to the point that
the sequence of Phil's pursuit of the maddened Gordon near the end is a
series of intercuts between Gordon's flight and Phil's approach to the chair, as
if the two spaces through which the men move were identical) - and, finally,
disciplinary, since it is Simon's presence which directs Gordon's violence,
and since it is actions or objects tied to Simon - the box of tapes which
happens to draw Mike's curiosity, even though it is underneath the
one he is
initially investigating, the coin that accidentally leads Hank to the hidden
treasure trove and inspires Gordon's killing of him, the coincidental power
failure (the shot of the darkness encroaching through a series of enclosure
suggesting an intentional force) that drives the nyctophobic Jeff from the
building into Gordon's murderous arms - that index his presence. But unlike
the kindly director of the Enlightenment asylum, Simon has no body in
which to provisionally locate the gaze - he exists only as a voice. Without a
body, authority cannot be controlled, and the tyranny of the director cannot
be resisted (the structure of Foucault's asylum, with its play of multiple
authorities, was meant to ward off this possibility), and the terror of Danvers
is that evil's power is omnipotent as well as omniscient because bodiless.

Moreover, in the model of the asylum proposed by Foucault, the
power of the panoptic gaze is one which orders and consequently cures. This
is most emphatically the reverse of what Simon's gaze accomplishes: Like
the spider which we see in one brief yet all-important shot, Simon lures the
current inmates of Danvers to the centre of his web, breaks them down and
destroys them. This constant movement to the centre - we think again of the
recurrent shots of the restraining chair - has the opposite goal of Foucault's
asylum, where the panoptic gaze radiates outward, through corridors and
rooms which are meant to open towards the outside world beyond the walled
enclosure, towards the regime of sanity where its inmates are meant
eventually to return. Danvers' illusion of order - wards, stairways, upper and
lower levels - and the possibility of escape - at least in the first part of the
film, the crew spends time on the grounds of the asylum and leaves for the
night - in fact, hides the vortex of Simon's web, which sucks first Gordon -
after the murder of his family, he lives there - and then the others into it.
Unlike Foucault's asylum, Danvers is a labyrinth of disorienting, chaos-inducing layers, from which it is impossible to “come back,” as the men frequently enjoin each other to do on their walkie-talkies.

So the strategy of containing the monster through reason, as embodied in Foucault's asylum, fails: The Enlightenment model cannot account for a model of insanity and violence caused by a supernatural evil, rather than a psychological one, nor can it accommodate one where the source of insanity is bodiless. What Simon inspires, Anderson seems to say, is the price of abandoning a belief in the supernatural, as 18th-century philosophy did, and in consequence there is no recourse against him. Were this Dracula, holy water and communion wafers could lay the monster; but just as Stoker's Crew of Light is ineffectual against Dracula until they recognize the value of fighting the supernatural with the supernatural, the crew of Session 9 will remain impotent against Simon unless they reach a similar realization, and Anderson shows them to be too blinkered by their modernity ever to do so. In fact, he subtly proposes a counter-model rooted in pre-Enlightenment thought, where madness and violence were expressions of original sin, and therefore to be accepted because inevitable: The film identifies the characters as embodiments of the Seven Deadly Sins. Anger is all too apparent in most of the crew; Hank is slothful, taking extra breaks and, as Phil constantly points out, not pulling his share; Hank and Phil are envious of each other's sexual prowess, as well as lustful; Gordon's impulse to complete the job on an unrealistic timetable is an expression of pride; Hank's greed leads to his death, and the acquiescence of the crew is guaranteed by a promised bonus; and even gluttony makes its appearance in the film's iteration of meals. While acknowledging the primacy of a model in contradiction to that of the reasoned asylum would not save any of the characters, it would at least make as much sense as can be made of Simon as an agent of Satan seeking the overthrow of good men: his constant whispering in Gordon and Mike's ears, his offering of death-tainted silver to Hank, and his exploitation of the sinful taint in Mary Hobbes' innocence - when the psychiatrist asks Simon, on the tape, what his role in corrupting Mary was, he replies, in best Satanic style, “She let me - they always do.” If Anderson's characters would recognize themselves as the “weak and the wounded” where Simon lives, they might at least come to terms with his evil, but in a world ruled by the Enlightenment conception of insanity and the asylum, they are unable to do so. Ultimately, Danvers is atavistic, promoting regression rather than the progress that Foucault's asylum promised, its malign power most obvious in its ability to turn Gordon, the most reasonable of the crew (and thus theoretically most resistant to its influence) into Simon's tool for mayhem.

The second strategy which Anderson deploys only to reveal its inefficacy against the supernatural monster is a more familiar, generic one.
Time and again, horror texts introduce the haunted, interstitial space (the Bates house in Psycho, fogbound Whitby and London in Dracula, the half-real, half-dream world of Nightmare on Elm Street, the glacier of Frankenstein, for example) and then locate the monster within it; the narrative of the film then normalizes the space in question so as to circumscribe the monster and neutralize it, at least until it returns in the sequel, as the repressed always does. Likewise, the horror text often emphasizes technology, whose concrete nature can stabilize the monstrous figure. Thus Dracula is bound by the various journals, tapes, and religious and scientific procedures that make up the narrative which presents and contains him, as are other familiar demons. Because the conventional horror film's intent is to pin down the monster, this technology is often contrasted with an emphasis on the body - the fluidity of the monster's nature can be disciplined - Norman Bates reduced to a psychological test case - and rendered vulnerable - when Dracula's or Lucy's bodies can be staked and beheaded, the monster can be abjected from powerful enemy to inert flesh and then expelled.

Anderson makes use of these conventions only to undermine them. First, Danvers is an interstitial space - empty yet inhabited (temporarily by the crew, permanently by the tapes in the basement), a place where sanity (at least theoretically) can be restored, but from which insanity cannot be banished, a real building and a bat-shaped, organic yet inorganic nightmare place. Yet, because Simon is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, the space he rules from his restraint-chair throne is not interstitial; while there seems on the surface to be a separation of inside and outside, between which Danvers exists, this is illusory. The grounds of the asylum, in theory outside the haunted space, are equally haunted: The cemetery outside the asylum where Mary Hobbes lies under a numbered marker - the numbering and order of the markers suggesting that this is the world of order, where the dead are truly laid to rest - is just as much the setting for Gordon's mad cell-phone conversations with his dead wife as the interior of the asylum. The gateway to the cemetery or the fences around Danvers suggest that there is a demarcation between the exterior and interior worlds, yet when we see the gateway through Gordon's eyes, or even when we see Mike and Phil discussing Gordon there, it becomes an extension of the claustrophobic gateway structures that frame the crew's movements through Danvers. When Jeff bursts out of the corridor where Simon's darkness has pursued him, he brings that darkness with him and is murdered outside just as surely as the rest of the crew is murdered inside; the violent anger inspired by Simon pursues the crew even into their arguments on the expansive space of the asylum's roof. Simon follows Gordon outside, into the “real” world: His voice is what inspires Gordon to murder there as well as inside Danvers. If there is no demarcation of exterior and interior, if there is no “between,” the
interstitial space takes over the world, and the monster cannot be isolated to be killed.

Second, Anderson presents technology as a possible, but ultimately ineffectual, solution to the problem evil poses. The dangers of Danvers are too multiple to be tractable; marking them with coloured “smoogee” and removing hazardous material through mechanical means is inadequate to neutralize an immense building, particularly under the constraints of the unrealistic timetable the crew has set itself: Grigg's tour of the facility early on in the film, where each new room reveals new dangers, suggests the impossibility of the task. The jenny that generates power for the work regularly fails; power cords come unplugged; Jeff doesn't know how to use the machine that removes the tile in the dining room - reliance on technology impedes, rather than further, the removal of hazardous materials. Even Anderson's emphasis on photographs reveals these to be empty simulacra; the images of Gordon's family in his wallet, which seem to be of living people, show in fact the dead, and the collages on Mary Hobbes' seclusion room, mixing periods, events, people and animals have not helped either of them to resist Simon's influence. For Anderson, faith in a reality pinned down by science is misplaced, as Mary Hobbes' tapes show: The careful professional questioning of the psychiatrist, his methodical movement from alter to alter, his scrupulous recording of Mary's case in accompanying notebooks to get to the heart of her case fails when what he finds is an evil that resists professional explanation. In Dracula, the monster's enclosure by recordings within journals which recount his neutralization through the technologies of religion, folklore and hypnosis leads to his demise; a similar effort to enclose Simon is ineffectual, as all who have been contaminated die or succumb to final insanity. The image of Gordon talking on a broken cell phone to his dead wife near the end of the film, followed by Simon's final voiceover at the conclusion, effectively - and chillingly - sums up Anderson's questioning of technology as a resource against monstrous evil.

Technology is ineffectual in Anderson's film because it depends on a concrete object, a body, to work, and Simon has no body. This is perhaps Anderson's most original contribution: Unlike most horror texts, which rely on blood, dismemberment, and other bodily effects to iterate that the monster can be controlled because it is embodied, there is very little gore in Session 9. For example, we do not see Wendy and Emma's murder, nor do we witness Gordon's mutilation of Hank or his murder of the other crew members. While the film does show us the murder of Hank and the unlucky recruit intended to replace him, it does so near the end, which suggests a concession to audience expectations for a horror film and to marketability more than an integral theme. Otherwise, the body is rendered inert, anesthetized; blood flows, but we do not by and large see it do so.
Rather than relying on body horror, what Anderson relies on is what I would call auditory horror, which is all the more chilling because located in a voice or in sound. We hear, rather than see, Mary Hobbes' killing of her parents; Anderson gives us the sounds, rather than the images, of Gordon's murder of his family; Simon has no bodily presence, merely a vocal one. When the monstrous is located in a sound rather than in a body, there is no concrete reality which one can isolate and expel: monstrous bodies can be laid to rest, staked, or otherwise eliminated, but monstrous sounds echo, can be heard in Gordon's head just as easily as on tapes to which he has no access, can exist in flashback outside of time - the murder of Gordon or Mary Hobbes' families - or in time - Simon's final voiceover comes from the past, but also exists in the narrative present. Moreover, in Session 9, the voice cannot be coerced - when Simon speaks on the Mary Hobbes tapes, the moment is the most chilling in the film because he has up to then resisted the psychiatrist's efforts to call him up, and speaks now because he wants to. When supernatural evil has a voice but no body, Anderson seems to say, there is no way to fight it; it cannot be banished in the way the demon in The Exorcist is, because there is no body to banish it from.

Anderson's message in Session 9, then, is a bleak one. Unlike other horror texts, which reassure us that the monster can be located, defined by reason or generic convention as something that can be cured, neutralized or expelled, Anderson underscores the idea that we have no recourse against this kind of evil. Because it is supernatural, it exceeds Enlightenment reason; because it has no body, it exceeds all efforts to contain it. At the end of Session 9, we are left with the anxiety that when the monster's home is “in the weak and the wounded” - Simon's reply to the psychiatrist about where he lives - it lives everywhere (since what human being is not “weak and wounded” in some way), and when it is invisible, yet speaks, who can resist the Tempter's call to just let Simon act, especially since as he affirms, “they always do.”

Notes


Bibliography


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From the Enchanted Forest to the Desert: Reading
*The Brothers Grimm* as Anti-War Critique

Ann-Marie Cook

**Abstract**

In the midst of the upheaval triggered by the War of 1812, the Brothers Grimm published their first collection of fairy tales. Nearly 200 years later, in 2005, Terry Gilliam’s *The Brothers Grimm* was released against a backdrop of yet another social upheaval: The war in Iraq. In order to locate the ideological work of the film more precisely, I shall examine it in terms of the parallels between the film’s historical setting and the contemporary context in which it was produced and viewed. In particular, I shall consider the development of a fairy tale discourses to discuss the war; the representation of wartime occupation and its consequences; the treatment of real versus imagined threats and the appropriation of Enlightenment discourses as part of the case for war. Through this analysis, I hope to illuminate how Gilliam played deftly with the relationship between the Grimms’ tales and their socio-political context in a way that articulated an anti-war message for a contemporary world facing a new battle with different sorts of monsters.

**Keywords**

Brothers Grimm, Terry Gilliam, Iraq War, War on Terror, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

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Our rulers will have to employ a great deal of fiction and deceit for the benefits of their subjects. - Plato, *The Republic*

This paper is part of ongoing project aimed at tracing out the ways in which films set in the past engage critically with contemporary political discourses. When we think of films set in the past, there is sometimes a tendency to regard them as escapist narratives whose visual pleasures stem from an ability to seal spectators within an insulated world that seems far removed from the troubles we encounter in real life. But due to the cyclical nature of history, the past is not really the foreign country it appears to be; and for that very reason, it represents an ideal space in which displaced social critiques can be articulated. Grimm scholars have already illuminated some of the ways in which the original tales engaged with the economic, political, and gender issues gripping the society in which the Brothers lived and worked, and I believe that Gilliam’s “take” on the Brothers and their tales can be subjected to the same sort of ideological analysis. Indeed, *The
Brothers Grimm offers a prime example of how even the most fanciful of subject matter (signified by enchanted forests, evil mirror queens and woodsmen that morph into wolves) can be mobilised in ways that engage with the horrifying realities and mythologies associated with the War on Terror.

Released in August 2005, Gilliam’s film is neither a biopic of Jacob and Willhelm Grimm, nor is it an adaptation of their stories, though elements of the brothers’ biography and scenes from their most famous tales certainly inform the themes and images of the film. Indeed, “Jake” (Heath Ledger) and “Will” (Matt Damon) are portrayed as charlatans who travel the French-occupied, German countryside conning superstitious villagers into believing that they are haunted by witches and monsters and then charging extortionate rates for their exorcism services. The Grimms are apprehended by Mercurio Cavaldi (Peter Stormare), a torture master acting on behalf of the French commander, General Delatombe (Jonathan Pryce), and threatened with death unless they travel to the village of Marbaden and use their “ghostbusting” skills to find out why little girls keep going missing in the adjacent forest. Assisted by Angelika (Lena Headey), the daughter of the woodsman, who has himself disappeared, the Brothers travel deep into the forest where Jake’s fascination with myth and magic puts him at odds with Will, who insists upon a rational, physical explanation for everything. Once there, they encounter a tower inhabited by an aging Mirror Queen (Monica Bellucci) who has arranged the kidnappings as part of plan to cast a spell that would restore her youth and beauty. When French forces are killed under mysterious circumstances in the forest, General Delatombe publicly accuses the Grimms of masterminding the woodland violence, and orders his troops to set fire to the forest and execute the brothers. But in a feminist twist on the archetypal rescue narrative, Angelika saves the brothers and the Mirror Queen magically quenches the flames in preparation for casting her “spell of youth.” As Will engages in a fight to the death with Delatombe, Jake prevents the Queen from completing her spell by shattering the mirror in which her youthful image resides. With the enchantment broken, the daughters of the village saved and the brothers freed from the threat of capital punishment, the film offers the obligatory fairy tale ending, though Gilliam teases viewers with the tagline: They lived happily ever after…or did they?

1. **Critical Reception.**

From a critical perspective, the film was greeted with almost universal derision. Even the reviews that commended Gilliam’s innovative visual style and imaginative approach to subject matter ultimately concluded that the film as a whole never fully realised its artistic potential. Critics lambasted the hammy acting performances, the uneven script, Matt Damon’s
unconvincing hairpiece, and the overall tone of a film that could never quite
decide whether it was a Hammer horror film or a screwball comedy. *The
New York Times* summed up the general trend in critical reception when it declared:

>[A]s usual in Mr. Gilliam's films, there are lavishly tricked out
sets, detailed costumes and props, a darkly ironic if unsteady
tone and hiccups of strained surrealism. [...] Despite his kinks
and flourishes, he never manages to stitch together the
kidnapping subplot with all his dumb sight gags (a skinned
rabbit, an errant hairpiece), cartoon performances and an
unfortunate, pop-psychological explanation for the brothers' interest in the uses and abuses of enchantment.²

Even reviews that acknowledged the existence of a connection with
contemporary issues, never explored fully the dynamics of the historical parallels, as we can observe in the *Village Voice*’s verdict:

>Noting that it’s the only major release of 2005 that makes hay
of an illegal military occupation will only get you so far -
Gilliam is an escapist, not just an escapism manufacturer, and
for him history is still grist for Pythonian high jinks.³

However, I would argue that the tendency of critics to focus on aesthetic and
narrative deficiencies contributed to a situation in which important
considerations of the film’s ideological work were largely ignored.

Although Gilliam has never acknowledged the film as a
commentary on the war, his involvement in anti-war protests in London
along with his public criticisms of America’s geopolitical dominance
highlight his political activism. Gilliam readily admits that, “all my films are
really about America in many ways. I used to say my films were messages in
bottles for America.”⁴ In the case of *The Brothers Grimm*, the message must
surely be a critical one, for as the filmmaker conceded in an interview with
*The Daily Telegraph*, “America’s influence in the world is too dominant. I
hate it and feel guilty about it.”⁵ In light of such sentiments, let us now turn
to a consideration of how Gilliam’s vision of the Brothers Grimm articulates
an anti-war critique. I want to focus on four main parallels between the film’s
historical setting and the contemporary context in which it was produced and
viewed: The development of fairy tale discourses to discuss the war;
representation of wartime occupation; the treatment of real versus imagined
threats and the engagement with Enlightenment discourses.
2. Fairy Tale Discourse.

Fairy tales offered a fascinating framework for public discussions of the war in Iraq. Former UN Chief Weapons Inspector Scott Ritter described the American government’s claims about Iraqi sovereignty to be “as fictitious as any fairy tale ever penned by the Brothers Grimm.” Following the capture of Saddam Hussein, Observer columnist Mary Riddell observed that he had ceased to be the monstrous figure he once was, in the same way that “when exposed to real life, stage coaches become pumpkins, and the mythic melts into the mundane.” Former British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw was likened to Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz, when Times columnist Ann Treneman wrote that he “clicked the heels on his (admittedly large) ruby slippers, and wished very, very hard that everyone is going to live happily ever after [in a] statement [that] provided a fairytale template for the new Iraq.” The Independent called Bush’s claim that Saddam Hussein had sought uranium from Niger a “spies’ fairytale.” Daily Mail columnist Peter Hitchens wrote that it was easier for governments to “go about slaying and capturing evil monsters far away, gigantic fairytale villains whose downfall we can all enjoy from a safe distance” rather than tackle tough domestic issues. The Daily Mirror’s Richard Stott went so far as to compare former Prime Minister Tony Blair to a father reading his children (the public) a “fairytale” in which: “They were bad. We were good. Force our God-fearing ways on them and all would be well. Democracy would reign supreme, peace would break out everywhere in the Middle East and we would all live happily ever after.” Just as factual developments pertaining to the war were discussed in terms of fantasy, so too did the fairy tale world evoked in Gilliam’s film lend itself to an engagement with contemporary debates about the war.

3. War and Occupation Imagery.

The most striking parallel for me is the fact that the film returns to the period of the Napoleonic invasion and occupation of Germany at the very moment when Coalition forces were occupying Iraq. But it is the way in which the occupying forces are depicted which lends the film its anti-war sting. The French troops under the command of General Delatombe are ruthless, violent, and in many cases incompetent. Like Michael Moore’s footage of George W. Bush taking time away from his golf game to urge the leaders of the world to stand together in the War on Terror in Fahrenheit 9/11, the film depicts General Delatombe as a man who is more interested in food, entertaining visiting dignitaries and putting on a show of imperial splendour to impress the villagers than in actually managing the territory under his control. Delatombe’s irresponsible leadership is further illustrated through his recruitment of the services of Mercurio Cavaldi, a zany yet
utterly sadistic master of torture. Cavaldi’s workshop is a surreal space that evokes the spectacular ritual of corporal punishment and humiliation. In a turn that makes the scene even more surreal, a string quartet strikes up in the background as Cavaldi orders hapless victims to be dunked, crushed, cut, and otherwise maimed.

While the brothers suffer the humiliation of being dragged from their rooms by ropes attached to horses and being held in cramped cages, the worst of the torture is used as a basis for blackmauling the brothers into submitting to Delatombe’s wishes. Two of their fellow conmen are apprehended, strung upside down with their heads in lanterns filled with insects, and lowered into a hot cauldron until the brothers agree to help the people of Marbaden. Angelika is placed in a barrel beneath a series of massive blades that threaten to slice her to pieces unless the brothers admit that there is nothing haunted about the forest. While Cavaldi’s madcap antics keep the terror from becoming too real, there are certainly uncomfortable similarities between the rituals portrayed on screen and human rights abuses in Guantanamo Bay and, even more particularly, Abu Ghraib, where photos of prisoners wrapped in plastic, wired for electrocution and tied to leashes held by smiling American guards provided a new iconography of abjection.

4. Real Versus Imagined Dangers.

The task of dealing with danger is central to the narratives of most fairy tales, but in the case of The Brothers Grimm, the mediation on real and imagined dangers takes on particular ideological value when read within the context of the Iraqi invasion. Fairy tales have been seen as cautionary narratives that offer lessons in the art of coping with dangers and threats to personal security: Red Riding Hood must overcome the threat posed by the wolf, Cinderella must overcome the threat posed by her evil step-mother and step-sisters, and so forth. But the world constructed by the Grimms is a dark one in which danger lurks in unexpected places, especially in families where blood ties offer little promise of safety, and figures that appear benign prove to be the source of real evil. The idea that threats are not what they seem resonates through the film as the brothers’ elaborate ghostbusting methods are shown to be pure trickery, as the father-figure woodsman is shown to be a criminal who, for the sake of the Queen, kidnaps his own daughters, despite reassuring them that he is their protector, and as the Mirror Queen herself is exposed for the aging hag she truly is. The idea that the greatest threat is created by those who claim to provide security and defence is entirely timely because the production and release of the film coincided with revelations that the American and British governments had gone to war on false claims about the threat posed by Saddam Hussein.

As the public is now well aware, President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair made the case for war on the basis that Hussein
possessed weapons of mass destruction and had to be stopped. The Bush Administration also sought to stir up public support for the war by claiming that Hussein was linked to the al-Qaeda terrorist network responsible for the attacks on 9/11. The strategy effectively boiled down to stoking the flames of public hysteria and persuading people that Coalition forces were the only thing that stood between survival and Armageddon. President Bush and Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Advisor, even blocked efforts to wait until arms inspectors had concluded their mission in Iraq on the grounds that “we don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.”

As Dan Hind has observed, the scenario betrayed the truth of H. L. Mencken’s claim that, the whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamourous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.

By the time Gilliam’s film was released, the 9/11 Commission in America and the Butler and Hutton Reports in Britain had already provided conclusive evidence that their respective governments had misled the public by over-claiming the veracity of intelligence about the real nature of the Iraqi threat. No WMDs had been found. Nonetheless, in autumn of 2005, Vice President Dick Cheney continued to play the WMD card in order to discredit advocates of troop withdrawal:

The terrorists believe that by controlling an entire country they will be able to target and overthrow other governments in the region, and to establish a radical Islamic empire that encompasses a region from Spain, across North Africa, through the Middle East and South Asia, all the way to Indonesia. They have made clear, as well, their ultimate ambitions: To arm themselves with weapons of mass destruction, to destroy Israel, to intimidate all Western countries and to cause mass death in the United States.

While there is no doubt that Hussein was a tyrant and that terrorist attacks have made the world an unsafe place, the film’s treatment of invented threats echoes allegations that Bush and Blair failed in their duties as protectors of their nations by launching a war under a false moral pretext and thereby inflaming further anti-Western sentiments in the Islamic world.

5. Enlightenment Discourse.

Amidst the WMD hysteria, proponents of the war sought to portray themselves and their mission as the last bastion of defence against dark
forces that would eradicate the legacy of the Enlightenment. Tony Blair characterised the War on Terror as an

age-old battle between progress and reaction, between those who embrace and see opportunity in the modern world and those who reject its existence; between optimism and hope on the one hand; and pessimism and fear on the other.\footnote{Such sentiments were also at the heart of the White House’s \textit{Progress Report on the Global War on Terrorism}: Murderous attacks in Bali, Jakarta, Mombasa, Riyadh, Casablanca, Jerusalem, Baghdad, and Najaf underscore terrorists’ continued contempt for the innocent, their fear of progress, and their hatred of peace. The civilised world must remain vigilant and committed to a long and critical struggle - until Americans and people around the world can lead their lives free from fear of terrorism.\footnote{But as Dan Hind argues, the increased usage of Enlightenment rhetoric following the terrorist attacks was particularly problematic for two reasons. First, it enabled the British and American governments to marginalise opponents of the War on Terror by claiming that “either you are for us, or you are against […] progress and reason.” Second, by framing terrorist attacks as part of an ideological struggle against modern Enlightenment, the governments were able to deflect criticisms and enquiry away from their own conduct and “the political context of the attacks.” Thus, for Hind, claims about the Islamic threat to the Enlightenment values were disingenuous in light of the ways in which the British and American governments had used the excuse of national security to erode Enlightenment values such individual liberties and open enquiry. Concerns about the status of the Enlightenment were equally relevant to the period in which the Brothers Grimm wrote because, as followers of the Romantic tradition, they were keen to revive the myths and legends of the past as an alternative to the values associated with the menacing French forces. As Valerie Paradiz observes, the Romantics regarded Napoleon’s imperial ambitions to subjugate rather than liberate the territories under their control as proof that “the struggle for the ‘Enlightened’ ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity fought for in the French revolution had failed.” The Romantics’ turned to \textit{Volk} culture as the source of inspiration for “a unified German nation in which citizens might participate in governance.” Paradiz explains that,}
The common people and the simple way of life were now celebrated as morally superior and a genuine expression of a nation’s cultural identity. […] the spirit of the Volk was represented by old songs, legends, fairy tales, and myths, the discovery and preservation of which became an essential project for Romanticism after 1800.22

In the film, the French are situated as the force that will bring Enlightenment to the backward, savage villagers they have conquered. Indeed, Delatombe refers to his fellow dignitaries at the dinner table as Enlightened ones and often refers to the villagers as backward heathens. Even Will and Jake parrot his bigotry by mocking the superstitious ways of the ordinary people, until the end of the film, when Jake’s knowledge of ancient fairy tales enables him to solve the mystery of the disappearing girls. While it stands to reason that the French troops would be associated with the Enlightenment, Gilliam’s particularly unfavourable portrayal of them suggests a desire to raise the questions about whether they really are so Enlightened and, indeed, whether Enlightenment values are desirable if they legitimise the abusive behaviour of the French. Over the course of the film, we, like the Grimms, are called upon to think about the dynamics between the real and the imaginary and to scrutinise assumptions about empirical truth and ignorance. Although the opportunity to reflect upon what it means to be Enlightened or share in the values of the Enlightenment was lost on most audiences, I believe that the film is at its transgressive best when it challenges the central premises behind the case for war whilst undermining the cinematic stand-ins for the occupying Coalition forces.

6. Conclusion

In locating the film as an anti-war critique, it is not necessarily my intent to suggest that the film offers a precise allegory in which certain characters represent specific political figures or international players involved in the Iraqi conflict. While such an exacting reading might be interesting to develop, I believe the political work of the film can be assessed in a productive way by simply examining the text in relation to the particular cultural moment in which it was created and identifying parallels between the film’s critical treatment of military invasion and occupation and the political discourses that were circulating in Britain and America concerning the war in Iraq. Given the fact that most mainstream filmmakers were loathe to undertake projects with wartime subject matter during the initial years of the conflict for fear of being accused of being unpatriotic, disloyal, or unsupportive of the troops, it makes sense to see this film as part of a broader dialogue in which filmmakers mobilised historical settings and subjects in ways that enabled them to engage with the issues and themes associated with
the Iraq War and War on Terror without appearing to do so in an overt way. It is my hope that scholarship will continue to scrutinise the contours of this dialogue as it developed across film, television and other modes of digital media.

The magic of the fairy tale lies in its ability to entertain while teaching a lesson. Unfortunately, in the case of *The Brothers Grimm* neither the entertainment value nor the ideological lessons on offer in the film have been subjected to the sort of scrutiny they deserve. But hopefully, by tracing some of the intersections between the historical setting and the contemporary wartime context, we can begin to appreciate the political work of this surprisingly rich text and begin to learn the lessons available to us on the journey from the Enchanted forest to Iraqi desert.

**Notes**


7. M Riddell, ‘Here be monsters: The West became fixated by Osama bin Laden’s psyche and thus made him more powerful’, *The Observer*, 23 May 2004, p. 28.


10 P Hitchens, ‘Ok, so they got him’, Mail on Sunday, 21 December 2003, p. 32.
14 ibid.
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18 Hind, p. 4.
19 ibid., p. 19.
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Following the successful completion of a PhD in Film Studies, Ann-Marie Cook is currently pursuing further postgraduate study at the Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, King’s College London. She is indebted to Amy Lee Bell for sharing her expertise on fairy tales and for recommending some particularly useful scholarly sources that aided in developing this paper.
Monster as a Victim of War: The Case of Homer in The Best Years of Our Lives

Amaya Muruzábal

Abstract
In spite of the noteworthy lack of academic interest in the representation of the veteran in films, there are some researchers who have studied the complex phenomenon of the implicit representation of the veteran in horror films. From this interesting perspective, it has underlined the significance of understanding the veteran as a monster. In some ways, veterans represent the subconscious guilt of a nation that has fought a war. Veterans are also victims of war, and they come back home to spread the horror they suffered. Nonetheless, beyond this horror film re-evaluation of the veteran, it is also important to highlight the lack of a systematic study on this issue. The character of the veteran as a victim of war is known, but the reason why he is a monster has not been studied in depth. The aim of this paper is to tackle this task in relation to The Best Years of Our Lives. Through the story of one of its characters, Homer, a study on the monstrous nature of the veteran is done. Due to the fact that the goal of this article is to find out some constant features of the veteran as a monster, this particular cinematographic representation is compared to the Ancient Greek representation of the returning veteran. In underlining the common features, an ontology of the veteran as monster is found.

Keywords
Veteran, monster, trauma, PTSD, narratives of memory, collective memory, redemption, guilt, hero

In spite of the fact that the war film is one of the best suited cinematographic genres, the image of the veteran has constantly been forgotten by academics. In part, it is due to the fact that - as Early, Walker, and Brookes suggest in their studies - war veterans cross the line to other genres where they fit better. This amazing fact highlights one of the main characteristics of the veteran: war has made a killer of him, a monster without compassion. He is now a creature which is closer to those who died on the battleground than to the ones who still live in the society he must come back to. However, at the same time, he is a peculiar monster as even one of the first western narratives - the Odyssey - points out: The veteran is a hurt monster, another victim of the war he fought. Coming home is then a second war.
With attention to the Homeric narratives, this paper seeks to study the monstrous root of the veteran that helps him to fit well in other genres. To do this, I will focus on a melodrama—a whole cinematographic genre dedicated to the scar or the fact of having been hurt—which was released in 1946: *The Best Years of Our Lives.* This film represents the process of coming home a veteran who has lost his arms—meaningfully called Homer—has to carry out. Picking his experience as an example, throughout this paper I will analyse the image of the soldier as a victim of war, and the process of humanization the veteran—a kind of monster—has to live to really return home.

A comparison with the character of Odysseus and other heroes of the *Iliad* will help to detect which the constants of coming home from the war are, and to illuminate how the image of the veteran as a monster has been represented since the Ancient Greek literature. In doing so, I will first analyse what the veteran and the monster have in common. Second, I will apply this analysis to the specific case of Homer. Last, I will conclude with a description of the process of de-monstering the veteran has to carry out: A process which is a *sine qua non* condition to really come back home from war.

1. **Becoming a Monster.**

There is a simple but meaningful feature of war that is not usually told: The fact that it is a process of becoming a monster. During the training, men are not only trained to survive in a mad background, but also to be an agent of evil. The consequences of this primary reality of war are considerable. To this respect, the veterans’ psychiatrist Jonathan Shay underlines that the complex Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has a moral origin, related to the betrayal of what people presently understand as “what is right,” whilst the Ancient Greek soldiers identified with their *thèmis*:

That is to say, their basic ethical guidelines.

Therefore, facing the veterans’ drama means to understand the transcendental nature of their inner conflict. Overall, the veteran feels that he is guilty: first of all, of what he did; second, of being alive; and third, of making his love ones suffer. Suffering is then one of the main characteristics of the veteran since his first representation, the character of Ulysses in the *Odyssey*. Remarkably—as Auerbach points out—the Roman name of Odysseus, Ulysses, means “scar.” Scars are thus a war heritage and a way for identifying the warrior even after the battle. Therefore, the veteran is the one who suffers, and also the one who make others suffer.

The veteran feels that no one who has not seen the evil nature of war can understand his inner suffering, and this is why he rejects their family and friends. After the radical experience of war, he feels closer to the
Underworld, and thus to the soldiers who died. In this sense, the veteran is a living dead: Another characteristic that the veteran and the monsters have in common. The ex-combatant knows that he has lost his humanity forever, due to the fact that he was a witness of horror. Since it escapes the limits of reason, looking directly to the Evil cannot be overcome by psychological means. As the Ancient Greek knew, the veteran’s acts are *miasma*: something that pollutes everything, a basic contamination of life, or a transcendental guilt that we have to share because it is bigger and deeper than the veteran’s acts themselves.

However, the societies the veterans belong to do not easily accept their part in the warrior’s acts. In fact, people in the home-front often think why they have to accept this premise if they were not at war. From this reaction, it could be derived that society can “understand” the veterans’ suffering, but it cannot assume its part in what happened. That is to say: Civil people want to help veterans but, at the same time, they reject to share their inner guilt. Nonetheless, a common feature of the veterans is that they do not want to be simply helped. Like Al - Homer’s colleague in *The Best Years of Our Lives* - says, they do not want to be rehabilitated. After the radical experience of war, veterans demand an unconditional loyalty. Exactly, the same code of virtue that rules their relationship to other veterans. The ex-combatants are more than friends. As the Ancient Greek literature would describe it, they mutually behave as *heraîtoi*: Comrades in arms. These comrades are absolutely loyal to each other - even after a member of the platoon dies - because they radically understand each other. To some extent, they are a group of monsters: People who know what evil means.

This knowledge makes them to reject the therapeutic solutions society offers them. After war, soldiers deeply understand the complexities of life and the transcendental dimension of some or their acts, i.e., killing others. To this respect, soldiers do not lie to themselves. They consciously acknowledge to the fact that as warriors, their main virtue is *biê* or the ability to inflict damage. Therefore, in doing so, they accept that there is no hero besides the monster.

2. **Homer as a Monster in *The Best Years of Our Lives***.

A soldier is trained to be a pirate, as Shay points out in *Odysseus in America*. They are allowed to do what is forbidden in society: Cheating, stealing and, obviously, killing. To get their aims, soldiers are trained to selectively block feelings like fear, guilt, sorrow or pity. As a consequence, this inability to feel is the new basis of their monstrous character. After war, the society to which the ex-combatant wants to return demands the veteran to
leave his newly learnt habits, but this conversion becomes remarkably difficult, since war has ruined the veteran’s sense of community.\textsuperscript{16} To sum up, recovering from war is so difficult because the soldier has lost his ability for trusting others.

As \textit{The Best Years of Our Lives} shows, there is a main reason why civil society does not know how to help its veterans: The fact that it limits the understanding of the problem to the psychological dimension.\textsuperscript{17} Due to the fact that - as we have seen above - the nature of the veteran’s suffering has a moral basis, there is not real understanding of his pain and, therefore, there is not a real solution to his suffering: his radical necessity to accept him and also to forgive him. Whilst society is able to cope with the veteran’s need for economic aids, or his psychological problems; even whilst society is willing to forgive his bad behaviour, the veteran demands more: A transcendental understanding of his sorrow.\textsuperscript{18} Society is willing to intensively talk about “the veterans’ problem,” but it does not want to confess its radical uneasiness with them.\textsuperscript{19} Homer, the young disabled veteran of \textit{The Best Years of Our Lives}, describes this reaction with mastery: “They keep staring at these hooks or else they keep staring away from them.”

Nonetheless, \textit{The Best Years of Our Lives} presents two exceptions to this hypocrisy that deserve to be study in depth, due to the fact that remarkably, both are rooted in the traditional literary and cinematographic representation of the monster. Whilst everyone behaves with unconformity with Homer, two people do not: His little sister, Luella, and his fiancée, Wilma. Only the Beauty, on the one hand, and the children, on the other, can face the Beast. I will highlight the first case as continues.

Luella, Homer’s charming sister, is about six years old. Since the beginning of the film, she is the only one in the family who normally admits the oddity of her brother’s arms, and therefore, the only - with his uncle Butch - who accepts Homer as he is now. This becomes evident when Luella makes Homer smile during a very tense meeting with Wilma’s family. Without any consideration to the adults’ feelings, Luella curiously stares at Homer’s hooks and finally she decides to imitate him by hiding her arms in her pyjama. Gratefully, Homer smiles at the child to thank her for her sincerity.

Nonetheless, at the same time Luella’s gaze relieves Homer, the fact that she can also look directly at the monster he is hurts him. Thus, his rage burst out when he discovers that Luella spies on him while he is having a difficult conversation with Wilma. Homer shouts to Luella: “You wanna see how the hooks work? You wanna see the freak?” Homer addresses to her but he is unable to open the door with his hooks. Then music accelerates: “All right, I’ll show you. Have a good look.” As he promises, Homer shows his hooks to Luella by breaking the window with them. For the first and only
time along the film, the narrative point of view gets down to Luella’s eyes. Wyler’s “spectatorial democracy,” so admired by Bazin and other critics, is put aside to underline Homer’s monstrous nature. Thus, from Luella’s standpoint, the hooks are huge and Homer’s face seems menacing. Then Luella cries and we witness it through Homer’s eyes: the terrible certainty he gains of being a monster.

3. The Redemption of the Monster.

It has been said that only the children and the Beauty can face monstrousness, and in looking directly at it - without denying its nature - they are who give the first step to redeem the monster. In this sense, it is relevant that Wilma witnesses the scene of Homer’s rage with us. Her reaction does not consist on criticising him, but on trying to help, despite Homer’s rejection: “I know, Wilma, I was wrong. I shouldn’t have acted like that. It wasn’t her who burnt my hands off. I’ll be all right. I’ve just got to work it out myself.” Wilma tries again: “I can help you, Homer, if you let me.” Nonetheless, Homer is less ready than her to face his reality: “I know how to work it out myself.”

Homer’s reaction is a direct consequence of his inability to cope with his sorrow, a main characteristic of the Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) His behavioural pattern suggests that he suffers from this illness: He wants to learn how to shoot a rifle with his hooks, and Wilma even fears that the weapon is loaded; Homer does not want to talk about the future with her; he seems elusive, and rude, as well. These are symptoms of the complex PTSD syndrome, characterised by the attraction for danger; the inability to cope with thoughts and feelings related to a traumatic event; violence and hyper vigilance; strangeness from the others and cruelty with the love ones.

Only a transcendent event that took place the night Wilma visits Homer can change his behaviour. Wilma’s family has decided to take her away from Boone City, in order to make her forget about Homer, but she needs to find out why the veteran wants to get rid off her. At the beginning, Homer says to Wilma that it is better for her to go where her family wants, but he finally confesses the truth: “I don’t want to tie you down forever just because you have a kind heart.” Then, Wilma asks him to understand things as they really are, but Homer replies that she does not know how to live with him is: “Got to face this every day, every night.” Then Wilma replies that the only way to find it out is by trying.

Both Homer and Wilma seem as shadows in the dark kitchen. Only an exterior light that comes from the corridor lights Wilma’s face: There is courage in it, but also respect for the unknown. Homer’s words confirm the mystery when he invites her to go with him to the bedroom in order to see what happens here. How they address to the bedroom is planned as a
sequence of a classic horror film. Homer goes out from the kitchen and Wilma follows him as she were hypnotised. Their shadows are long while they climb the stairs, and when Homer enters the room, he looks at Wilma one more time. Then she stops walking. The soundtrack of violins underlines the fear for the unknown. When Wilma finally enters the bedroom, we see Homer in front of his bed, waiting for her. She stops in front of him.

There is something revolutionary, even subversive, in this reconsideration of the myth of the Beauty and the Beast. As we have seen, the treatment of Homer as a monster and a beast is spread out along the film, and it has its climax in Luella’s scene. However, the sequence in which Homer accepts Wilma to go with him to the bedroom reverses Homer’s monstrous character. Defying the limits stipulated by the Production Code in 1946, we see a man and a woman in front of a bed: A man who is the beast and a woman who seems ready to immolate herself. However, horror film implicit references completely refocus this moment, and the scene gives the message of love as redemption. By reinterpreting the conventions of the Beauty and the Beast’s first encounter, we do not witness the force of a monster, but its weakness.

The power of this scene is rooted in its lack of dramatisation. Throughout the film, the camera registers with documentary detail the use of the hooks by Homer: How he carries his bag, how he lights a cigarette, how he drinks, how he plays piano, et cetera. Thus, when Homer shows his arms without the hooks in the bedroom scene, he is revaluating the rest of the film. With Wilma, we understand how his life is without the hooks.

Before this, there is another scene in which we watch Homer’s father pulling the hooks off the veteran. Nevertheless, on this occasion the camera focuses on Homer’s sad face: How he inexpressively accepts the cigarette his father gives him. But the image of Homer without his arms is relegated until the sequence with Wilma. There is no sentimentalism in it: “I’m lucky I have my elbows. Some of the boys don’t.” This is how their true mutual acceptance begins.

*The Best Years of Our Lives* does not try to analyse the signification of this scene. Homer’s feelings points out - like Angel Quintana would say - to “the non evident nature of what is real, against every possible rational explanation.” Narratives of trauma are limited not only by the problems concerning their interpretation but also, and overall, by the difficulty in enunciating what happened.

Mircea Eliade underlies that the first human attempt to put the world in order is to name things. Therefore, the radical experience of chaos consists on its impossibility to be expressed. For a veteran, coming home is directly related to his ability to tell what happened during the war. That is to say, what he suffered *but also* the damage he inflicted. From this standpoint, it is

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noteworthy that the Greek word for “coming home,” nostos, meant “the oral literature concerning the return of the soldier” (nostoi), as well.²⁴

Coming back from war is a process of humanization, a process of leaving a monstrous character behind. For doing this, it is necessary to be able to communicate it: coming home means nothing if it cannot be told. Therefore, the main difficulty is to find out how to express it, and who for. The Best Years of Our Lives states that women have a very important role in it, since their sacrifice helps to discover a victim behind the veteran: A victim who, however, is particular to some extent, since he comes after hurting others. In fact, it is his wicked nature which made a victim of him. The veteran needs to be recognised as a monster in order to forgive himself.

Therefore, there is something else beyond forgiveness. Coming home is a real anagnorisis: Re-cognizing - that is to say, meeting again - the other. In this sense, not only Homer but also Wilma experiences a process of humanisation through love. Love is the only regenerative power, because it does not deny the sin, the mistakes or the evil; it is not a blind abnegation but a way of knowing the beloved in depth.

Like the Odyssey, The Best Years of Our Lives places this mutual recognition over the bed. However, the film removes the erotic conventions usually linked to this situation to underline the deeply intimate character of this renewed anagnorisis. The bed, a space reserved to the couple, is the visual proof of a unique relationship that in the Ancient Greek was called sema: A sign. The bed is a sign in itself, but also of something else: the identity of the estranger who is the veteran - in this case, Homer - and the love - Wilma’s love - as the only way to really come back home: The only way to be human again.

Notes
4 Shay explains that our terms for moral order, convention, normative expectations, ethics, and what we commonly understand as social values were resumed with an only word in the Ancient Greek world: Thémis, one of the concepts which had a great influence in the way Greek soldiers faced and understood war. J Shay, Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character, Simon & Schuster, 1994, p. 5.
10 In this sense, it is very significant that the Ancient Greek citizens carried out various blood rites before their veterans came back to the polis, in order to share their moral condition, at least in a symbolic way. B J Verkamp, *The Moral Treatment of Returning Warriors in Early Medieval and Modern Times*, University of Scranton Press, Scranton, PA, 1993, p. 42.
17 Thus, guilt is rejected as something bad, instead of accepting the moral nature of the veterans’ dilemmas. B Verkamp, pp. 1-17.
18 The therapeutic society cannot offer this because it does not assume the existence of an only and shared source of principles and ideals, normally of a religious nature. The end of this theological and moral unity makes difficult to understand the veteran. ibid., pp. 72-85; and J Shay, *Odysseus in America*, pp. 152-156.
19 In a strict sense, society cannot experience a catharsis: Religious purification and expiation of a sin; medical purgation of something which is
unhealthy; mental clarification; destruction of the obstacles that avoid understanding.


**Bibliography**


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Sweet, Bloody Vengeance: Class, Social Stigma and Servitude in the Slasher Genre.

Sorcha Ni Fhlainn

Abstract
In this paper, I intend to explore the complex nature of the rise of the slasher genre in relation to Reaganism and Reaganomics in the 1980s. Known for prowess and effective killing methods, the slasher sub-genre in horror was a movement in film, which grew out of the turbulent political period in the 1970s under Presidents Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter. At first, the films generated a shock response from the American public due to the slasher film’s intent on focusing on the destruction of the body, and by extension, the body politic. As the horror movement and particularly this sub-genre grew, an increasing critique of the incumbent president, Ronald Reagan, came to light, particularly in relation to the situation of property, rightful ownership and social displacement. The slasher, whose history and reason for killing is usually configured as revenge for a social wrong committed against him or his family, is revealed to be the victim of Reaganomics; he is usually depicted as sidelined due to issues of social class and Reagan’s abandonment of necessary social policies. A similarity has been established in the horror genre, according to Carol Clover, in the divide between city and country under Reagan; the country is that wild boundary that lies unchecked beyond the city limits – a place beyond civil liberties, social and moral order, particularly when intermixing with locals. Within this boundary set-up, we see the divide of economics and class come to the fore, and usually the beginning of the bloodbath between the victorious and the victims under the film star President. The films included in this study of the slasher - The Texas Chainsaw Massacre,1 Friday the 13th,2 A Nightmare on Elm Street,3 and Candyman4 (as a post-Reaganite reflection) - are among the most telling films on the failure of social responsibility. It is interesting to reflect that in this period of excess, overindulgence and increasing greed among the middle and upper classes, the victims of the slasher in these violent, visceral films, are construed as the intended inheritors of Reaganomics.

Keywords
Slasher, Reaganomics, Class structures, Suburbia, disenfranchisement

The slasher genre has always been subject to relentless scrutiny - labelled as a sick sub genre, which actively promotes violence against women, and only enjoyed by the macabre in society. Rising in popularity and
with a stringent formula set from John Carpenter’s highly successful *Halloween*, the slasher was to be instantly recognisable as the most formulaic, revisited genre in horror. Darryl Jones attests that Slashers, as they came to be known, were plotted according to a set of basic narrative tools and structures:

A past misdeed creates a psychopathic killer.
In the present, on a specific date, the killer returns to the site of the misdeed.
He stalks and kills with a knife (or some kind of blade) a group of teenagers of both sexes.
One girl survives to thwart the killer, at least temporarily.

By being so formulaic, and branded as highly misogynistic, the slasher was not to be recognised for its relevant political message beneath the simple structure of beautiful women being chased by masked figures with weapons. Acclaimed film critic, Robin Wood, considers the slasher to be “produced by repression […] essentially a superego figure, avenging itself on liberated female sexuality.”

I contest in this paper that while the slasher can be read on some level as a genre which celebrates bodily destruction, it does not limit itself to the destruction of women exclusively. Furthermore, women suffer less gratuitous deaths than their male counterparts onscreen, leaving us with a brave, if conservative “final girl,” to best the killer in most cases. The killer in these slasher films, usually figured as a person with a troubled past and hell bent on revenge, becomes an interesting political force in these narratives - not only in their physical realisation; in being costumed and using signatory death styles for each victim but, in each of the killers “histories” unfold, we discover the political, class and abuse of these characters that subsequently shape them as killers. Slashers are, like vampires, spirits and creations of their time - they reflect the trauma and anxieties that are not openly acknowledged in the public sphere - “Under the slasher’s mask there may be no face at all, for the killer may have no identity other than the embodiment of unmotivated destructiveness.”

I intend, for the purposes of this paper, to present an alternative reading of the 1980s slasher from the perspectives of the “other,” which shapes these often-subjugated characters into terrifying slashing monsters.

The issue of ownership, particularly in the area of property, has been signalled by academics as the initial response of horror filmmakers to Reagan’s presidency. Ownership and consumption of property, in the terms of the most notorious 1980s horror sub-genre, the slasher, has signalled the fixed state of often middle class victims, pitted against working class, transient and placeless killers. Private ownership soared as the model for
personal success, which reflected Reagan’s budget cuts in social projects and reduced government. The welfare state and the legacy of Franklin Roosevelt’s Great Society (whom Reagan admitted was his only “real” political hero) were dismantled piece by piece by a new vision of Reaganomics. Reaganomics consisted of radically reducing social spending, Medicare and social security, cutting $25 billion in 1981 while simultaneously cutting taxes over a five-year period by $750 billion. Presumably in an attempt to fulfil his election promises that “never again would America be subject to humiliation at the hands of the Soviet Union,” Reagan won congressional approval to increase defence expenditures to $1.2 trillion. Clearly, the finances did not add up. By increasingly promoting a nation secure in its global position while disenfranchising the vulnerable at home, Reagan’s policies manifested these anxieties in a similar cycle in the horror film; if the 1950s model of the Red Scare was manifest in invasion films like Invasion of the Body Snatchers, the same fears of outsider economic invasion and destruction is predominant in the roots of the slasher genre. The detraction of social infrastructure fractured the already fragile American tiered system into lines that discriminated against those condemned to a lower source of income, mainly within the Black and Hispanic communities. Although these economic lines do not seek to segregate on the basis of skin colour, the likelihood of white people’s success in economic terms far outweigh their fellow Black and Hispanic citizens.

Ownership of a home, a predominantly white, middle- and upper-class luxury, translated into a culture of fear of those who were in a state of transience. It also explains why the home is not abandoned outright by its inhabitants if it is found to be haunted or spectrally charged, because it is worse to be without the status of home ownership than to have a problematic one. Comedian Eddie Murphy touched upon this in his stand up show Delirious when he stated that, after watching Poltergeist, he would leave the neighbourhood if it was his family being haunted, yet the white people stayed.

I got a question: Why don’t white people leave the house when there’s a ghost in the house? Y’all stay too fucking long; just get the fuck out of the house. I would have been in the house and I would say “oh baby, this is beautiful. Kids outside playin’, it’s a beautiful neighbourhood, ain’t got nothing to worry [about]” … “GET OUT!” … “Too bad we can’t stay baby!”

Murphy’s parody of cultural difference between the black and white responses to property acutely answers the issue of property and neighbourhoods in American Culture. Both comedy and horror as genres
“probe boundaries, delineate difference and are concerned with identifying, and destroying, the other, the outsider.” In this case, what is being fundamentally addressed is the overwhelming lack of black people in suburbs; they are usually confined to the inner city, not wholly participant in the suburban American dream so propagated by Reaganism. To own property is to be empowered and entitled to the promises of consumer happiness. Particularly in the case of Bernard Rose’s *Candyman*, we see that the overt racial discrimination discussed in the film reflects the lack of cultural access to such properties and assets, marking the suburb as a predominantly white American dream.

The slasher, like the haunting ghost, is figured as a force of nature, an embodiment of the fear in a specific cultural age. Significantly, as we review the famous slashers and anti-heroes who stalked and slashed the youth of 1980s America, most, if not virtually all, of these slashers are white. The discrimination that figures the slasher is not one of skin colour but of strict social hierarchy; those with the lesser jobs, the poorly paid with the non-permanent homes or dwellings. Because these slashers, their personal history is usually the catalyst for their killing spree, have been punished resolutely for their attempts to transgress the strict boundaries of class, they kill the class above them in terrifying revenge.

Aviva Briefel and Sianne Ngai argue that with the ownership of property and the sense of entitlement it brings reveals a paradoxical position of being both frightened and empowered in Reagan’s America:

Victims in these films are consistently white, suburban residents engaged in middle-class routines of moving to a single-family home, celebrating holidays, or going on vacation. The characters who seem to have the most claim to being afraid are thus themselves owners or future inheritors of property, as if the entitlements of material ownership automatically extend to the psychological or affective realm.

The reading of slasher victims in the context of property ownership is quite relevant here, in that the usual setting of the slasher film is centred on everyday middle class anxieties or activities, such as babysitting (*Halloween*), the prom (*Prom Night*) or family events. The often-transient killer is the victim of Reaganomics, unlike his/her victims who are afforded political representation, and is hinted to always be of a lower class than the victims he chooses. Representing the fear of the middle classes - to be politically destabilised or forgotten - the slasher’s own history of a past misdeed is often due to their personal economic instability. Within this instability of budget cuts and severely reduced public housing, the slasher film “raises the troubling question of where these newly displaced individuals would go.”
The slasher’s own experience of pain, fear and violence is then usually transferred onto a new set of middle-class, white teenagers representing those who are expected to survive Reaganomics, while the killer, by being transient, never can.

In both *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, we see the slasher’s history of physical destruction in relation to the property they serve or inhabit rather than own. Freddy Kruger’s position as school janitor, who was burned to death by vigilante parents believing him to be a child molester, casts a shadow of servitude to a property that cannot be owned because it is a state funded body. In *Friday the 13th*, Mrs. Voorhees (Betsy Palmer), mother to the series’ hockey-masked, chainsaw-wielding killer, Jason, works as the cook for the summer camp, as a servant to the middle class teenage camp counsellors. As she is revealed to be the camp’s killer, it emerges that twenty years earlier, the counsellors had ignored Jason’s drowning cries for help as they made love. Interviewed in *Going to Pieces*, a documentary charting the life of slasher film, Betsy Palmer revealed her entire character history for Ms. Voorhees, which further explains the displacement of the slasher in relation to property:

I can tell why Mrs. Voorhees is the way she is. One place in the script, there is a hand that has a high school ring on it - a male’s high school ring and we girls always wore the boy’s class ring, you went steady but you didn’t have a sexual relationship … they did make love and she became pregnant. She told him and he [did not want to know]. Her father has a fit; you’re a tramp, you have no business being a part of this family, get out, so she leaves. She went to the Salvation Army and she had the baby there. [When make up artist Tom Savini revealed that Jason was mongoloid to Betsy Palmer, she adapted her back-story]. She takes this job at the camp so he [Jason] can be with other children and the counsellors were there off making love. Somewhere her little boy was off swimming and the kid drowns. Mrs. Voorhees is the perfect mother - not only will she kill for her son, she’ll die for him.19

Freddy’s boiler room and Jason’s Camp Crystal Lake are sites of transition for property owners or middle-class children, in that they use the sites temporarily - by attending school or holidaying there, rather than the punished figures that subsequently haunt them. Crucially, both Freddy and Jason’s histories mark them as servants to the upper class kids who inhabit their space - the janitor is a frequent example of failure in American popular culture, and Jason, being made “a mongoloid” with a cook for a mother, is constructed as equally outcast. Mrs. Voorhees’s (*Friday the 13th*’s part one’s
slasher) revenge is channelled as forgotten, lower-class woman who is expected to serve middle- and upper-class teenagers. The victim’s use of these rented spaces marks them as victims for the slasher because they are consumers of the services of the lower classes who must inhabit them. The places where slashers attack are usually familiar to the upcoming victims and crucially, the audience; it will be a place of presumed safety because of its familiarity but, as the story unfolds, we discover that we are never truly safe in open or private spaces.

The position of being frightened or targeted in the slasher film recognises the class of the victim, the victim’s security within their class prior to their onscreen destruction and allows them the position of being both secure in their assured politics while being perpetually afraid of its loss at the hands of the “other.” Despite this narrative of impending political, social, and economic destruction surrounding 1980s America, the white suburb continues to endure film after film, while the killer’s motives, history and methods of bloodletting shift. The ideal of the white suburban neighbourhood consistently survives these narratives, despite any invading slasher or vampire, which “ultimately suggests a fantasy of its resilience to the changes embodied in the face of the haunter, who functions as an emblematic representation of change itself.”20 By polarising the working class through exclusionary policies, marking the working class as potential monster, the middle class hope to survive through consumerist realpolitik. However, this consumption is of a two-fold nature: The slasher, who was once consumed by the exclusions that Reaganomics inflicted, now like Goya’s Saturn, devours and punishes the young.

In looking at the use and setting of space and social stigmas in the slasher film, I propose that further answers lie within two films that bookend the slasher film period, from 1978-1986: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre from 1973 and Candyman in 1992. Both of these films, arguably slasher films in their own right, significantly use the space of setting to illustrate the stigmas of space where the slasher dwells. While the 1980s slasher brings death and destruction to the familiar spaces of victims, in homes, schools and camps, in these films, the slashing is contained within the private space of the killers, where the victims are entrapped by circumstance and political punishment. In very claustrophobic and self-contained spaces, both of these films offer the full realisation of the white suburban American nightmare: People who integrate are people like us - people who do not, or cannot, are marked as frightening “others.” Carol J Clover marks the fear of country spaces as “urbanoia” - a place of fear for city victims filled with “marked families comprising of adult males with no ascertainable attachments […] the problem is patriarchy run amok.”21 Horrific homes in various stages of rot and decay are presented, as is the body of the slasher unmasked. “They do not observe the civilised rules of hygiene or personal habit […] likewise teeth;
the country is a world beyond dentistry.”[22] As Victor Sage described the home as “the soul’s dark cottage”,[23] the soul, or its lack, of the slasher is highly visible by the sheer disgust it evokes in the audience. The slasher’s home, if they do possess, or dwell in one, is presented as squalor, as filth. We are supposed to feel unnerved by their environment from the outset because it is a place the audience dare not enter. When the slasher of later films comes to the urban settings so familiar to the audience, it is presented as a place which is economically firmly out of grasp for the killer; when the would be victims cross the limits of familiar space into the world of the slasher, their difference marks them immediately as privileged and worthy victims. The stigma associated with country living - usually as the setting for the rape revenge film - is the product of the unrepresented and the undereducated. The country folk are, like Leatherface’s family who were manual labourers in the local slaughterhouse, put out of business by the mechanisations of the modern world, and the corporate decisions of the city people.[24] The desire to enact retribution is one of consumer capitalism - for country people, like ghettoised people, are poor and kept poor, and their victims remind them of this quite explicitly by driving new cars, wearing expensive clothing, and owning flashy objects. It is “the confrontation of haves and have-nots, or even more directly, between exploiters and their victims.”[25]

This distinction, in the city, is seen clearly in the ghettoised space in *Candyman* - where the black community is firmly placed and can be collectively ignored by those unaffected by poverty. Situated in the Cabrini-Green projects in Chicago, *Candyman*, originally written as the short story “The Forbidden” by Clive Barker, presents the violence of racial and class transgressions on the black body.[26] The Candyman (played by Tony Todd) is a radically different slasher to his predecessors; he was a refined, highly educated talented 19th Century painter who was murdered for his affair with his white master’s daughter. The politics of this film is quite explicit in “dealing with not only issues of black disenfranchisement but with fears of miscegenation.”[27] This transfers to the homes of the characters in the film - Helen, the white protagonist anthropologist, recognises that her own apartment block shares the exact same architectural structure as the Cabrini Green towers. Helen’s building was intended to be a housing project until it was discovered there was no boundary to divide it from the wealthy neighbouring Gold Coast. It was promptly resold to wealthy private yuppies. The mirroring tower blocks of Cabrini-Green remains impoverished and isolated because the freeway - effectively isolating undesirable “others” who inhabit them - surrounds the impoverished neighbourhood. This neighbourhood is visually marked as “outside” by the freeway shots that lead us to Cabrini-Green, that it is a world socially beyond us because it is firmly isolated. Candyman’s legacy as a ghostly presence in the projects reminds us
of the extremity of social injustice and segregation based on race and class. Just as Eddie Murphy noted on the white suburbia in *Poltergeist*, the ownership of privatised space is firmly beyond the reach of the black community, in the eyes of the middle class consumers.

The politics of the slasher film, across race, class, gender and conservativism reminds us that the killers we are presented with, and who subsequently became the anti-heroes of the 1980s in popular culture, are representative of groups of people who have been traumatically stigmatised. This stigma is in part their reasons for killing, but, rather than feel a duty of sympathy or empathy, we should examine why each of these slashers come to be killers and why it seems to return to extreme cases of social wrongdoing. Political violence and social neglect of others breeds similar violence being further propagated – in the case of these films in violent destructions of the body as a rebellion against the body politic. Undoubtedly these “little morality tales” can be read further than merely as perverse pleasures.

**Notes**

10. ibid., p. 473.
15. B Rose, ibid.

17 Virtually every holiday and cultural event experienced the slasher treatment in the early 1980s as the cycle generated a formula, which needed only a threadbare setting in order to produce a slasher film.


19 M Bohusz, Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, Think Film, USA, 2006.

20 A Briefel & S Ngai, p. 73.


22 Ibid.

23 V Sage, Horror in the Protestant Tradition, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1988, p. 44.

24 A Simon, The American Nightmare, Minerva Pictures, Italy, 2002: Carol Clover interviewed on The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. This is also the case in John Boorman’s Deliverance where they speak of raping the countryside.

25 C Clover, p. 126.

26 B Rose, ibid.

27 D Jones, p. 117

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Masks and Machine Ethos: Traces of Techno-Horror in the Slasher Film

Kristen Miller

Abstract
Because slasher films have been read almost exclusively as being about gender,¹ the few explanations of why killers like Jason Vorhees and Michael Myers wear masks have also been explained in terms of gender, such as Tony Magistrale’s description of them as allowing us “to view these serial murderers as random males - as men who are defined not by their individuality or uniqueness, but instead by their identical acts of unexplained violence and an emptiness of spirit reflected in their expressionless faces.”²
However, an alternative to this explanation that still adheres to Kristeva’s notion of the abject is to explain the use of masks as giving these killers a sort of “machine ethos,” emphasizing how they, in the words of Kyle in The Terminator (which could itself be seen as a slasher film with a science fiction premise), can’t be “bargained with” or “reasoned with.” They, like machines, will not stop, and like machines, are incapable of sympathy, and denying the audience the ability to see their human faces emphasizes this aspect of the characters. Considering that slasher films descend from a film genre that was only years earlier obsessed with machines and technology as the monstrous (an argument can be made for viewing machines as the abject), it makes sense that at least some elements of slasher films would reflect that same source of fear. This paper argues not that slasher films should be read as about technology fear instead of being read as about gender, but that the masks worn by the killers are traces of the technology fear that was once so central to horror films and still remains fearful to human beings despite our horror films having moved on to deal with other fears and issues.

Keywords
slasher films, abjection, techno-horror, masks, remakes, gender

Julia Kristeva’s notion of the abject has become a popular lens through which to examine works in the horror genre, largely because many things that frighten us, at a psychological level and beyond the level of simply making us jump or squirm, do fall under the heading of abjection. With films in the slasher genre, viewing the films as being about gender is already a popular critical lens, but critics have also begun to explain the gender issues presented in these films in terms of abjection. In brief, this argument is that the mostly male audience will derive much of the horror it feels over the course of the film from the abject female who is the killer’s
typical victim. However, this way of looking at the films requires the audience to identify primarily with the killer, not the victim, at least until the very end, which is somewhat problematic; in a horror film, one would think the audience is supposed to be scared of the killer moreso than the victim. As a way of resolving this, I suggest that another aspect of abjection at work in slasher films is the use of the slasher killer’s mask to give him a machine-like ethos, therefore making the killer abject through his similarities to a machine. Having the killer wear a mask, therefore, is integral in causing the audience to experience horror at him and his acts because it emphasizes the killer’s machinelike nature, and the use of the mask also shows that, though techno-horror is no longer the major trend in horror films, that technology and invocations of it can still be a viable source of fear.

The abject, in short, are those things that are familiar to us, especially those things related to life and our being human, but those things in a state that is not quite part of the natural order. Less horrific to us are things like bodily fluids removed from our body. More horrific are things like dismembered limbs or dead bodies. It is something that lies between the subject “I” and the object “other.” Abjection is similar to Freud’s concept of the uncanny, when something is foreign yet familiar. Discussions of abjection in the slasher film so far have primarily identified the abject within the films as the female characters, though dismembered limbs and dead bodies and blood certainly abound. The rationale for this is that, because the audience tends to be mostly male, the female is for them the other that is not quite other. According to this view, the source of horror is the female for most of the movie, but that eventually the audience will switch loyalties to the female victim, and in particular Carol Clover’s Final Girl. Clover’s examination of the slasher film discusses how, though camera point of view does not necessarily force audience identification, filming at least some of the early scenes from the killer’s point of view can facilitate the audience’s identification with him, which is further facilitated by the tendency to view the female as abject. However, Clover does stress that the mostly male audience can, and does, eventually switch loyalties to this Final Girl, though she will not be a typical female. Clover’s examination of identification in slasher films admits that the relationship between the members of the audience and the characters in the film is elastic, and so to suggest that the audience derives horror simply from its identification with the killer of most of the film, even with the shift at the end, seems to overly simplify the matter. The audience does not only identify with the killer for the first part of the film; if this were the case, the killer would cease to be monstrous. I believe that having the killers in slasher films wear masks reflects the filmmakers’ attempts to play on another source of the abject, the machine, as a way to also make the killer himself as frightening as possible, along with the female “other.”
In *Abject Terrors*, Tony Magistrale fits the killers’ wearing masks into the paradigm of the female as the abject by explaining its purpose as making the killer out to be an anonymous white male, more of a symbol than a person, implying that it makes the audience identification with the killer easier. While this is not necessarily wrong, it still does not account for the killer as source of fear. Another, additional explanation for the mask that doesn’t cancel out the role that gender plays in slasher films but does explain how it can help make the killer scarier is viewing the mask as a throwback to the earlier techno-horror movement in horror films.

In Andrew Tudor’s *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, he surveys trends in the horror genre from 1931 to 1984. He points out that the mad scientist is a frequent source of disorder in the earliest of these films, but it is in the 50s through the mid-60s that the “accidental and unanticipated consequences” of developments in technology comprise the largest portion of horror films and the causes of disorder within them. This is the period that Tony Magistrale has dubbed the techno-horror period. During this period, radiation is a frequent source of threat, but the general common thread is that our attempts at technological advancement will eventually be our undoing. As horror moved forward and took on different trends, it appeared on the surface that the obsession with technology and fear of it going awry subsided, but fear of technology has not gone away and has not ceased to manifest itself in horror films. The difference is that now, instead of the technology itself being or causing the primary menace, technology is invoked in other types of menace. One example of this is the use of masks in slasher films to give the killers a more machine-like persona. While the abject is usually described to be such things as body parts, corpses, the female, and so on, machines and cyborgs can also be the abject. In her dissertation *Monsters, Men, and Machines: An Exploration of the Abject in Cold War Culture and Film*, Angela Farmer argues strongly for machines being viewed as the abject:

In “Mothers. Monsters, and Machines,” Rosi Braidotti defines monsters as representing that which is between boundaries, conglomerate, or undetermined (Nomadic Subjects). While Braidotti’s primary goal is to discuss new reproductive technologies in regard to women’s bodies, I would take this definition to extend to all bodies. [...]. Gilles Deleuze, whose theoretical framework Braidotti takes as her starting point, defines machines (loosely) as any point at which flows of energy either enter or leave a structure and connect it with another structure (anti-Oedipus). The machine is not the structure itself but the boundary between structures. Where this argument leads us is to a conversation about the relationship between monsters and machines. Because the machine is the
boundary between entities and is neither subject nor object, it is therefore the abject. Monsters too are that which falls between boundaries and they too are abjections. While the monster may be the entity itself and the machine is the way in which monsters connect with other entities, both monsters and machines represent the in-between, they defy boundaries, they are the objects of simultaneous horror and fascination, they are abjections.\textsuperscript{12}

If machines are unsettling to us, if they are abject, it makes sense for filmmakers to invoke the persona of a machine in the creation of their killers. The killers become more frightening and monstrous because of the machine ethos created for them through the use of their masks.

Although it is not specifically categorized as a slasher film, the 1984 film, \textit{The Terminator}, could easily be described as a slasher film with a science fiction premise. The killer from that film is not far removed from the killers in other films more widely accepted as belonging to the slasher genre like \textit{Friday the 13th}, \textit{Halloween}, and \textit{The Texas Chainsaw Massacre}. Kyle’s description of the terminator in the film, though he is describing an actual machine and not a human being with a machine ethos, could easily be applied to Leatherface, Michael Myers, and Jason Voorhees, as he says, “It can’t be bargained with. It can’t be reasoned with. It doesn’t feel pity, or remorse, or fear. And it absolutely will not stop, ever, until you are dead.”\textsuperscript{13}

This is what makes the terminator so scary - it is a killing machine. Likewise are the human killers in slasher films. This is a part of the fear that is elicited during slasher films that can’t be accounted for by the gender-based readings of the abject at work in these films.

In the original \textit{Texas Chainsaw Massacre}, Leatherface is never seen without his mask. Gunnar Hansen, the man who played Leatherface in the original film, says of the decision to have him wear the masks that

\begin{quote}
The idea of the mask is that there is no personality under the mask [...]. When they created the character, they said he has to put on masks to express himself because he himself can’t do it. [...] The way we tried to create him, there is nothing under the mask, which is what makes him so frightening.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

So, here, the mask is hiding the character’s humanity in order to make him as scary as possible. The fact that he is portrayed as being mentally-challenged already makes uncertain whether one could reason with him or expect him to experience the types of emotion like pity and sympathy that would keep a would-be victim safe, and having him wear the mask strengthens that
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uncertainty. Hansen also describes his character as being “completely under
the control of his family. He'll do whatever they tell him to do. He's a little
bit afraid of them,” which also fits with the idea of his being more a killing
machine than a person. He does what he is told, or programmed, to do.15

Likewise in Halloween, outside of the brief glimpse of the child
Michael Myers at the beginning of the film and his adult face right before the
end, Michael Myers’ face remains hidden by a mask for nearly the entire film.
He is, in fact, rarely referred to by his name in the film, and referred to in the
majority of the script as simply “The Shape,” adding to the impression of his
not being human. There is certainly something unsettling about a person
inflicting such violence upon other human beings and yet the only face he
has visible, a blank white William Shatner mask, retains the exact same
expression throughout. The audience does finally get to see Michael without
his mask at the end of the film, but this comes at a point at which, in a few
more seconds, he will no longer be called upon to scare the audience. It’s
instead shocking on its own as the audience is shown momentarily that this
killing machine, Laurie and Tommy’s boogeyman, is human after all.

Finally, though Jason Voorhees is not actually the killer in the first
film of the Friday the 13th series, by the time he makes his appearance in the
second one, he dons a cloth mask, and, by the third film, he begins to wear
the iconic hockey mask he is known for. As with Leatherface, Jason’s story
would make him a good candidate for audience sympathy because he is
suggested to be mentally challenged and because of the negligence he
suffered at the hands of the camp counsellor at Camp Crystal Lake, but also
like Leatherface, he is more the minion of another person, though in his case
his dead mother. However, the potential sympathy is balanced out at least
partly by the use of the mask, creating a strong division for the audience
between the child Jason and the adult Jason. Along with the mask, Jason’s
machine ethos is supplemented by his at times superhuman strength and
ability to not be killed.

The film industry’s revisiting the slashers through remakes and
spinoffs in recent years and how the earlier “rules” about their wearing
masks have been broken helps clarify the importance of the masks to the
personas of the slasher killers in their original films. In the 2003 film, Freddy
vs. Jason, for instance, Jason Voorhees begins the film as the primary baddie,
spurned to action by Freddy Krueger because Freddy is too weak to kill
himself. When Freddy is finally able to kill and Jason is stealing victims
from him, Freddy turns on Jason. This is where the film breaks the rules
about the mask: As Freddy attacks the sleeping Jason in his dreams, the
audience gets to see Jason as a whimpering child, tormented by Freddy with
the water that caused his death. Here Jason is seen without his mask, and
again outside the dream world as the teens being stalked by Freddy try to
revive Jason as Freddy tries to drown him in his sleep. Though perhaps quite
intentional on the part of the filmmakers, at this point Jason becomes an ally and not a villain. Once he has been seen as a vulnerable child, and once we have seen his real face, deformed as it is, he can no longer be the cold killing machine he was for the first two thirds of the film. We are actually rooting for him, and the removal of the mask is a major part of this.

Likewise with the remake of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, also in 2003. A major complaint about the film brought up over and over again in reviews was the choice of the filmmakers to show Leatherface, albeit momentarily, without one of his masks. Through this scene and plot details, the audience learns that Leatherface wears the masks, because he has a skin disease and that he turned out the way he did because he was picked on and ridiculed because of his condition. In a review of the film, Kevin Carr writes that

One of the worst choices was to not only show Leatherface without his mask, but to try and explain why he wore it. “Skin disease,” they say. “Who cares?!” I say. What made Leatherface the perfect relentless killer was his twisted mystery. We don’t need to look into his humanity.

Another reviewer, B. Alan Orange, also cites this scene as especially problematic for the film, explaining that it is an example of “an ’03 sensibility ruling out the actual decade the film takes place in.” Indeed, our culture has become increasingly obsessed with explaining why the killers do what they do, giving them a reason, rather than simply letting them be evil for no good reason. But, in order to do this, you have to show him without the masks so the audience can see his face, to see that they are indeed human, despite any deformities. Creating the explanation for the killers’ actions is not necessarily wrong, but attempting to create this sympathy and by extension removing the mask removes the killers’ abilities to be truly frightening to the audience. Once the killer has his mask removed and has the audience’s sympathy, the film ceases to be a true slasher film, and this is exemplified in Rob Zombie’s 2007 remake of Halloween.

Not only is the audience allowed to see a young, maskless Michael Myers for a majority of the first half of Zombie’s Halloween remake, but structurally, the film gives the audience no choice but to recognize Myers as the hero of the film. I have a hard time believing that this was an accident on Zombie’s part as he wrote the film; he was clearly more interested in answering the question, “What could have made Michael Myers the way he was?” than simply updating Carpenter’s 1978 slasher film. The problem comes when he gets to the second half of his film and needs Michael to be the killing machine he was in the first film. Up until this point, the only character for the audience to identify with is Michael himself. Zombie
attempts to get the audience to change loyalties by having Michael brutally kill the one person in the mental institution who was nice to him, and also makes the deliberate decision to never show adult Michael’s face, but switching identification this abruptly is not possible, especially without a suitable alternate hero to switch our sympathies to, like Clover’s Final Girl. Once we’ve seen the killer as human, there’s no going back, and the remake’s Laurie Strode is too underdeveloped to lure our sympathies.

Zombie, however, does demonstrate that he understands the importance of the mask in creating the right persona for the killer. Even when Michael is a child in Zombie’s remake, he’s only shown to be able to hurt or kill others while he is wearing a mask. Though he does not go so far as to suggest there are multiple personalities, he does seem to say that the mask is necessary for Michael to separate himself from his actions, as if he would not be able to hurt others if they could see his face. The mask, as he puts it, hides his “ugliness.” In a film that is ultimately told from the killer’s point of view, this new perspective on the purpose of the mask seems quite appropriate. Once Michael retreats into his own mind, just before the film skips ahead fifteen years, his face is no longer shown, always hidden by either a mask or his long hair. Near the end of the film when he is trying to make clear to his sister, Laurie Strode, who he is, to make it clear to her that he does not want to hurt her, he removes the mask. When she turns on him and tries to escape, he has to replace it before he can resume the chase. Rob Zombie knows that for Michael to be truly monstrous, he needs a mask to hide his humanity. He just could not find a way to tell the story he wanted to tell without showing Michael Myers as a human being, and because of this, Michael is not able to be as frightening to the audience as he goes on his murder rampage in the second half of the film. Despite Zombie’s best efforts, you still kind of root for him. Without Michael wearing the mask throughout the movie, we as audience cannot make the shift in identification necessary to fear him. He is too much of a human to be simply “The Shape.”

My purpose here is not to say that gender-based readings of slasher films are incorrect, but instead to propose that abjection is simultaneously at work at another level in these films in order to also make the killer a source of terror. In this case, the abject is the machine, and the killer’s mask is key in giving the killer his machine-like persona. This demonstrates the importance of dehumanizing any figure who is supposed to be viewed as monstrous, stressing the connection between seeing the face and finding humanity in someone. Because hiding the killers’ faces essentially renders them killing machines, slasher films could be seen as containing traces of the technology fears that were previously so central to horror films. Now, as these films and characters are remade and revisited, and films have become more and more likely to humanize their killers and remove their masks, it
appears that true slasher films, with these masked killing machines at their cores, are now a thing of the past.

Notes
4 C Clover, p. 23.
5 ibid., p. 45.
6 ibid., p. 45.
7 ibid., P. 45.
8 Magistrale, p. 160.
10 Magistrale, p. xiv.
11 Tudor, p. 141.
12 A Farmer, Monsters, Men, and Machines: An Exploration of the Abject in Cold War Culture (Dissertation), Auburn University, Alabama, 2008, p. 27.
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Monstrosity of the Beautiful and the Dark Side of Consumption and Consumerism in the Melodrama/Horror Film, Dumplings

Sarah Arnold

Abstract
In Dumplings, desire for “youth and beauty” manifests itself in women’s consumption of dumplings made from aborted foetuses. In the film, both producer, as well as consumer, of the dumplings engage in cannibalism in order to prolong youth and remain desirable to both themselves and men. The two women come from opposite ends of the social spectrum yet seek the same goal. The film relates capitalist preoccupations with image and status to the monstrous mechanisms involved in the production of status symbols. The monstrosity of these women does not lie in their bodies, but in how they refigure and utilise both their own and other bodies in order to gain value and currency within the capitalist system in Hong Kong. This works in opposition to many Western horrors that cite the female/maternal figure as the source of horror and abjection.

Keywords
Monstrosity, abject, cannibalism, consumerism, feminism, horror, melodrama

In this paper, I will talk about how monstrosity becomes figured through the actions of women in contemporary capitalist society. Using the film Dumplings, and drawing from Kristeva’s notion of the abject, Creed’s monstrous feminine, and Baudrillard’s simulacra, I will argue that women become a source of monstrosity precisely because of their efforts to disassociate themselves from the monstrous feminine. In the film, the search for youth and beauty leads women to reject and re-appropriate their bodies to feed their monstrous appetite in order to gain status. The film, then, to a degree, presents itself as sceptical of both feminism and capitalism, as women actively engage in a system of consumption that enables them to commit horrific acts. Cannibalism is not just figured through the women’s consumption of flesh, but also through the cannibalistic nature of late capitalism.

In the film, which is set in Hong Kong, a fading television star in her mid-thirties, Mrs Li, approaches a woman, Mei, who offers youth-inducing dumplings for sale. Mrs Li becomes a regular client and hopes that the dumplings will help her win back the affection of her unfaithful husband.
After Mei performs a fatal illegal abortion on a teenager, bringing her business to the attention of the police, she escapes and Mrs Li begins to source and make the dumplings, which turn out to be aborted foetuses, for herself. It has been well-documented how women have come to be associated with monstrosity in literature and cinema. Julia Kristeva has drawn associations between women and abjection. She describes the abject as that which threatens the borders between the civilised and the ordered and that of chaos and disorder. Woman, through her maternal body, becomes associated with the abject. Using Lacanian theory, Kristeva connects abjection to the world outside the symbolic, or outside of the Law, where borders, rituals and prohibitions are not yet established for the child. As the child learns these “rules” and moves away from the mother, she, and the female body in general, become a constant reminder of the abject. Blood, bodily functions, and excretions also threaten the order of the body and here, too, the female body becomes associated with abjection because of its reproductive capacity. Barbara Creed draws from Kristeva to highlight how woman becomes the “monstrous feminine” in horror films. She argues that many horror films suggest the monstrous feminine as they enable a confrontation with the abject. Through an examination of films such as Carrie and The Exorcist, she argues that women’s bodies are figured as the site and the source of monstrosity.

In Dumplings, abjection and monstrosity are not directly linked to the female body in the same way as in a film like The Exorcist. It is not the visceral, corporeal maternal body that is “monstrous,” it is the beautiful and perfect body that is. Both Mei and Mrs Li crave young bodies in order to be desirable to men. Thus the reproductive and aging body become a source of anxiety for them, to be avoided at all costs. Both women do not have and do not really want to have children, again because this is a sign of age. To them it is the sign of a corrupted body. The irony of the film is that in trying to remove all trace of the abject body, the women become corrupted themselves. As such, they become the monstrous feminine - the sirens, the femme fatale. Barbara Creed writes that “it is this stereotype of feminine evil-beautiful on the outside/corrupt within - that is so popular with patriarchal discourses about women’s evil nature.”

The film constructs women as participants in this discourse. Both Mei and, to a degree, Mrs Li appear to be independent women. Mei tells Mrs Li that she is free, she does not rely on men. Mrs Li is rich and has had a successful career. But their desire to remain youthful stems from their desire to remain attractive to men. Both of them eventually seek the attention of Mrs Li’s husband. In the end, it is a game that they cannot win. In gaining a young body, they must relinquish part of their womanhood, which is having
children. Instead, they use other women’s potential children to feed their own appetite for youth. Although the film suggests that women suffer under patriarchal and filial society in Hong Kong, to a certain extent they are constructed as either victims or monstrous.

Before the audience even knows the content of the dumplings, we know something sinister is going on. Mei’s apartment, which is a focal spot of the film, is dark, decaying and humid. When Mei prepares the dumplings, sharp loud squeaks sound from the knife as she cuts through the “meat.” Mrs Li slurps and dribbles as she eats the dumplings, all of this evoking the abject. The monstrous feminine is later evoked in a scene where Mei performs an abortion on a young girl. Although Mei knows that this is potentially lethal (and it is), she needs older foetuses for Mrs Li. Mei places the foetus in a water-filled basin and stares into it saying “beautiful.” It is, however, her own reflection in the water that she is commenting on or perhaps both, since the aborted foetus is the means by which she remains beautiful. Mrs Li, although initially disgusted by the taste of the dumplings, soon begins to relish them.

Their consumption of flesh also resembles other monster figures: The vampire and the zombie. The Vampires take life from others so that they can remain immortal and the zombie has an insatiable appetite for human flesh. Both of these monsters relate to the mythology of cannibalism. Western discourses of cannibalism, usually directed at exotic cultures, worked to distinguish civilised people from savages. Freud, for example, described the prohibition on cannibalism as one of the identifying features of civilised culture. Cannibalism has also been linked to consumerism, for example in the zombie films of George A Romero. These films envision consumerism out of control, where people literally consume themselves. Abjection and monstrosity in the zombie film lies in the blank, unthinking, unfeeling state of the zombies; human but not quite so. What is disturbing about the women in Dumplings, is that they are aware, conscious and that their activities are represented as part of the economic machine. Life has currency and value. The dark underbelly of production, distribution and consumption is also exposed. The film presents consumerist culture as a monstrous appetite that feeds off the poor to feed the rich. Throughout the film parallels are drawn between the activities of the women and the operations of consumerist society. For example, there is a contrast between the beauty of the women and the sinister means that this is enabled, and the glamour of consumerist life and the disturbing way that it functions. The film also presents consumerism as a feminine pursuit (drawing on the stereotype of women as shoppers and consumers of “lifestyle”).

Significantly, the film takes place between Hong Kong and China, locations that represent both consumption and production. Demand for commodities helms from Hong Kong, which does not produce much.
Manufacturing and production take place in China. Mei sources her product in China and carries it, disguised, across the border, where she packages it for Mrs Li’s consumption. Mei is able to get enough “product” from an abortion clinic, as China’s one child policy results in “thousands,” as she says, of terminations. When access to this becomes difficult she is able to use Katie, a young girl who has been raped by her father and cannot afford a legal abortion. The production of the goods is only enabled through other’s misfortune.

The treatment of women’s role in production and consumption is a major theme of the film. In the industrial era, women’s role was to produce children. They were excluded from the economic terrain as labour or consumers. Skip to modern day and women partake in both. In both China and Hong Kong, overpopulation is a problem and women are discouraged from having children. The very act of not having children becomes integrated into the market to supply a commodity that is demanded by women: youth and beauty.

The film draws parallels between consumerism and cannibalism in a number of ways. It does so by highlighting the movement of the “product” across both the cultural and class border of Hong Kong and mainland China. The lower class and less-developed regions are exploited by the wealthier in Hong Kong. It also establishes the link between consumerism and cannibalism through the character of Mrs Li. She participates in cannibalism as a result of her desire to maintain her status in society. One of the prominent features of contemporary consumerist society is the selling of lifestyle and the importance of what Baudrillard calls “sign value.” He argues that after societies needs have been met, capitalism survives through the establishment of sign value. These signs give people identity and power. Mrs Li fills her life with products that reflect and promote her sense of prestige and reaffirm her upper class identity. In order to maintain this lifestyle, she needs youth and beauty. Otherwise, as Mei puts it, she will be “an ex-wife in five years, an ex-ex-wife in ten years and in fifteen years, nothing.” The value accorded to youth and beauty is apparent through the growth, internationally, in things like face creams, nutritional products and especially cosmetic surgery. The means by which people retain youth have become ever more extreme. Dumplings pushes this even further and questions how far someone will go. Cannibalism, then, becomes the means by which Mrs Li acquires her “product” (youth) and, in the general metaphor of the film, it represents how consumerist society operates.

The sign value accorded to youth is cannibalistic in nature. The women “buy” back their youth through the dumplings. As such, they eradicate both their history and their future since they will always be or at least simulate the same age. This act of simulation that the women engage in
is highly cannibalistic. The more Mrs Li and Mei consume the dumplings the more they become pure simulation. Mrs Li represents this best. Her entire life is dedicated to simulation, to the image and the sign. She wears expensive clothes, always carrying her designer bag like a comfort blanket. She lives in a hotel, while her ideal home is being built. She watches re-runs of herself in a television programme and continually watches herself in the mirror.

Cannibalism, again, becomes apparent through the prominence of mirrors and images in the film, as the images in the film remind the audience of what is no longer there, rather than what is being reflected. Before Mrs Li takes her dumplings, she is distressed by her own reflection in mirrors. She looks at herself more and more as she begins to regain her youth. The final image of her at the end of the film is of her wedding day. Dressed up in an elaborate gown, she looks at herself in a mirror and wishes for youth, beauty and happiness. The truth, however, behind the image is that of corruption and degeneration, as the film repeatedly reminds the audience. Just as Mei only sees her reflection in the basin that holds the aborted foetus, Mrs Li’s reflection masks a darker truth. At a dinner party, she checks herself in a mirror before presenting her new image to her friends. As they all comment on it, they begin to notice a terrible smell. Mrs Li’s over indulgence in the dumplings has led to her smelling strange. Finally, after Katie has died, her mother sits crying in her apartment after stabbing her husband, who raped Katie. The camera tracks through the apartment to a shrine with Katie’s photo at its head. Here, the image is meaningless as it reflects something which does not exist anymore. Katie and her baby have been “consumed” to feed the “sign.”

Monstrosity becomes figured through the cannibalistic nature of contemporary economic practices. Woman, in her representation as consumer, becomes the cannibal and is eventually cannibalised as she loses herself to her image and becomes a mere representation, both monstrous and beautiful, of what she once was. Abjection lies in the breaking down of the borders between “real” and “image,” “self,” and “other.” It lies in the transgressing of borders such as that of China and Hong Kong and in Mei’s ambiguous nature. She is mother/not mother, old and young, friend and enemy and because of this she is nothing-identityless. It lies primarily in the corruption of both Mrs Li as well as the culture of excess that produced her. The film, ultimately, seems to suggest that women are responsible for their own monstrosity. Abjection does not simply lie in the female form, but in “feminine” patterns of consumption (as the film sees it) that are part of modern life in Hong Kong. The film takes the “monstrous feminine” to a new level where contemporary life is marked as abject, monstrous and, importantly, feminine.
Monstrosity of the Beautiful and the Dark Side


2 Kristeva, p. 54.
3 Creed, p. 8.
4 Creed, p. 76.

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Sunlight and Shadow: F.W. Murnau’s Appropriation of the Vampiric Figure in Nosferatu and Expressionist Cinema in the Weimar Republic.

Deborah G. Christie

Abstract

American filmmaker George Bluestone asserts that “in film, more than in any of the other arts, the signature of social forces is evident in the final work,” while Horace M. Kallen refers to film as “visible hieroglyphics of the unseen dynamics of human relations.” Along those lines, the post-war films of the Weimar Republic (1918 to 1924) as a whole have been the subject of numerous studies, both literary and anthropological, as evidence of a traumatized society struggling to deal with a national identity crisis. Expressionism provided the opportunity for directors to reflect this fragmentation of the German national identity in the divided and alienated images they produced on screen. In 1922, German expressionist filmmaker, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, filmed his own art house version of Stoker’s novel in Germany under the title Nosferatu: Ein Symphonie Das Grauens [A Symphony of Horror]. The film was plagued by a copyright infringement lawsuit pressed by Stoker’s widow, and many have speculated that the changes Murnau makes in his version - shifting the location to Germany and renaming the characters - were a pragmatic attempt on his part to avoid any copyright confrontations. However, beyond character name and setting, Murnau radically alters the physical appearance of the vampire and originates such tropes as the use of a coffin and the lethal effects of sunlight. An examination of the specific changes Murnau incorporates as well as what those alterations reveal about the social and political anxiety present in the Weimar Republic forms the basis of this presentation. In tracing Murnau’s utilization of the vampiric figure, as well as his innovation of said figure, I will argue that Nosferatu represents both an aesthetic and artistic vision of war as a political monstrosity that literally feeds on the lives of its populace.

Films are like dreams: When we congregate with strangers in the darkness of the cinema, it’s a kind of public dreaming where we process, mostly unconsciously, the more insistent concerns of our lives. Australian Director, George Miller

The appetite for horror seems almost timeless in its persistence, but such films thrive in periods of low-level social anxiety,
such as Weimar Germany, the Great Depression, and the Cold War. Morris Dickstein

If the hauntingly identifiable Count Dracula of literature had remained merely a character of literature, he would also have remained an individually experienced character. However, early cinematic and dramatic manifestations of the “visual” vampire made it distinctly social in experience. Public viewing and the group catharsis made possible by both stage and film productions altered an audiences’ understanding of the vampire, an effect that would both augment and limit the vampire’s modern development in that it was now indelibly linked to humanity via its representation by a series of human actors. The visual appearance of the vampire becomes the subject of much artistic license as its humanness is manipulated to represent varying degrees of threat and familiarity. Indeed, the two most nearly iconographic images of the vampire become fixed in the public mind very early in the twentieth century and yet they are diametrically opposed. I am referring, of course, to Count Dracula, the dashingly malevolent seducer of both stage and screen as well as to Count Orlok, the cadaverous predator from the silent film Nosferatu by F. W. Murnau.

The focus of this paper is on the latter because Murnau’s appropriation of the vampiric figure alters so distinctly the mythos of the beast. Whereas Stoker’s Count is human enough to walk the streets of London in broad daylight and needs only to sleep in or with the soil of his home country, Murnau’s Count Orlok is barely human, allergic to sunlight, and prefers a soil-less coffin for bedtime. There have been a few half-hearted attempts to argue that these changes, along with altering the names of the characters and the setting, were merely attempts by Murnau to negotiate around some rather sticky copyright issues, but I vehemently disagree and would argue that Murnau and his screenwriter Henrik Galeen saw in Stoker’s original Count the potential to represent a social adversary that was much more relevant to the political and cultural upheaval present in Post-War Germany during the Weimar Republic.

The closing of Germany’s borders after the advent of WWI both freed the German film industry from competition and burdened them with the necessity to make rapid advances in order to satisfy the internal demand for cinematic entertainment. The Expressionist movement that flourished in Germany’s artistic circles demonstrated a predilection for “stylized abstraction and distortion” and emphasized the role of the viewer by the “conspicuous part played by a camera which the Germans were the first to render completely mobile.” But this period of rapid development and experimentation was complicated first by the demands of a nation at war and eventually by those of a nation defeated.
In her book, *The Haunted Screen*, film critic Lotte Eisner argues that the years immediately following the First World War were especially difficult and confusing for Germans, citing poverty, constant insecurity, and difficulty adjusting to the collapse of the imperial dream as sources of social insecurity. Germany had lost over two million of its male citizens, along with large amounts of land and raw materials, and faced still more losses to pay the enormous reparations demanded by the Allies and the Versailles Treaty, which also demanded that Germany publicly accept blame for the war and was widely perceived by Germans to be “sucking the life out of the nation.” Allied forces would not negotiate with an undemocratic Germany, forcing the Social Democratic Party to take over for the Kaiser. German cinema inevitably reflected the resulting crisis of national identity, a crisis which remained unresolved because, as German philosopher Max Scheler has argued, “the Germans had failed to achieve their revolution and, in consequence, never succeeded in establishing a truly democratic society.”

When Siegfried Kracauer was appointed by the New York Museum of Modern Art to catalogue and analyze the films of the Weimar Republic, which he published in his book, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of German Film*, he likened his project to “performing an autopsy […] on a piece of his own past.” In his estimation, these films reflect “not so much explicit credos as psychological dispositions - those deep layers of collective mentality which extend more or less below the dimension of consciousness.” Along those same lines, American filmmaker George Bluestone asserts that “in film, more than in any of the other arts, the signature of social forces is evident in the final work.” while Horace M. Kallen refers to film as the “visible hieroglyphics of the unseen dynamics of human relations.” Films of the Weimar Republic period reflect a culture “under the influence of a terrific shock which upset normal relations between their outer and inner existence.” Expressionism provided the opportunity for directors to reflect this fragmentation in the divided and alienated images they produced on screen.

Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau already had several films under his belt when he undertook the filming of *Nosferatu*, and he was known for having a “unique faculty [for] obliterating the boundaries between the real and the unreal.” Departing from the more abstract interior sets of previous Expressionist films, Murnau chose to film *Nosferatu* on location and make Nature a participant in the uncanny elements of the film. Pounding waves foretell the approach of the vampire, the empty hammock of a dead sailor swings aimlessly, a garden gate swings shut - closed by invisible hands: All images impregnated with narrative meaning that is in some cases far more compelling than what is textually revealed on the dialogue cards. Furthermore, Murnau emphasizes the role of the camera as a “seeing subject, a shaper of perception” utilizing what Erwin Panofsky defined as...
“dynamization of space” to facilitate the viewers’ visual identification with the shifting motion of the camera lens. The ultimate effect is to brilliantly recreate the novel’s sense of interiority - of observing private moments and communications - and to suspend the sensation of terror into a slow arc of growing fear and credulity that can only be resolved by the destruction of the vampire.

The basic storyline in Nosferatu is recognizably Stoker’s: Hutter is sent to Count Orlok’s castle to finalize a real estate purchase, whereupon Orlok follows Hutter back to Wisborg and proceeds to feed upon the local townspeople, including Hutter’s wife, Ellen. However, Murnau makes three significant alterations to the novel: the visually compelling changes in the vampire’s physical appearance, the romantically idealistic addition to the vampire’s motivation, and a symbolic modification in the place and means of the vampire’s death.

When Hutter arrives at Orlok’s castle the Count greets him wearing a large encompassing hat that successfully hides his bald and bulbous head and some of his more feral features. Murnau is careful not to reveal the whole of Orlok’s demonic visage too early. As the movie progresses, the hat is removed and Orlok’s teeth seem to grow longer and more visible, ultimately resembling the sharp front teeth of a rat - two biting fangs side-by-side rather than the wide-spaced incisor fangs more visibly familiar to modern audiences. Hair sprouts from his ears, the talon-like fingers grow longer, and the dark circles around both eyes grow larger, accentuating the sunken appearance of a cadaver.

In his book, The Monster Show, David Skal shrewdly argues that much of the physical change in Murnau’s vampire can be attributed to the physical representation of humanity’s aggression as evidenced by the shattered bodies and visages of Europe’s war veterans. Drawing from art historian Sidra Stitch’s analysis of surrealist art and its preoccupation with “deformed and disfigured bodies,” Skal makes the point that:

modern warfare had introduced new and previously unimaginable approaches to destroying or brutally re-ordering the human body. Parallel advances in modern medicine made it possible for soldiers to survive injuries that earlier would have been fatal […] and] with their missing, dislocated and disproportioned body parts, Surrealist figures call attention to the body as a dis-unified entity in which absence and deficiency prevail.

The survivors - or walking wounded - of WWI represented a symbolic invasion of death back into the world of the living and this has an obvious correlation in both the cadaverous appearance of Count Orlok and in his
necrotic desire to trade the lives of his victims for the sustenance of his own. He represents a nightmare vision of the undead - one that would be impossible to ignore, much less to swoon over, for he resembles more a creature cursed with pestilence and plague than one endowed with eternal life. Unlike Stoker’s text, in Murnau’s film there is never any visual or textual confirmation that this vampire offers anything remotely like eternal life. Nosferatu does not promise release from death; rather, there is only the lingering reminder that death is ever-present and the film seems to emphasize that a form of living death is the end result of man’s aggression against his fellow man.

The struggle of society against aggression - internal or external - and the wide-scale confusion of a community unable to protect itself against that aggression is perhaps best represented by the town’s frenetic pursuit of the escaped lunatic, Knock. Almost from the moment of the vampire’s arrival in Wisborg, Hutter’s former employer begins maniacally laughing and raving about blood; his incarceration in the lunatic asylum run by Dr. Sievers is the town’s solution to his antisocial behaviour, but even this remedy is ineffective as they are unprepared to defend against the unnatural strength and violence of the madman. After overpowering his guard, Knock escapes and climbs to a rooftop overlooking the village square and, from this position, he taunts the town with their inability to control him. Eventually, the mob chases Knock through the town and out into the countryside, as if to indicate that if they cannot repossess the madman, they can at least reposition him away from the town. The contrast between the town’s immediate and decisive response to insanity and its lack of response to either the vampire or the plague carrying rats that accompany him suggests that Wisborg - and perhaps by extension Germany - has failed to recognize the real danger living unseen amongst them.

The night before Hutter goes to Orlok’s castle he finds that a text called The Book of Vampires has been conspicuously left on his bedside table at the inn, demonstrating that a social awareness of the vampire has been codified into written form. Yet Hutter refuses to believe in the existence of vampires and, thus, loses the opportunity to protect himself and his loved ones from the vampire’s predation. Later, while finalizing his business with the Count, Hutter shows him a picture of his wife; Orlok is inordinately interested in Ellen’s portrait and comments: “Is this your wife? What a lovely neck.” He then signs the papers to purchase a house in Wisborg located directly across the street from Hutter and Ellen. Murnau’s decision to have Hutter be so criminally naïve as to let the creepy vampire move in across the street and do nothing about it is counterbalanced in part by his utilization of Ellen as a force of natural reason and positive action. Murnau’s vampire is obsessed with desire for Ellen, and though several arguments have been made that his desire could be romantic in nature, I think it much more likely
that Murnau is simply further demonstrating the destructive impulse of the vampire in that he can neither control his unnatural desire nor can he protect himself from the consequences of that desire. Furthermore, Ellen is the only one who sees and acts to countermand the danger represented by the vampire, and her involvement constitutes the second significant alteration Murnau makes to the vampiric figure.

That convenient text, the Book of Vampires, so cunningly placed on Hutter’s bedside table by the innkeeper, is wasted on Hutter, who not only does not read it but takes it back to Wisborg and makes Ellen promise that she will not read it. Being a sensible woman, she ignores him and reads it anyway - discovering a passage that reveals:

Only a woman can break his frightful spell - a woman pure in heart who will offer her blood freely to Nosferatu and will keep the vampire by her side until after the cock has crowed.\textsuperscript{21}

This key piece of information reinforces for the audience the counterintuitive refusal of Hutter to recognize the existence of a problem, much less utilize the information at hand to combat the threat, but it is left ultimately to Ellen to find a way to destroy Orlok and it is her knowledge as much as it is her purity of heart that emphasizes the impotence of the town’s male authority figures.

Murnau, himself a social outcast due to his homosexuality, was perhaps making a statement critical of the social authorities who professed to have the knowledge as well as the moral right to guide society down the “right” path; certainly the partisan politics and class-structured tyranny that had led Germany into war had not only failed to protect its citizens during the war but continued to demonstrate its impotence during the turbulent years of the Weimar Republic. Humanism may have seemed like a redeeming - even salvational - quality, and Ellen’s symbolic connection with purity and living things makes her a champion, however unlikely, of the greater power of Nature over Man.

Nosferatu needed no invitation to attack Hutter, and even within the confines of the ship, The Demeter, he was able to nibble away at the life force of the sailors aboard. But with Ellen there is only hesitation - and it is almost comical to modern audiences to watch the forlorn desperation on Count Orlok’s visage as night after night he stares out of his window across at Ellen in her bedroom - a little like a pervy stalker. Confronted with this female embodiment of life - who he must recognize as potentially being the foretold woman pure of heart who hearkens his destruction - Nosferatu is as impotent to act against her as the town is impotent to act against him. His continued predation in Wisborg, however, places Ellen in an untenable position: Her continued existence threatens the lives of everyone in her town,
as the vampire will continue to sustain itself in order to be near her. She chooses to sacrifice herself for the good of the town, and, after sending her husband out on a fool’s errand as a distraction, she flings open her bedroom window as an invitation to the vampire - giving him access to her bedroom, her body and her life. Glorious fulfilment and horrible desire mingle on the countenance of Count Orlok as he enacts the tragic perverseness of being a vampire: Of “inevitably causing one’s object of desire to die,” but in this case Orlok’s desire becomes his own undoing as well.22 There is a moment during Count Orlok’s ravishment of Ellen at which he raises up his head, satisfied, and would, perhaps, have made to leave - but Ellen - still alive at this point - claps him back to her. Maybe it is the level of sacrifice that entices the vampire to stay or maybe her blood is just that good, but stay he does - long enough for the sun to rise.

It is Orlok’s inability to manage his desires that results in his being tricked into the sunlight - a peripatetic device of Murnau’s that has been recycled by any number of vampire films since. However, it seems significant that the moment of the vampire’s destruction in Murnau’s film is located at dawn rather than at dusk (as it is in the novel) because dawn has somewhat different connotations. Essentially, the dawn brings the vampire from the realm of the supernatural - or marvellous - into the realm of the uncanny, where at least it is possible for humans to grapple with him. The textual Count Dracula dies at the moment of passing from a time of human strength into one of vampire strength – dusk - but the key to Orlok’s destruction is detaining him past the time of his power and into the “light” of humanity. It may be that dawn simply has the potential to inspire a more hopeful and perhaps more permanent subtext to the destruction of this evil, but both dusk and dawn are still transient so it is also possible that the placement of humanity’s victory at daybreak implies something a little more nihilistic: that human power is only temporarily sufficient and, like dawn, a cycle of nature that offers merely a reprieve.

Though Murnau emphasizes the powerlessness of the town to resist the vampire’s tyranny, he also severely limits the powers of the vampire by requiring its use of a coffin and making sunlight an acute menace. Death and life appear to be intertwined in a processional dance much like that of dusk and dawn; nature is simultaneously constant and transient. The visual reduction of the vampire back into the dust from which its humanity originated offers a comforting sense of finality to the viewing audience. This relocation of actuary power to natural forces rather than humanity may reflect the post-war trauma of man’s ineffectiveness against forces greater than himself; indeed, the final title of the film reads: “And at that moment, as if by a miracle, the sick no longer died, and the stifling shadow of the vampire vanished with the morning sun.”23 In part redemptive, the effect of the sun on the vampire purges the town of contagion; sunlight, which has
long been associated with purity of thought and deed, symbolically cleanses
the landscape in the final scene so that life can begin anew.

Slightly mushy, happy ending notwithstanding, I would submit that
Murnau intended his appropriation of Stoker’s vampiric figure as a call to
social action, and that he, in essence, placed his film in plain sight on
Germany’s collective bedside table as an aesthetic and artistic vision of war
as a political monstrosity that literally feeds on the lives of its populace. In a
world where human interaction had become so monstrous as to engage in
mass annihilation, the horror of war and the subjugation of humanity that it
entails could only be represented by a figure of nightmarish aspect. Count
Orlok is the perfect post-WWI vampire; he is not the Victorian foreigner
threatening to infect polite English society, but rather the very embodiment
of the debasement of humanity rising out of a war torn Germany.

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The Monsters That Didn’t Scare:
The Atypical Reception of the 1930s Horror Films in Belgium

Liesbet Depauw

Abstract
The 1930s horror films are believed to have provoked public outcry in nearly every country in which they were shown. They tested the limits of representations of violent or gruesome acts, which made them highly controversial in their days. Initially, the American Production Code Administration underestimated the negative public response to this type of pictures, but soon they were forced to pass a special amendment on the matter in order to preserve their main goal: avoiding excessive censorship by American states or foreign countries. In 1937, the British BBFC introduced the new H(orror) certificate, as a result of the public debate on horror films and children. In the Netherlands, most of these films reached a strictly adult audience - severely cut by the Dutch board of film censorship. Some were even banned due to their “sadistic and repulsive” nature. In Belgium however, all of these films passed without cuts, and perhaps more importantly, without any sign of public indignation. The press described them as “infantile,” “messy” and, in the best case, “funny.” In this paper, we will map out this 'liberal' attitude of Belgian film censors and critics by focussing on the historical reception of these early 1930s horror films. This way, we want to demonstrate that the boundaries of acceptable representations of violence in a society do not solely depend on the intrinsic qualities of a text, but are also the result of the specific historical context in which they appear.

Keywords
Horror, film reception, 1930s, censorship, Belgium

The 1930s horror films are believed to have provoked public outcry in nearly every country they were shown.1 In this paper, after briefly sketching the reception of these films in countries as the United States, the UK and the Netherlands I turn my attention to the way these “classical” horror film were received in Belgium and I will try to explain why these pictures caused no problems whatsoever in an otherwise not so liberal society.

1. Horror, a genre?
Although my main concern is the reception of horror films, I would first like to say something about the definition of the genre used in this paper.
After all, I did have to make choices about which films to include in the corpus of films examined here and which not. Horror, as a genre, might be one of the most difficult things to pin down and define since the basic components of horror films are repetition and variation. This reflexivity - which provides endless pleasure to the true horror fan - is one of the reasons why the genre has no stationary boundaries, and overlaps with aspects of science-fiction and fantasy genres. Many attempts have been made to come to a satisfying definition of horror films based on the opposition with other genres, the poetics of genre films or their theoretical relationship with the cultural context in which they were made. But for this paper, dealing with films that were shown in Belgium during a time when Belgian audiences had never even heard of the term horror, I had to look for a more practical criterion to decide whether or not a film could be regarded as horror, namely the responses it was expected to provoke from its audience. That is why a film like *King Kong* is treated here as a horror film, although you might just as easily label it as an adventure film or a sensationalised documentary drama (as indeed some Belgian critics did at the time).

2. **International Outcry Against the Monsters.**

During the 1930s two of the most successful genres, horror films and gangster pictures, were believed to be extremely troublesome, since they constantly pushed the boundaries of acceptable on-screen violence and brutality. “The Golden Age of Horror,” beginning in 1931, would also mean the golden age of controversy and censorship which would eventually - but very temporarily - put an end to a certain type of films. Tod Browning’s *Dracula* is generally considered to be the film that led Hollywood into this “Golden Age of Horror,” closely followed by James Whale’s *Frankenstein*. Both pictures were produced by Universal, a studio that would forever be linked to its cycle of now classical horror films - but, by 1932, five of the eight major studios had climbed aboard the horror bandwagon, most notably Paramount with an adaptation of Dr. Jekyll and M. Hyde and MGM with their unsuccessful *Freaks*. *Freaks* pushed the limits of acceptable representations of gruesomeness too far and ran straight into the scissors of local and international censorship boards. In most countries, *Freaks* was banned outright and the film proved to be a financial fiasco. Not all films that caused international public outcry were Hollywood productions, but considering Hollywood’s dominant position on international film markets - most of the time - they were. Therefore, it is rather surprising that the American *Production Code Administration* (PCA) underestimated the impact of the horror wave on public sensibilities and initially gave relatively quick approval to this type of film.

*Dracula* had received a PCA seal but the public turned out to be more censorious than the American regulators, judging by the many
complaints that came in and the extensive cuts demanded by official censorship boards in Singapore, British Malaya, and British Columbia. The same year, Universal continued their horror cycle with *Frankenstein*, which ran into numerous problems with censorship boards both home and abroad. Since a PCA seal approved a film for all audiences, it did not take long for local censorship boards to send furious letters to the PCA, asking “how it could release such material to neighbourhood screens were impressionable children would see it.” The protection of children was one of the main arguments used by public pressure groups, local and international censorship boards and angry viewers to heat up the debate and ask for official measurements to be taken. In response to the furore over *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, the PCA tried to exercise greater care with future productions. But when *Frankenstein* premiered, several horror movie scripts had already been approved by the PCA, such as those of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, and *Island of Lost Souls*. This was a serious misjudgement by the PCA since all three films proved to be highly controversial and ran into a considerable amount of censorship trouble. This type of negligence would eventually lead to a stricter implication of the code in 1934 and a loss of important foreign film markets for horror films, such as the British one.

When *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* all reached the UK in 1932 local parent groups, newspapers and town councils reacted strongly against this wave of “frightening films” that led to the “moral decay” of its youth. In a way, the BBFC had the same kind of problem as the American PCA, since they, too, did not dispose of a category that could forbid children under sixteen from entering a film theatre. The horror films were obviously categorised as adult (A) films, but even then, children were allowed to see these films with a parent or a guardian. As a result of public pressure, the BBFC instituted a “horrific” category to warn parents not to bring in their children. The category however, was “purely advisory” and did not quiet down the concerned voices. On the contrary, the continuous flow of Hollywood horror pictures and the seemingly reluctance of the BBFC to take any real measures, led to a growing moral campaign against horror films; so much so that the British Government actually started thinking about official censorship. In 1937, after a vivid protest against *The Raven*, the “horrific” label was turned into the obligatory “H” certificate in 1937, banning children under sixteen from H film screenings. Of course, by then, the first cycle of Hollywood horror films had already died out.

Finally, it is worth noting that in the Netherlands, a country culturally related to the Northern part of Belgium, horror films barely ever left the censorship board uncut. *Dracula* seemed to have caused the least resistance, since it reached an audience older than fourteen intact, but films such as *Frankenstein* and *The Bride of Frankenstein* were not that lucky.
They were severely cut and even then could only be shown to an adult audience (18+). Films like *Island of the Lost Souls* and the first version of *Murders on the Rue Morgue* were even banned, respectively, due to “the appalling scenes of torture and vivisection” and “the highly despicable sadism, miscegenation and murder.”\(^\text{15}\)

3. **Official Film Classification of Horror in Belgium:**
   **Keep away from the Children.**

   In Belgium, films like *Dracula, Frankenstein, The Mask of Fu Manchu, The Mummy, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, King Kong, The Mystery of the Wax Museum, The Raven, Werewolf of London, The Bride of Frankenstein, Dracula’s Daughter, Island of Lost Souls,* and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse,* which were known to contain a fair amount of violence and crime, had a good chance of running into trouble with the moral guardians. From the beginning of the 1930s, there was a vivid debate in mainly Catholic and liberal newspapers about the negative influence of film violence. On-screen violence was believed to incite people to commit crimes, even more so, it provided a guide of how to get away with them. News articles on crime often mentioned film as a source of copy-cat behaviour and special care was given to foreign studies into the consequences of violence on film.\(^\text{16}\) The thing that saved horror films from a moral attack was the fact that the discourse on dangerous film violence was inextricably linked to that of the protection of children. Since in Belgium all the aforementioned horror pictures were shown uncut to an audience older than sixteen, moral guardians - unlike their British colleagues - were deprived of their number one argument against these films: Namely that they would leave a permanent stain on the minds of innocent children.

   The non-obligatory character of the Belgium Board of Film Classification explains why these pictures reached Belgian audiences uncut. In 1920, this Board was legally installed out of a societal need to protect Belgian youth from harmful effects of the new mass medium. They could either label a film as appropriate for children under sixteen or not. They could also ask the distributor to cut certain inappropriate images out of the pictures in order to become children approved (CA). In the case of horror films, where the distributors rightfully suspected that their films - even with extensive cuts - would never be allowed to be shown to a juvenile audience, they were legally free to skip classification and to offer their films directly as strictly adult films. Which they did.

4. **Catholics and Horror Pictures: Healthy Entertainment?**

   As in many other western countries, Belgian Catholics played a part in trying to discipline films and by 1932 they were convinced that the official censorship of films was not strict enough. Since official censorship was only
there to protect the welfare of children, but could do nothing to protect adults against what they called “morally unhealthy films” they came up with a system of their own. The decisions of the Catholic Board of Film Classification were purely advisory and were broadly publicized in Belgium’s many national Catholic newspapers. They are a good indicator of what was regarded as acceptable within a mainly Catholic society. The Catholics used a rather refined code system that ranged from code 1 (for all) over 2 (for adults) to the negative codes 3 (to dissuade) and 4 (to avoid).

So, surely, the Catholic Board, as a guardian of even the adult Christian soul, would react firmly against these films? Surprisingly, they did not. While films like Tarzan and his Mate, Mayerling, and La Kermesse Heroique were strictly forbidden (code 4), only two horror films Island of Lost Souls and The Testament of Dr. Mabuse were to be dissuaded (code 3). For the latter film, that code was even changed into code two - for adults - when it became clear that “the masses didn’t get the immoral message that was hidden in the film.” All other horror pictures were categorised as adult films and were only to be dissuaded for people with feeble nerves. Catholics were more concerned to keep adults away from films containing nudity, suicide, immoral depictions of marriage, or ideologically dangerous messages, than they were with depriving them of a good fright.

5. The Discourse of Disappointment: Belgian Film Critics and the Horror Film.

In line with the classification boards, the Belgian press did not react strongly against horror pictures. Dracula received little attention in the Belgian press, but Frankenstein was reviewed by a fair amount of film critics. Although in Great Britain and the United States moral campaigns were fought against these pictures, Belgian critics - whether they were socialist, Catholic, or liberal-minded - were all clearly disappointed. As one critic wrote about Frankenstein:

They have made a lot of noise about this film. The director of the cinema theatre where the film was playing even kindly informed us of the attendance of the Red Cross in case anyone would faint. [...] When the film had finished and the lights went up, I looked around me. Everybody got up at once, speeding to the exit to get their last tram. What happened to the fainted ladies, the terrified virgins and the unsettled men? They had already left. The fainting will clearly be for another day.

Horror films failing to terrify their audience were the number one comment in Belgian newspaper accounts. For example, the film critic of the socialist newspaper, De Vooruit, said of The Mummy that he was shaking with
laughter when watching it; of *King Kong* that it could probably only frighten really small children; of *The Invisible Man* that he was amused by all the tricks, but that the film certainly was not the frightening story that was promised to him by publicity; and of *Werewolf in London*, that no part of his body had even considered to stiffen with fear.\(^{22}\)

So what was going on? Why did Belgium react so differently towards these films than the rest of the world? Why didn’t the monsters scare? While this is quite an impossible question to answer, it is still worth trying to reveal some of the contextual factors that might have led to this type of reaction.

6. **The Disaster of Dubbing American Dialogue.**

In Belgium, even in the Flemish speaking part of the country, most of the time, films were dubbed into French. This dubbing caused a lot of frustration and, sometimes, even laughter with the film critics and arguably, the audience. Nearly all of the horror films were dubbed, some more successfully than others. In the Belgian press, the first trace of frustration caused by bad dubbing can be found in reviews of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. One critic wrote the most peculiar thing:

> The necessity of dubbing the English voices, has spoiled a big part of our fun. In order not to show us the artists who are talking, these scenes were altered with other scenes that had, unfortunately, no link whatsoever with the action. What where these pictures of Queen Wilhelmina doing there? Or of La Fayette? There was absolutely no connection at all.\(^{23}\)

The mediocre quality of the French voices in *King Kong* was also said to diminish the value of the film, while *The Raven*, which was subtitled, received fairly good reviews. Since the technical possibility of placing subtitles underneath the frame was not introduced in Belgium until 1937, dialogue in *The Raven* had to be severely shortened. That way, *The Raven* avoided two possible ways of irritating the public: One of bad dubbing and the other of exposing the banality of American dialogue. To Belgian audiences, this dialogue, especially when translated word for word, was often perceived to be highly artificial and sometimes even comical. The moralising dialogues of *Frankenstein* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* were described as infantile and hilarious.\(^{24}\) Hollywood’s lack of affinity with Belgian culture and *vice versa* can further be illustrated by looking at what the films critics did find frightening: Dreyer’s *Vampyr*, and Lang’s *Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, two films of which the European origin of the directors was repeatedly emphasized in reviews.
7. **Special Effects, or How to Make an Audience Laugh.**

The tendency to prefer horror films from European directors had also to do with the difference in technical approach to create a horrifying atmosphere. Belgian film reviewers did not like excessive special effects. Film critics stressed that there is nothing wrong with special effects, as long as they were not too transparent and served the film’s plot. On many occasions, horror films were accused of being purely sensational with stories that were invented only to show off Hollywood’s newest technical accomplishments. *The Mummy* was perceived to be a film with so many terrifying effects that it became amusing, King Kong was described as a preposterously giant ape whose movements were terribly mechanical, and the empty flying shirts in *The Invisible Man* had made the socialist film critic burst into laughter. But he did admire the illusion of the invisible man taking away the bandages from around his head. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was better appreciated for its tricks, only the transformations went a bit too quickly. *The Mask of Fu Manchu* was described by the Catholic Board of Film Classification as a film in which Boris Karloff could again show off his talents for cosmetic make-overs. As Jean Valles commented on *The Mystery of the Wax Museum* in 1933:

> It is really regrettable that American producers can’t image these terrifying films without big complicated electrical machines, without workshop that have proportions of palaces, without a whole *mise en scène* which might terrify simple souls, but makes us rather laugh.

When *Dracula’s Daughter* was shown in 1937, the reviewer nostalgically reflected on Dreyer’s *Vampyr*, whose poetics were praised in opposition to the flat *mise en scene* of the new American version. One year later, a critic described the audience reactions to the reissued *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and the French silent, *Le Chateau de la Mort Lente*. Apparently, people were shaking with laughter from beginning to end, copying the noises that were supposed to terrify them and clapping out loud whenever the monsters appeared. To the critic, this proved that fantastic films relied too much on the ridiculous and the impossible. They simply were out of touch with reality. Still, according to this critic, the real horrors of the day had to be found in Spain, China, Palestine. Compared to the horrors of reality, horror films would always be regarded as “ragged old dolls.” Even as early as 1932, this comment was heard when a socialist film critic commented upon *Frankenstein* that the audience could only shiver at the horrors of the day, and that, therefore, gangster films were much more terrifying than fantastic films could ever be, unless they were to be of a really high cinematographic standard.
8. The Absence of the Term, Horror.

Finally, something should be said about the absence of the term “horror” in Belgian newspaper discourse. As Kuhn demonstrated, the term “horror” became institutionalised in the UK in 1932. When that happened, horror films could be seen as one group, a group that appeared to take on enormous proportions. In Belgium, no such word existed. Boris Karloff’s movies were called “thrillers,” The Testament of Dr. Mabuse, an adventure film; King Kong, a film of sensation, or an adventure film; The Son of Frankenstein, a frightening melodrama; and most of the others were seen as terrifying dramas - which more often than not, did not reach their goal. The term horror was used only once, in 1932, but was not picked up in other reviews. Without a generic name and a clear consensus on the characteristics of “frightening films,” horror films passed by fairly unnoticed and had a hard time shocking the nation.

9. Conclusion.

During the 1930s a wave of horror films reached Belgian audiences uncensored, which considerably raised their ability to cause public outcry. But due to some very specific circumstances, they did not. One of the major factors of why they did not attract the attention of moral guardians, was that they were labelled as children not approved. The discourse of media violence effects was inextricably linked to the protection of youth, so crusaders against dangerous films were deprived of their number one argument. Of course, it helped that Belgian film critics and in extenso the viewers were rarely frightened by them. Bad dubbing, cultural differences, the habit of and preference for European films without excessive special effects and the absence of a single denominator for the genre, all made that the horror film screenings were quite unproblematic. The boundaries of acceptable representations of violence in a society then do not solely depend on the intrinsic qualities of a text, but are also the result of the specific historical context in which they appear.

Notes


Prince, pp. 30-87.


Prince, p. 63.


Prince, pp. 30-87

Kuhn, p. 200.


For censorship files, see www.cinemacontext.nl


Code 1 had several subdivisions, namely 1a (especially convenient for children), 1b (for all) and 1c (For all with light reserves). Code 2 also had subdivisions: 2a meant that adolescents were able to view the film as well, 2b indicated light reserves for adults and 2RR meant strict reserves for adults. P Warlomont, *Face aux deux écrans*, Casterman, Kortrijk, 1958, pp. 94-101.
The Monsters That Didn’t Scare

23 K Valles, ‘Les films dont on parle. Dr. Jecyll et M. Hyde’, La Flandre libérale, 9 September 1932, p. 3.

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PART 3

Legal, Historio-Cultural, and Medical Monsters
Negligent Monsters: American School Shootings and the Displacement Of Monstrosity

Kristen Davis

Abstract

Immediately after Dylan Klebold finished his shooting spree with his friend, Eric Harris, at Columbine High School in Colorado, and then turned the gun on himself, his parents’ lawyer informed them to beware. “Dylan is dead,” he said, “so now they’re going to hate you.” Soon enough, he was proven correct when the families of the victims started one civil trial after another alleging Dylan’s parents were negligent in their parenting. Dylan the “monster” was dead, so his parents must, perforce, take his place.

This paper will investigate this phenomenon whereby the monstrosity of the acts of a dead child is assigned to his or her living parents, even when the child acted without his or her parents’ foreknowledge. This is a particularly easy substitution to make due to the stereotypes of the “always responsible adult parent” and the “non-volitional child.” For the parents are considered to have not only created the “monster” who could engage in school shootings, but who should also have known their child’s secret intentions even before he or she did. The parent’s monstrosity, thus, is unmistakeable in the actions of the child; the child is never a “monster” on his or her own terms.

The reason for this desperate need to bestow monstrosity on the parents of such killers and to then prosecute them, is, so this paper will argue, to belie the necessity of the community, or the society, to look more closely at the socio-cultural factors surrounding these killings. For, in the Columbine case, as in all the others, the people the killers claim drove them to their acts are never their parents; rather they are the bullies and the jocks who run their high schools and make life living hell for anyone who is not like them. Yet, exploration of this culture of fear and misery would mean too deep a soul search for the towns that host this sort of mass murder. Instead, the “monstrous” parents are wheeled out to face the music their children have written, to be hated in the ways their children were hated, and finally to be forced to mask those deep underlying rents in the fabric of their communities in ways their children one day simply refused any longer to do.

Keywords
American High School Shootings, Negligence, Parents, Monster, Responsibility, Children, Columbine
Eric Harris’s timeline

5:00 Get up
7:00 go to Reb’s house
7:15 he leaves to fill propane
    I leave to fill gas
8:30 Meet back at his house
9:00 set up car
9:30 practice gearups
    Chill…
10:30 set up 4 things
11: go to school
11:10 set up duffel bags
11:12 wait near cars, gear up
11:16 HAHAHA

Dylan Klebold’s timeline


Chill… HA HA HA  Have fun  Chill….

Weapons used

One TEC-DC9
One Hi-Point 9-millimeter carbine
Two double-barrelled sawed-off shotguns
27 pipe bombs
40+gallons of flammable liquid
48 carbon dioxide bombs
Duffel bag bombs filled with 20-pound liquefied petroleum gas tanks

April 20, 1999.
11:19 a.m. - 12:08 p.m.
Fifteen dead, twenty-four injured.

HA HA HA  Have fun  Chill …

Immediately after Dylan Klebold finished his shooting spree with his friend, Eric Harris, at Columbine High School in Colorado, and had then turned the gun on himself, his parents’ lawyer informed them to beware.
“Dylan isn’t here anymore for people to hate,” he said, “so people are going to hate you.”

When they first heard about the shootings, it did not occur to either Tom or Susan Klebold that their son, Dylan, was in any way responsible. As Susan said, once they heard the news, “we ran for our lives.” Dylan, the “monster” was dead, as was his partner-in-crime, Eric, so their parents must, unavoidably, take their place.

Soon enough, the Klebold’s lawyer was proven correct. The families of the victims started civil suits alleging both sets of parents were negligent. As their attorney put it, “Justice demands a full accounting of everyone who significantly contributed to this massacre. Klebold and Harris could not have developed and executed their violence without the negligence of the parents.” According to the attorney, “responsibility for violence sometimes extends beyond the person who pulls the trigger. It sometimes extends to those who contribute to individual acts of violence.”

Such sentiments, played out in the legal arena, were echoed strongly in a range of public discourses on the crimes. Five years after the massacre, poll results indicated that 83% of Americans still believed the parents were partly to blame. According to this line of thought, Thomas and Susan Klebold as well as Wayne and Katherine Harris, were responsible for their son’s shooting spree. As parents and as human beings. They were negligent. They failed to act. They may as well have pulled the trigger. They were in denial. In the words of one blogger: “How many homemade bombs does one have to move off the coffee table to buy a clue?”

“This was murder,” said the father of one of the victims, “in my opinion what went on in their home led to Columbine.” Hang on a minute. Murder, yes, thirteen murders and two suicides and it all goes back to the domestic interiors and child-rearing practices of the Klebold’s and the Harris’s. I do not buy it.

Another person who does not buy such a line is novelist, Lionel Shriver, who produced the controversial book, We Need to Talk About Kevin. Just briefly, We Need to Talk About Kevin is the story of a mother’s retrospective account of her son’s life up to and beyond the day he went to his high school and killed fellow classmates, a cafeteria worker and a teacher with a high powered crossbow. Kevin is all about the ambivalence of motherhood. Kevin’s mother, Eva Khatchadourian, really does not like her own son. In fact, she does not seem to just dislike him, at times she seems to actively hate him. This book forces us to confront the taboo subject of a mother who loathes her own child, but what is important about Kevin for the sake of this paper is that Shriver does not buy into the notion that modern day mothers (or fathers) somehow have blanket responsibility for how their children turn out. This book asks us to reconsider the idea of the child as
“perfect victim, incapable of volition,” to tolerate the notion that sometimes children act badly because they want to and it is no one’s fault but their own.

As we have seen with Columbine, the monstrosity of the acts of a dead child is assigned to his or her living parents, even when the child acted without his or her parents’ foreknowledge. This is a particularly easy substitution to make due to the stereotypes of the “always responsible adult parent” and the “non-volitional child.” For the parents are considered to have not only created the “monster” who could engage in school shootings, but who should also have known their child’s secret intentions even before he or she did. The parent’s monstrosity, thus, is unmistakeable in the actions of the child; the child is never a “monster” on his or her own terms.

The inadequacy of the parents was a popular explanation for this crime yet was not by any means the only reason given to explain, or attempt to answer, the inevitable question, why?

Other factors were offered, yet many of these textbook examples remain unconvincing. Traumatic childhoods? Hardly. Eric Harris’s family moved around a lot owing to his father’s work in the U.S. Air Force, but changes of location in themselves do not equal mass murder. Evidence of a mental illness perhaps? Whilst Harris and Klebold were retrospectively diagnosed as the sociopath and the depressive, according to a strict psychiatric diagnosis neither of them were deemed psychotic. As Jerald Block argued, “whilst both alternated between depression and grandiosity, diagnoses like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or psychotic depression do not adequately explain the teenagers’ actions.”5

However, I am just as unconvinced by Block’s analysis of the crimes in which he attributes blame to the dangers of virtual reality, where, according to Block, one lives:

[O]ne’s life in an alternative place without real touch, real smells, or real accomplishment. Such a life may lead to an existential crisis. Who am I - the virtual persona or the real one? Is my life a fiction and, if so, which world is false? Where do I exist, in my body, or somewhere on the Internet? Such questions might come to the forefront when one is abruptly severed from that virtual life, triggering a crisis.6

Block’s argument is that both Klebold and Harris were “seduced by the ease of the virtual,” dislocated by the “harshness of the real” and then, ultimately “unwilling or unable to restrict their impulses.”7 Block argues that when the boys were, at one stage, banned from computer usage, the reduction of their virtual fix was “destructive and isolating,” and led to the “crisis” of the massacre.8
Once again, I do not buy it. Decades of effects theorists could easily critique Block’s argument as overly simplistic and reductionist. Such critiques would also be usefully applied to critics who blamed the following as influences and inspirations for the murders - violent computer games such as *Doom*; films such as *Alien*, *Starship Troopers*, and *Natural Born Killers*. Music was also said to be a cause. Marilyn Manson was singled out as a significant and dangerous influence. However, according to students at Columbine High, neither Eric nor Dylan listened to Marilyn Manson, rather they thought he was a sell-out. Other musical influences were reportedly Rammstein, and KMFDM, particularly the songs, “Son of a Gun” and “Stray Bullet” were said to be among Harris’ favourites. Understandably, Rammstein and KMFDM all rejected responsibility for the massacre afterwards.

Gun control was reported to be another reason. I do not have time to go into this debate in my paper but would recommend Mike Moore’s *Bowling for Columbine* as a pertinent text on this issue.

Nazism is also listed as a possible influence although this is generally attributed to Harris having made no secret of his admiration of the Nazi’s in his diary. Whilst he does praise them on numerous occasions, Harris is also critical of how fascism could work in practice. References to the Nazi’s could not be located in Klebold’s journals, perhaps owing to him being Jewish. Either way, there is little evidence to indicate that the pair’s massacre was influenced by Nazi mythologies.

So far in this paper, I have ruled out a number of possible explanations for the youths’ acts. Bad parenting, abusive childhoods, mental illness, addiction to the virtual, popular music, gun access, and Nazism.

Why then did Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold commit such a crime? I do not have a definitive answer. It is far too simplistic to monster either the boys - they were freaks, they had bad genes - or the parents - they neglected the boys, they were in denial, etc. Whilst initially reassuring, such explanations draw on standard narratives of “good” versus “evil,” the “monstrous” versus “the un-monstrous,” the abhorrent versus the everyday. Perhaps we could ask the boys.

In their writings and videos the boys made a point of excusing their own families.

In Eric Harris’ words:

My parents are the best fucking parents I have ever known.
My dad is great. I wish I was a fucking sociopath so I didn’t have any remorse, but I do. This is going to tear them apart. They will never forget it.

Then addressing his parents directly, Eric says:
There is nothing you guys could have done to prevent any of this. There is nothing that anyone could have done to prevent this. No one is to blame except me and Vodka (Dylan).\textsuperscript{11}

In another entry on Mother’s Day, Eric invokes Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, “Good wombs hath borne bad sons.”\textsuperscript{12} Second-guessing the media coverage that would eventuate, Eric is even more specific:

> It’s my fault! Not my parents, not my brothers, not my friends, not my favourite bands, not computer games, not the media, it’s mine.\textsuperscript{13}

In such entries, blame is not attributed to the “bad parents,” or the variety of other possibilities, but rather to themselves - the bad sons.

It would be easy to end on this note. To argue that the “bad sons,” who accepted full responsibility, are indeed the monstrous beings they claim to be.

However, to bestow monstrosity on the “bad sons,” or for that matter on their parents, is to belie the necessity of the community, or the society, which these killings took place in. So what I want to do in the remainder of this paper is to examine more closely some of the socio-cultural factors surrounding these killings, in particular, the bullying “jock culture” of Columbine High. For, in this case, the people the killers claim drove them to their acts are never their parents; rather they are the bullies and the jocks who run their high schools and make life living hell for anyone who is not like them.

A true confession. During the research for this paper I scrutinized the transcripts left behind by the killers. Did I find the “monsters” I was seeking? No, instead what was strangely uncanny about Dylan’s and Eric’s diatribes was their intense familiarity. These entries had been recorded almost two decades after my own high school days, and at the other end of the world, yet they spoke to me. They touched me. They reminded me.

Dylan’s notebooks, for example, were full of entries about being depressed, not fitting in, and generally hating his life. He describes himself as being in “a weird time, weird life, weird existence […] I swear […] like I’m an outcast, & everyone is conspiring against me.”\textsuperscript{14}

Eric’s railings against the world also struck a chord.

Take this, for example:
I hate the fucking world [...] everyone is a follower! [...] Ever wonder why we go to school? Besides getting a so called education. Its not to obvious to most of you stupid fucks but for those who think a little more and deeper you should realize it. Its societies way of turning all the young people into good little robots and factory workers that’s why we sit in desks in rows and go by bell schedules, to get prepared for the real world cause “that’s what its like …” “How dare you think that I and you are part of the same species when we are soooooooo different. you aren’t human you are a robot”

Normal teenage rants? Or “evidence” of “evil”? There are numerous entries by both boys which exhibit grandiosity (talk, for example, of their superior “universal intelligence” and “self awareness”) as well as many racist and homophobic diatribes in Eric’s journals.

Yes, there were an awful lot of revenge fantasies.

It is well-documented that both Eric and Dylan had been bullied at school. Both boys certainly felt looked down upon by their peers. In Eric Harris’ suicide note, for example, he links his retaliatory blood-bath to this sense of exclusion: “Your children who have ridiculed me, who have chosen not to accept me, who have treated me like I am not worth their time are dead.”

As Mark Ames succinctly put it, “Everything was blamed except the most obvious cause of the attack: Columbine High School.” Ames describes how after the shootings, numerous parents, students and ex-students talked publicly about the school’s “toxic” culture of brutality. Ames quotes one jock from the Columbine High football team bragging after the massacre, “Sure we teased them. If you want to get rid of someone, usually you tease ‘em. So the whole school would call them homos.” Instead of the “usual suspects” (the parents, the media, virtual games, guns etc), Ames posits Columbine High, and some of its “human villains” (whom he names) and their “viciousness” as being the main cause of the massacre. Although I have certain sympathetic leanings towards this explanation, one could also argue that although bullying is relatively common in the high school context, massacres of this type are much more rare.

Having said this, what is significant about most of the literature on the Columbine shootings is that, for the most part, everything but the high school culture that Eric and Dylan were a part of has been held up to account and closely scrutinized. Nazism. Marilyn Manson. Virtual reality. Doom. Guns. Occasionally, bullying does rate a mention, but it receives minimal attention in contrast to these other “explanations.”
One may ask, why is this so? Why is an analysis of *Doom*, for example, privileged over an examination of the bullying culture that existed, and presumably still does, at Columbine High? I would argue that it is far more productive to examine the social organization of high schools and their bullying culture than spend time on simplistic theories concerning the effects of the media or computer, or the individual psychological characteristics of the killers.

Why have these boys become heroes to so many? What is it that resonates in this tale of two nerdy, geeky boys from high achieving, upper middle class families taking their revenge on, among others, the “jocks” of their school?

I would argue that it is because there is a certain secret, guilty pleasure there. Not one that most of us would readily own up to. However, when I was reading a recreation of the events in the library, I could hardly suppress a feeling of “satisfaction” - is perhaps not the right word. However, I felt uneasy reading the section when the gunman were reported to have singled out the members of the sports teams for attention, with their demand, “Everyone with a white cap or baseball cap, stand up!” and “All jocks stand up! We’ll get the guys in white hats!” Wearing a white baseball cap at Columbine High signified that one was a member of a sports team. So the geeks (of sorts) were getting their revenge on the jocks.

I need to stress here that I do not in any way condone the actions of either Dylan Klebold or Eric Harris. They murdered people for reasons best known to themselves. Perhaps what my guilty satisfaction was about was two factors. First, that someone was actually standing up to the jocks. Second, that post-Columbine, entrenched and toxic cultures of bullying have been exposed, if only momentarily, and if only, for all the wrong reasons.

To conclude. I do not have a definitive answer on “why” Eric and Dylan did what they did, nor do I aim or expect to produce one. I began this paper by investigating the way in which the “monstrosity” of the boy’s actions were displaced onto the parents, both in media and legal circles. I finish up this paper with a brief examination of the bullying culture that existed at Columbine High. My point here is not to attribute blame to any one sector or group of people but rather to highlight the culture which existed at the time and which, for the most part, has been ignored in serious discussions on the massacre. I argue here that an exploration of this culture of fear and misery would mean too deep a soul search for the towns that host this sort of mass murder. Instead, it is easier and more convenient to wheel out the “monstrous” parents to face the music their children have written, to be hated in the ways their children were hated, and finally to be forced to mask those deep underlying rents in the fabric of their communities in ways their children one day simply refused any longer to do.
Kristen Davis

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Killing “Just For Fun”: Amoral Monsters

Belinda Morrissey

Abstract

On June 18, 2006, in Collie, a Western Australian mining town, two teenage girls strangled their friend, Eliza Davis, with speaker wire. They had no motive for doing so, other than their claim that they wanted to “experience” killing someone. In the girls’ terms, their acts had no moral force; indeed, it was an entirely amoral act, divorced from any concept of compassion or ethical behaviour.

This paper will argue that the appellation “monster” has a moral dimension on the part of those who use it to describe another’s behaviour. It will place the case it considers in the context of a long line of earlier “thrill kills” where teenagers have killed just “for fun.” It will examine the tension between the public condemnation of these killers as “monsters” and the killers’ own amoralistic explanation for their acts. It will analyse whether or not amorality is, in itself, monstrous, or whether it problematizes the concept of the “monster,” specifically in moral and ethical terms.

This paper will diverge from earlier studies of amoral acts, including those of Hannah Arendt and Shoshana Felman on Adolf Eichmann, in that it will move beyond the spectre of the amoral “agent” only “following orders” to justify his deeds, to the figures of these two young girls, and others who came before them, who killed merely because they wanted to, not even because they were asked by someone else to do so. The paper will argue that there is a great difference, even in shades of amorality, between “following orders” and deliberately deciding on one’s own behalf to kill so as to try out the experience. It will claim that in many ways, these teenaged “thrill killers” are both more monstrous than someone like Eichmann, and at the same time, less monstrous; both more responsible and even further steeped in an amoral universe.

Finally, the paper will consider our very capacity to judge these girls. If they are so unlike “us” in their amorality, can we evaluate them in “moral” terms, and denounce them as “monsters”? For, as the paper will observe, these seemingly vacuous thrill killers are our community’s most vehement examples of the “Other”: Terrifyingly incomprehensible, yet uncanny reminders of the capacities for violence and mercilessness present in all of us.

Keywords
Teen killers, girl, Eliza Davis, monster, amorality, Collie, thrill killing

Monsters are not elusive creatures. Instead, they are terrifyingly evident: We know the shape of a monster, the look of a monster, the actions of a monster.
It is not hard to define the monstrous, and it is not hard to reject the monsters when we catch them. Our certainty on this point seems breathtaking. Monsters are those who expose the limit between the human and the inhuman. They engage in “evil” acts, they hurt the “innocent,” and they can no longer have any right to the common decencies to which humanity is traditionally entitled.

Clearly, then, monstrosity is a moral term, reeking with judgement, disparaging of ambiguity or ambivalence. Monsters form part of a dichotomous “good” or “bad” universe, where they are always bad. Little or no rehabilitation can be expected of a monster; personal and ethical development or change is denied them. Monsters do not and cannot change, they can only be. There is no hope for a monster.

This is a discourse with which we are all so familiar that it becomes almost laughable to contest it. Defending monsters is not very high on anyone’s list of priorities for human rights or civil liberties. Monsters deserve the worst fates possible, and these usually include horrors far worse than our justice systems can provide. Moreover, the nature of monstrousness is such that the individual traits of the monsters themselves seem to matter very little when such calls for vengeance are made. For attributions of monstrousness can lead to people calling for the death penalty, even for offenders who were legally children at the time of the offence that created them “monstrous.” Further, not just any death is demanded; rather slow tortures are conceived for boys and girls whose right to any kind of civility was removed when they were named in this way.

The two girls I am going to talk about today certainly committed an awful crime, but their monstrous appellation only came about due to specific features both of the crime itself and of the personalities of the girls. I am not intending to defend the murder they undertook. Instead, I want to ask only one question when we think of these girls and especially, when we hear that what they did was incomprehensible. That question, once asked in a very different context regarding the Holocaust, is: “What is it that we do not want to understand?”

At around 10.30 on the morning of Sunday, 18 June 2006, 15 year old, Eliza Jane Davis died in the small West Australian town of Collie. She was murdered by two sixteen-year-old girls she had considered her “best” friends. These girls cannot be named as they were legally children when they committed the murder. One crept up on her from behind and strangled her with speaker wire, while the other held a chemical soaked rag over the girl’s face. The girl with the wire claimed that the “only thing [she] was thinking about was trying to pull [the wire] as tight as [she] could,” even while she faced Eliza who was by then lying on the floor. Eliza at first abused her tormentors, saying “Oh you freaks, what’s wrong with you psychos, you’ll never get away with it.” However, she soon became scared, started to cry
and to beg for her life. Unable to get her breath, blood finally frothed from her mouth and she died. The two girls then dragged her to some stairs leading under the house, pushed her body down them, and buried her in a shallow grave under the foundations.

Later, the killers were to confirm that they had not wanted Eliza to suffer because, after all, she was their friend. They explained that they had chosen the manner of her death so that it would be “quick and non-messy,” both because of this apparent desire for mercy and, more importantly, because one of them needed to get back to Perth that day and could not risk a drawn out killing followed by a lengthy cleaning up ritual.

Once Eliza was reported missing, both girls helped in the search. At this point, they quickly realised that, due to the shallowness of her grave, she was sure to be found. So, they went separately to police stations in different towns and gave themselves up, much to astonishment of all around them. As one police officer who charged them observed:

They were fairly unremarkable people that you wouldn’t look twice at if you were walking down the street, but they were that cold and calculating they could plan to murder a friend in the circumstances that they did - it is absolutely bizarre.

Their reasons for their actions were also pretty bizarre - in that they did not exist. The two recounted that they had been partying with Eliza the night before the killing, and had smoked marijuana and taken “pink ice.” They had then retired to the house which one of them shared with their victim, and gone to sleep. In the morning, the two had sat around after breakfast having one of their familiar discussions about killing someone. Both agreed they would not “feel bad,” if they were to do so. Then, for no apparent reason, they decided to kill Eliza. They were not jealous of her or angry with her, they stressed; she was merely a convenient victim. As one said, “We just did it because we felt like it. It’s hard to explain.” The other added, “I knew we had wanted to kill someone before. We knew it was wrong, but it didn’t feel wrong at all, it just felt right.” Indeed, they had even practiced for the homicide by killing two kittens shortly prior.

Moreover, they felt absolutely no remorse for having taken Eliza’s life. As one observed: “If she had died another way, it probably would have bothered me […] but, it just did not.” They did regret the fuss the whole thing had caused, and at trial, one managed to express her sorrow for the loss to Eliza’s family. However, at all times, both have stated clearly and categorically that they were not sorry Eliza, herself, was dead, although they did miss her as a friend, nor that they were unhappy they had been responsible for her death.
Indeed, neither girl has even expressed upset at their own situation. As they have maintained throughout, they were “willing to take the risk” when they killed Eliza, pointing out that “We said if we did get caught, shit happens and we will deal with it.”9 Certainly, they have retained their stoicism, sitting unmoved through a sentence which will not see them paroled until they are at least thirty-two years of age.

Needless to say, this case represents something of an anomaly in Australian justice. The Prosecutor, predictably enough, emphasised their lack of remorse, but even he had to admit the reasons for the crime were a “mystery.”9 Even more tellingly, he was forced to concede that “there is no sensible explanation in any of the materials I have seen to explain the killing.”10 The girls’ own lawyers were as baffled as the Prosecutor, having got no further with their clients as to any possible motivation for the crime. Lacking any information from the girls themselves, they decided to rely on the old standbys of bad childhoods and drugs. One of the girls, considered the leader of the two, was obsessed with death and emo culture. As a young child, her father had taken her hunting and she had seen wild animals killed and skinned. Later a cruel stepfather humiliated her. She began using marijuana at ten and by fourteen was taking whatever drugs she could get her hands on - speed, ecstasy, heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine or “ice.” She was also a Goth who self-harmed. Further, she was often homeless and “lived rough.” It was claimed that the murder was a “misplaced type of aggression, perhaps an act of desperation, to resolve the crisis.” The other girl had lost both parents by the age of twelve. She never came to terms with her mother’s death, and wound up in a series of bad foster placements, after having been let down by her family.11 Nevertheless, even she claimed she had no reason to kill Eliza who had actually taken her in and given her a home. Eventually, the judge was left with little option but to partially blame drugs and to claim that the girls were clearly in an “enmeshed” and dangerous relationship to explain the whole mess away. When in doubt, folie a deux always seems like a good idea!

These are the two girls, then, who have become the “monsters” of Collie, and of whom Eliza’s family and friends would dearly like to demand the death penalty. They form part of a continuum of a lengthening history of thrill kills committed out of moral vacuity, or perhaps more accurately, out of amorality. These girls have the capacity to frighten lawyers and journalists precisely because they appear to have no moral compass, nothing more to guide their actions than their own momentary desires. This can be seen to be monstrous in itself, evil incarnate, non-controlled inhumanity expressing itself on the body of a defenceless teenaged girl. Their acts demonstrate for those who tried and wrote about them, the limits of the human and the inhuman. Clearly, they were considered to have forfeited their right to be human when they strangled and suffocated Eliza Davis.
This is argued because, as Sergio Pérez has stated,

[H]umanity is the result of the observance of specific prohibitions, which in certain cases are universal. To protect itself from the threat of dissolution, human life requires rules, laws and the continuity provided by individuals and institutions preserving and supporting it.\textsuperscript{12}

If someone like these two girls wilfully deny these prohibitions, then, they made a choice to enact a form of “freedom” to undertake evil deeds. They chose to defy society and pursue their own desires, no matter what form those desires took. Indeed, in knowing what they did was wrong, and in doing it anyway, the two enacted the most “magnificent and supreme” of evils, in Pérez’s terms, by understanding what good was and deliberately choosing to sink into evil.\textsuperscript{13} Instead, they asserted their own individual sovereignty, their capacity to overlook the laws preserving the continuity of life and maintain a state of complete indifference to death. For them, Eliza’s death had no meaning. It did not matter and nor did she. All that was important was that they got to experience the act of taking the life of another. They got to see her die. Furthermore, they were utterly dispassionate about it, which only made their acts worse, as they lacked even the veil of strong feeling to ameliorate their crimes.

Their sovereignty in choosing to ignore the rules governing humanity’s continued existence is, of course, false, because it threatens their own lives, and has in many respects, has ended them. Yet, we could argue that this only makes them more terrifying: They show that which we do not want to see, that often humans are their own worst enemies, even when they are abusing another so horribly.

It is easy to see, then, why these two should be called “monsters.” Yet, I want to suggest that their monstrousness is undercut in one very important way. These girls existed within an amoral universe; they were not party nor privy to the delicacies of moral philosophy. Indeed, it is doubtful whether they would even make sense of distinctions between subtle gradations of moral behaviour. Rather, they acted in two ways which terrified their judges and commentators. Firstly, they acted in a sense like the active nihilists of whom Nietzsche wrote. Albert Camus described this kind of person very well in his book *The Outsiders* with his character, Meursault, who shoots and kills a young Arab. He refuses to justify or mitigate his actions because he believes that “the only ethics of which humanity is capable is to take honest responsibility for one’s own actions and not hide behind an abstract and empty moral code.”\textsuperscript{14} Like Meursault, these two girls display the same nihilism, in insisting on their own indifference to the world, the lack of any extenuating circumstances for their crime, and their
willingness to accept the consequences for what they have done. Their acceptance of fault is not a moral quest; rather, to do anything else would be to deny their act. This ability to face unflinchingly the consequences one must face for following one’s desires, completely undermines the Law’s power to punish or the media’s power to vilify. For these girls do not care, and their lack of concern for their own fate, or that of their victim, means they effectively escape all that society can throw at them in the way of retribution.

Second, the murder of Eliza Davis proves, once again, Hannah Arendt’s thesis of the banality of evil. Arendt introduced this term at the time of Adolf Eichmann’s trial to “face up to the fact that the perpetrators [of the Holocaust]” were “men like ourselves” who demonstrated what terrible deeds “ordinary men” are capable of.” She realised from watching this trial, that evil was even more horrifying when it was committed thoughtlessly, and through “remoteness from reality.” Eichmann claimed he simply followed orders, and it never occurred to him not to. He did not think about his victims, and he did not consider their reality. Rather, he, like numerous of his co-conspirators, saw themselves merely as “cogs in the machine,” who killed professionally, “without passion or ill will.” They murdered during their working hours, and saw no contradiction between their day jobs and their roles as fathers, husbands, sons, and neighbours. Evil acts became second nature, as commonplace as any other type of work. It became ordinary, banal; committed without any reservation or consideration for those who were harmed, nor even for those who might eventually find out and be repulsed. It seemed that repulsion had been excised from these people’s understanding, so that when they were finally tried for war crimes, many, including Eichmann, were nonplussed as to why they should be so persecuted.

The killers of Eliza Davis manifest the banality of evil as well, albeit on a much smaller scale. But, in placing such thoughtless evil directly in our own back yards, literally in the case of the people of Collie, they brought home the fear such evil raises even more potently perhaps than did Eichmann and his ilk, who, after all, committed such atrocities in another place and another time. Their crime was entirely thoughtless, although at least they did admit they knew it was “wrong.” Eliza’s life simply was not important to them in any real way. Nor indeed, it should be pointed out, were their own. The consequences of their act did not bother them, the pain to her did not worry them, the ending of her life was neither here nor there, and they actually seemed to believe they had been merciful in choosing “only” to strangle her.

Eliza’s murder can be argued to be both more, and less, monstrous than the murders carried out due to “orders.” It is more monstrous because this was not a killing sanctioned by anyone else; it was not part of an orchestrated genocide; it never had even the slightest veneer of some
hypocritical political hyperbole to sustain it. Instead, Eliza died because her “friends” thought they would not mind killing someone, and she was just in the next room. On the other hand, of course, it is always going to be less monstrous an act than those which resulted in the murders of millions of people. There is no comparison to be made in terms of the enormity of the crime on a global humanitarian scale. Yet, on an individual scale, her death is as much an enormity as any of those who died in the Holocaust. She died, as they did, for no reason. She died horribly, for someone else’s dubious thrill. Her life was severed to suit her killers’ desires. She deserves justice as much as any other murder victim.

Yet, in Eliza’s case, as in those of the victims of the Holocaust, she will never actually receive real justice, if by that we mean that the killers confront their crimes and repent. For the killers, in both these cases, lived within an amoral world, where the rules by which humanity functions to preserve itself were relegated unimportant. Eliza’s killers removed themselves from the processes of justice and from the consequences of their actions when they professed not to care. Eichmann and his cronies went to their deaths still scratching their heads, wondering what they had done wrong. Justice cannot function in these circumstances. It reaches an aporia; a blank of massive proportions.

So, we come back to the question with which I began this paper: “What is it that we do not want to understand?” Why do we persist in merely characterising these girls as monsters and claiming they are incomprehensible? They are not.

Girls like the ones who killed Eliza Davis inhabit a world of amorality, where the normal rules do not apply. They have no care for themselves, nor for others. Perhaps, given their fixation with the beauties of death, they actually cared for Eliza more than any one. They may scare us, but they not impossible to imagine, nor to understand. Girls like these exist to show that evil persists despite all our good intentions, and all our attempts to fix it. Indeed, it persists despite the fact that, of all societies, ours feels the most collective guilt for the actions of so few, and tries so hard to prevent evil or to find reasons for it. Evil is, and there is no solution for it. The only thing we can do is not to label it monstrous.

Notes
Killing “Just For Fun”: Amoral Monsters

6 ibid.
7 Kappelle.
8 Kappelle.
9 op. cit.
10 Gibson.
13 Pérez, p. 191.
15 Fine, p. 143.
16 Fine, p. 144.
17 Fine, p. 139.

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**Herculine Barbin: Human Error, Criminality and the Case of the Monstrous Hermaphrodite**

*Jessica Kate Webb*

**Abstract**

Discovered by Michel Foucault in the archives of the French Department of Public Hygiene, Herculine Barbin’s diary documents her experiences as a hermaphrodite. Classified as a girl at birth, she develops into an extremely isolated, bewildered, and sexually-charged female only to be re-classified as a man in her early twenties. On the face of it, Herculine’s erotic diary is concerned with an ill-fated love affair, her own medical reclassification and social scandal. Yet, when examined in relation to various manifestations of monstrosity, the narrative is packed with allusions to her position as human mutant; brought in from the arctic cold where Frankenstein’s creature was left wandering, she represents a new variety of monstrosity that is absolutely central rather than peripheral in the text. My paper will examine the subtle, complex and roundabout ways in which Herculine’s battle with her own gender exposes a worryingly dangerous threat of monstrous criminality: “Possessed by feelings […] my imagination was ceaselessly troubled by the memory of the sensations that has been awakened in me, and I came to the point of blaming myself for them like a crime.” A new type of creature is shown to emerge; contrary to the gothic mummy, vampire or witch, this monster comes from within polite society. Identity is a monstrous process. Although she is aware of her own fragmented identity, Herculine maintains a sexual relationship with Sara transforming the hermaphrodite lover into a kind of criminal sexual predator. This principal figure is literally and figuratively between bodies. My paper, then, suggests that monstrosity and its position in Herculine Barbin’s diary is far from straightforward; it draws attention to things - particularly in the area of criminality, sexual deviancy and the mutant female body - that contemporary society would have preferred to ignore, and, as such, insidiously but insistently disrupts the overt, central narrative.

In this paper, I am going to focus on a single text: The diary of a nineteenth-century French hermaphrodite that was discovered by Michel Foucault in the archives of the French Department of Public Hygiene nearly a century after it was written. Indeed, Herculine Barbin’s journal painstakingly documents her experiences as a hermaphrodite, right through her adolescence, to her reclassification as a man, and final suicide. Born on November 8, 1838, she was christened Adélaïde Herculine Barbin, known by
her family as Alexina but refers to herself as Camille throughout her memoirs. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I am going to follow this example and refer to her as Camille and as a female.

Looking closely at this journal, my paper will examine the subtle, complex and roundabout ways in which Camille’s battle with her gender exposes a dangerous threat of monstrous criminality. Indeed, the ambiguity of hermaphroditism seems to have fascinated Foucault enough to have influenced his subsequent research into sexuality, leading him to ask the loaded question “do we really need a true sex?” Moreover, his 1974-1975 lecture series, given at the Collège de France, focused on nineteenth-century human abnormality whereby he divided the topic into individual monstrosity (i.e., physical or psychological), masturbation, and indiscipline. But it is not only Foucault that was intrigued by this form of human error. Throughout history the hermaphrodite plays an ambiguous and ever-changing role in society. Finding its origins in Greek mythology, and brought to life in Ovid’s Metamorphosis, Hermaphroditos was the bisexual offspring of Hermes and Aphrodite who excited the passion of the fountain nymph Salmacis. After praying to the gods that she may be eternally united with this male, the nymph secretly bathed in the same waters as Hermaphroditos to physically merge with him and create a female boy: Hence the term, hermaphrodite. Following on from this, during the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, the hermaphrodite was denoted as two sexes that were simply juxtaposed. In such cases, the father determined the sex of the child at the time of baptism which could be quite easily reversed by the hermaphrodite on the condition that the reversal was permanent. Foucault explains the significance of this by emphasising how “hermaphrodites were free to decide for themselves if they wished to go on being of the sex which had been assigned to them.” Importantly for my research, it was not up to a doctor or lawyer to decipher the true sex: Hermaphrodites themselves had control over their bodies at this point in history.

By the nineteenth century, however, attitudes had changed, and, as Foucault points out, society was “powerfully haunted by the theme of the hermaphrodite - somewhat as the eighteenth century has been haunted by the theme of the transvestite.” I suggest that the key point in this change in attitude comes with Charles Darwin’s 1859 publication of On the Origin of Species. Significantly, in this work, Darwin saw the cross-fertilisation of a hermaphrodite plant as an abnormality of nature which may have helped to alter the meaning of the word to something that is an error. More specifically with regard to the text, Camille’s reclassification as a man occurs in 1860, only a year after Darwin’s groundbreaking research into evolution. Again, it is Michel Foucault in his History of Sexuality who draws attention to a shift in attitude towards the hermaphrodite, emphasising not only the
biological abnormality but also the criminal element of the condition. He explains how:

Prohibitions bearing on sex were essentially of a juridical nature. The “nature” on which they were based were criminals, or crime’s offspring, since their anatomical disposition, their very being, confounded the law that distinguished the sexes.7

Indeed, even today, the Oxford English Dictionary classifies a hermaphrodite as:

A human being, or one of the higher animals, in which parts characteristic of both sexes are to some extent (really or apparently) combined. (Formally supposed to occur naturally in some races of men and beasts; but now regarded as a monstrosity).8

So, with this image of monstrosity in mind, it is best to turn our attention towards specific parts of the text. From the very beginning of the journal, Camille is only too aware of her difference, expressing it in terms of something grotesque. After being sent to a convent school at the age of seventeen, her situation surrounded by other adolescent girls only works to heighten her sense of being an outsider. She laments that:

At that age, when all a woman’s graces unfold, I had neither that free and easy bearing nor […] well-rounded limbs […] My upper lip and a part of my cheeks were covered by a light down that increased as the days passed. Understandably, this peculiarity often drew to me joking remarks that I tried to avoid by making frequent use of scissors in place of a razor [but my] body was literally covered with it, and so unlike my companions.9

The most fundamental binary opposite, that of male and female disintegrates as a complicated world of intersex destroys the two sexes/two bodies model. Moreover, what is significant in this quotation is not only her description of male characteristics and deformity, but the reaction of her peers to her appearance. Camille is reduced to an object of ridicule; distorted limbs and excessive body hair transform the religious school into some form of circus freak-show - something that was all too common in nineteenth century Europe. Unlike both the circus acts and Darwin’s abnormal specimens, however, this human error is not contained, labelled, and put on display for
all to see. Camille is left to continue her education surrounded by confusion about her gender and, more importantly, surrounded by sexual temptation.

Time and time again in the narrative, she is sexually aroused by the presence of girls and forms intense friendships throughout her early schooldays that soon develop into various, essentially homoerotic, relationships. For example, after befriending seventeen-year-old Lea, Camille passionately explains how she was "her slave, her faithful and grateful dog. I loved her with the same ardour I put into everything" and admits that she used to creep into her bedroom at night to slip a little ivory crucifix around Lea’s neck before “kissing her several times.” Such an unconventional display of excessive affection does not go unnoticed by a convent nun who catches the love-struck girl and says that “I will not inflict punishment upon you; Mother Elénore will attend to it tomorrow” and forces Camille to enter the Mother Superiors office “like a condemned man going before his judge.” What is significant here is that the text seems to operate at two levels. At one level, this is simply an example of a disobedient schoolgirl. But there is a sinister undertone. Even though she is “just” giving her friend a gift, the notion of Camille creeping into bedrooms under the cover of darkness to kiss and caress another pupil adds an incubus-like element to the narrative to suggest that this form of female intimacy is never completely innocent. Additionally, the language used to describe the event criminalises Camille’s action, turning her midnight wanderings into something illegal that reduces her to a “condemned man.” Once more, the fluid boundary dividing the two genders transforms the hermaphrodite into something dangerous: Her behaviour is not considered feminine, and, as such, she labels herself as masculine. What I am interested in is the way that a new form of monstrosity emerges from beneath the shadows of polite society and, even more worryingly, from within the innocence of the schoolroom itself.

Indeed, what becomes more and more apparent is that, contrary to stereotypical fiends such as the mummy, vampire and witch, this new type of horror can be found lurking in religious institutions and even given the status of schoolmistress. Yet, the same predatory and homoerotic elements that characterise gothic creations like the vampire can also be found in the hermaphrodite. Indeed, elements of the gothic invade the narrative to shape Camille’s identity, transforming her from teacher to some form of sexual predator. More specifically, it is her relationship with fellow schoolmistress Sara that is an important example of this metamorphosis. Although their friendship is initially platonic, it soon deepens into something far more serious as Camille describes how:

Since the morning, she [Sara] had been feeling a bit resentful toward me. In spite of all of her efforts, I had just drawn a
smile from her, which I gave back to her while overwhelming her with kisses. In the movement I made, her chignon became unfastened, and her hair, tumbling down, flowed all over my shoulders and part of my face. I pressed my burning lips to it.\textsuperscript{15}

The tone of this diary entry suggests that sheer desperation drives Camille to overpower her friend and smother her with kisses. Sara is an object of desire that cannot be resisted and, therefore, must be conquered. Although her attempt to distance herself from the predatory Camille fails to have any effect, her body becomes eroticised and, more specifically, the reference to her hair transforms her into something highly sexualised as the two female bodies become almost fused together. But what becomes even more noticeable is that Camille’s location on a boundary between female/male, normal/mutant, and victim/criminal shifts as her sexual relationship with Sara intensifies.

Guilt-ridden and torn apart by what she terms their “terrifying secret,”\textsuperscript{16} Camille obsessively declares:

\begin{quote}
My God! Was I guilty? And must I accuse myself here of a crime? No, no! That fault was not mine; it was the fault of an unexampled fatality, which I could not resist!!! Henceforth, Sara belonged to me!! She was mine!!!\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Her language grows more and more irrational while her disjointed sentences and excessive use of exclamation marks reveal the extent to which she is seized by these new sensations and battles with her own moral conscience. Obsessed by her feelings, her lover seems powerless to stop events spiralling out of control while yet another reference to crime suggests that a new type of clandestine criminality emerges to threaten the domestic set-up and nineteenth-century society itself.

Soon enough, however, the “crime” that is concealed beneath this unconventional, and suggestively homosexual, friendship is detected by society and brought to light amid a cloud of scandal, shock and intrigue. Forced to undergo intrusive medical examinations, Camille is then subjected to a court procedure that alters her civil status and formally registers her as a man. Furthermore, the town gossips label her as a sexual menace that had “brought shame and dishonour everywhere, and had profited brazenly from […]her] situation in order to engage secretly in love affairs with women who had been consecrated to the Lord.”\textsuperscript{18} Essentially, then, the very notion of a hermaphrodite seems incomprehensible to nineteenth-century society, shattering tireless attempts to both understand and categorise the sexes. Indeed, unable to break the taboo of silence, it is up to medicine and the law
to interpret events: In the wake of numerous scientific advances, society looks towards well-established and trusted professions to offer a discourse that could explain such biological and moral error.

Moreover, what this case demonstrates is that as well as monstrosity emerging from within polite society, there is a form of monstrosity within the self. The idea of a bi-partite soul relentlessly troubled nineteenth-century thinkers, and, indeed, seems to arise in the case of Camille. Once again, it is Foucault in the *History of Sexuality* who stated that homosexuality (such as what seems to be happening at the stage in the text when Camille is having sexual relations with a female while she is still classified as female herself) “appears as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul.” As a result homosexuality, hermaphroditism and the divided soul are all presented as somehow interlinked. It, therefore, seems to be precisely this interchange-ability that continues to unsettle the text, creating a new type of human mutant in body, mind and soul.

Indeed, identity is a monstrous process. Although Camille is aware of her own fragmented identity she maintains a sexual relationship with Sara, transforming the hermaphrodite lover into a kind of criminal sexual predator. Not only is she is literally and figuratively between bodies, but she also blurs the boundaries between villain and victim, human and monster, homosexual and heterosexual. Brought in from the Arctic cold where Frankenstein’s monster was left wandering, she represents a new variety of fiend that is absolutely central rather than peripheral in the text. My research, than, suggests that monstrosity and its position in the diary of Camille is far from straightforward; it draws attention to things - particularly in the area of criminality, sexuality and the mutant female body - that nineteenth century society would have preferred to ignore, and, as such, insidiously and insistently disrupts the overt, central narrative.

**Notes**


4 Foucault, p.viii.

5 Foucault, p. xvii.
10 Barbin, p. 9.
11 Barbin, p. 11.
12 Barbin, p.11.
13 Barbin, p.12.
14 Barbin, p.12.
15 Barbin, p. 50
16 Barbin, p. 51.
17 Barbin, p. 51
18 Barbin, p. 90.
19 M Foucault, p. 43.

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Jessica Webb is an English Literature PhD student at Cardiff University. Her thesis is entitled, *Orthodoxy and the Occult: Religious Turmoil and Victorian Narratives* and explores the uneasy relationship between the supernatural, science, and Christianity in the Victorian novel, raising questions about how we should read the seemingly endless public fascination with the paranormal in an age dominated by debates on Christianity and which simultaneously celebrated the technological achievements of the 1851 Great Exhibition.
This paper provides evidence of an inconsistency and an absence of a definite concept of monstrosity within the nineteenth century. Using the autobiographies of monsters and medical reports, I will concentrate on three main areas: The use of classification systems in the diagnosis of monstrosity, experimental embryology and the evidence given for the causes of monstrosity, and the treatment offered in public hospitals to cure monstrosities. I argue that there was no clear definition of monstrosity in medicine at this time. Instead, a space was created where monsters had multiple causes, aetiologies, different diagnoses, and were analysed as individuals. Teratology encouraged wide-ranging debate and experimental science, which led to a transformation of the understanding of monstrosity in the nineteenth century. This new understanding spread across medicine and was reflected in the social consciousness and literary representation of the time. In particular, the “new” discourse of monstrosity was characterised by the attempted removal of mythical explanations and an uneasy acceptance of experimental science. The life of Joseph Merrick, famous as “The Elephant Man,” demonstrates the inconsistency of teratological classification, diagnosis, evidence and treatment. Not only did Joseph experience the absence of a universal medical opinion, he also questioned the opinions of those offered to him. Joseph was highly vocal in his beliefs in mythology and the cause of his own condition, which clashed with all major forms of teratological theory. His life as a travelling “freak” also brought questions about the legitimacy of his case within medicine, and the legitimacy of those who treated him. Joseph’s disorder not only interacted with medical debates but with philosophical and anthropological debates. His case is important as it highlights discrepancies in the debates upon religion, hybridism, heredity theory and evolution.

In this paper, I argue that there was no clear concept of monstrosity in nineteenth century medical thought. Instead, monstrosity was contested within British medicine and in debates ranging from the classification systems, to possible causes and diagnosis; even the treatments offered to cure monsters varied wildly. All of these areas produced discussion and debate not only within teratology, but also in medicine more generally as doctors attempted to explain human monstrosity. This provides evidence that within these debates there is no prominent concept of monstrosity; rather, these
debates give monsters individual identities and multiple aetiologies. I argue that Joseph Merrick’s experience of the medical profession demonstrates this instability.

In the nineteenth century, “freak-shows” exhibiting monsters were increasingly popular. For example, in 1847 *Punch* “suggested the existence of an epidemic of a new disease termed ‘Deformito-mania’ and published a cartoon satirizing the placards advertising the range of monsters decorating the Egyptian Hall’s façade.” The Egyptian Hall housed many of the most popular exhibitions in London. The shows attracted audiences from all parts of society, which included trainee doctors, who were fascinated by the distortions of the human body. Dr John Bland-Sutton, a teratologist who trained under Frederick Treves at the Royal London Hospital, wrote, “In my early days I often visited the Mile End Road, especially on Saturday nights, to see dwarfs, giants, fat women, and monstrosities at the freak shows.” The position of the Royal London Hospital on the Whitechapel Road opposite the exhibition houses is especially worth noting in this respect as it made the shows easily accessible to young doctors. From these visits, Bland-Sutton and others became interested in the causes of human monstrosities, codified under the new term “teratology.”

Geoffroy St Hilaire first began to look at the scientific causes of monstrosity in the early nineteenth century. His book of monstrous classifications, *Theorie des Phenomenes de la Monstruosite*, was published in 1826. The aim was to discover the cause of congenital deformities and classify and diagnose the visible monstrosities that occurred. Teratology originally only classified congenital deformities in still-born infants, removing any living and adult monsters from their studies. This distanced teratology from the previous mythical studies of monsters, which concentrated on adults with fantastic distortions and hybrid bodies. It supported St Hilaire’s theory that monstrosity was a natural process caused by arrested foetal development in the womb. In the first English classification of monstrosities published in 1892, Barton Cooke-Hirst and George Piersol’s, *Human Monstrosities*, only classified foetal monstrosities that were still born or aborted, due to their, “graver anomalies of development.”

However, such a narrow classification of monstrosity resulted in a lack of evidence needed for comprehensive research and accurate classification. Combined with the rare nature of monsters this was problematic to the advancement of teratological classifications. It was exacerbated by the burning or burying of monsters by their superstitious families and the high price paid for the monsters’ corpses by travelling showmen and trainee doctors, and the curiosity of certain medical
practitioners themselves. The most prolific British teratologist, J.W. Ballantyne explains that,

[monsters] have been bottled and catalogued, and placed upon the shelves of some museum, private or public. Sometimes that has not even been done. And they have either been destroyed or kept in the medical man’s own possession for the benefit of his professional friends alone. In this way much information of a valuable kind has been lost to science.6

The study of monstrosities created some suspicion amongst doctors, who questioned its legitimacy within medicine. Many doctors were used to viewing monsters for interest within the realms of entertainment, not examining them within science. Without regular opportunities to categorise and diagnose monstrosities, more teratologists found themselves frequenting “freak-shows” and examining the performers. This is reflected in the second British classification of monstrosities, published in 1896. George Gould and Walter Pyle’s *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine*, classify “only those monsters that have lived after birth, and who have attracted general notice or attained some fame in their time, as attested by accountants in contemporary literature.”7 The contrast in classifications between Hirst and Piersol’s and Gould and Pyle’s publications produce conflicting evidence for what constitutes a monster and what physical form it should take. Such inconsistency did not help the claim that teratology was a legitimate science.

Frederick Treves, the physician who cared for Joseph at Royal London, regularly visited the freak-shows opposite the hospital and exhibited the most interesting cases for discussion at the Pathological Society of London. He “developed a reputation for discovering more unusual cases than anyone else,” and he was so prolific in his discoveries that by the time he exhibited Joseph his cases were only receiving recognition in the meeting’s minutes.8 Treves’ interest was not in finding a cause or attempting to diagnose the monsters, his displays “were usually descriptive” and it is claimed, “did not add much to the canon of medical knowledge.”9 It is not surprising that in the 1980 David Lynch film, *The Elephant Man*, Treves’ was compared to a showman enjoying the praise his discovery had brought him.10 Demonstrations such as these made it difficult for teratologists to legitimise their work and many of their colleagues questioned their study. Dr Chance, a pathologist who worked closely with patients with deformities, explained the criticism doctors faced:

So little was known of the pathology, or of the appropriate and scientific treatment of bodily deformities, that the medical
profession as a body considered the subject so beneath their notice, that only a solitary individual here and there was found possessed of sufficient hardihood of character to encounter the deriding sneer of his professional brethren, that was conveyed in the words, “Oh, he is a specialist,” or its then synonym, “quack.”

With no clear classification of monstrosity, the incorporation of performers into their research and conflicting vocabularies of diagnosis, the concept of monstrosity was less certain than it had ever been before. In response to medical inconsistency a rise in pre-teratological theories were seen amongst doctors and the wider public. Many doctors found themselves explaining monstrosities through folklore or mythical tales. Ambroise Pare, first attempted a classification of monsters in the sixteenth century, he provided a list of causes including:

An act of God, an excess of seminal fluid, the imagination of the mother, the position of the womb, the mother’s posture, disease, or acts of the devil.

Gould and Pyle wrote extensively on Pare in their classification, and admitted that since his publication in the sixteenth century: “There has been little improvement in the mode of explanation of monstrous births until the present century.”

So it was when the so-called “Elephant Man,” Joseph Merrick, was presented by Treves to the Pathological Society in 1884, that many of the doctors attempted to diagnose his condition. The diagnosis of his disorder ranged from “elephantitis,” a tropical disease, to “leontiasis,” a disorder which causes overgrowth of the facial and cranial bones. Treves offered a broad diagnosis of a “congenital condition,” and another claimed it was the result of a “ghastly genetic mutation.” By his presence at the Pathological Society Joseph was seen as monster, but no doctor could accurately classify him as one. The range of terminology and diagnosis offered exemplifies the difficulty medicine had conceptualising monstrosity at the end of the century.

In the face of medical inconsistency Joseph diagnosed himself. In his autobiography and in interviews with doctors he claimed that he was the result of a maternal impression. Maternal impression theory claimed a similarity between an image that produces an emotional impression on the mother, and the defect resulting on the foetal form. It had been a popular belief for the cause of monstrosity for centuries. Joseph describes this process happening to his mother:
The deformity which I am now exhibiting was caused by my mother being frightened by an elephant; my mother was going along the street when a procession of animals were passing by, there was a terrible crush of people to see them, and unfortunately she was pushed under the elephant’s feet, which frightened her very much: This occurring during a time of pregnancy was the cause of my deformity.  

Doctors who treated Joseph dismissed his self-diagnosis as an example of his simple mental state. However, Joseph later proved he did not have a simple mental state nor was he alone in his rejection of medical explanations of monstrosity for traditional ones. Many doctors continued to diagnose maternal impression as a cause of monstrosity and, up until the turn of the century, there were still articles published in medical journals providing evidence of its existence. Indeed one of the arguments used to close the travelling fairs across London and later the rest of Britain was for fear that viewing monsters would cause, “psychologic discussion and speculation” within pregnant women and would result in the production of monstrous children.

Another traditional theory that captured the imagination of the public and the medical professional alike was hybridism. The “Hybridist theory […] is founded upon the notion that animals of different kinds may be fertile with one another: the products of such unions are, however, monstrous.” J W Ballantyne found himself battling not only with mythological tradition, but also with his own profession. In 1896, he wrote, “Even at the present day, […], there still exists a strong popular belief in the old theory, and even in the ranks of the profession I have met with its adherents.” Hybridism was a popular belief within the public consciousness and many monsters, including Joseph, traded on this interest to advertise their freak shows. As “The Elephant Man,” Joseph embodied the public’s fascination with the shared biology of humans and animals, and adopted it as another explanation for his monstrous appearance.

Some teratologists attempted to take practical measures to establish the scientific cause of monstrosity in the face of traditional belief. This was attempted through teratogenesis, the artificial production of monsters using bird eggs. The fertilised eggs were subjected to different environmental factors such as temperature change and movement. The eggs were then studied to see if these factors had caused any abnormality in the foetus. Teratogenesis firmly grounded teratology within the scientific realm and the experiments supported the theory of arrested foetal development and the effects of environmental factors on the development of the foetus.
However, teratogenesis was not the breakthrough teratology needed to silence its critics. Many doctors were sceptical of the experiments and their results. Claiming, first, that the bird’s egg did not simulate the human womb, second, the experiment could not be tested on humans; and, third, it did not explain monstrosities that appeared after birth. For example, Joseph’s own condition was not visible until he was five years old. By diagnosing himself and aligning himself with traditional explanations for monstrosity, Joseph questioned medical legitimacy. He embodied the scientific “limbo” that was created during the nineteenth century as medicine attempted to remove traditional explanations for monstrosity without providing alternative scientific ones. J W Ballantyne, himself, agreed and stated that without access to the mother’s womb during pregnancy, identifying and proving the cause of human monstrosity would be very difficult indeed.  

The instability of monstrosity within medicine was further demonstrated by Joseph’s admittance into the Royal London in 1886. The medical system could find no suitable place for Joseph; he could not be admitted to a public hospital as his condition was incurable, and public hospitals only admitted cases that could be cured; and he could not enter the hospital for the chronic sick, as he was not terminally ill. Indeed, when Treve’s first examined Joseph he remarked on the patient’s good health. Monsters had traditionally retired within the travelling fair. If they were no longer able to perform, they cared for the other performers and undertook odd jobs. The monsters were kept out of public view by the fair, keeping them rare and worth paying to see, and, in return, the monsters had a comfortable retirement. However, with more fairs being closed by reformers for being “indecent,” a comfortable retirement was looking ever more elusive for the monsters. Joseph set a precedent by entering a hospital and he raised the case for further monstrous admissions.

What Joseph’s story shows in conclusion, is that monsters did not just “enter” medical thought in the nineteenth century, they had always been there, and were central to the construction of the monster. However, with new scientific developments and debate in the nineteenth century, medicine had to reassess and question its constructions of monstrosity and human existence. Medicine created a space where monsters had multiple causes, diagnosis and were analysed as individual cases.

Notes


9 ibid., p. 35.


12 Johnson, p. 16.

13 Gould, p. 4.


17 Halsted, p. 37-38.

18 Ford, p. 182.

19 Gould, p. 185.


21 ibid., p. 11.


23 Ballantyne, p. 3.


Bibliography


Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, What's the Most Uncanny of Them All: the Elements of the Uncanny in the Art of Norval Morrisseau

Natalya Androsova

Abstract

Norval Morrisseau, a celebrated shaman artist of the Ojibway tribe, has become almost a mythical figure in contemporary Canadian Art. Creatures and monsters from other worlds, animal and bird spirits, the Earth and the Water Manitous (Ojibway spiritual beings) inhabit the world of Morrisseau. His paintings communicate his dreams, visions, shamanic out of body experiences and voyages to other worlds, but more importantly, they create an unmistakable sense of the uncanny in the viewer, which, according to Freud, refers to “the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread” and to “what was once well known and had long been familiar.” How is this effect created? It is the structure of this experience of the uncanny that will be explored in this study. Morrisseau’s deployment of such themes as the double, possession, flight, death, resurrection, and human-animal metamorphoses, is partly responsible for representing the uncanny in his artwork. We are first intrigued by the themes of Morrisseau’s art, then baffled by the ethos of the artist, and, on top of that, confused and frightened by the artistic form of his work, but the uncanniest of all experiences emerges when the uncanny leaves the canvas and crawls into our mind making us lose certainty about our own self. When looking at Morrisseau’s art, we are susceptible to a moment of paralysis and an unconscious shift when, as if by magic, all of his monsters become us, and we are parts of them. I think this unconscious transference of identity becomes possible because the unfamiliar monsters are, in fact, familiar to our psyche. They take us back to our very own but disowned fears, terrors, and horrors. But to come to this realization is nothing less of the uncanny because it means acknowledging the unfamiliar inside the most familiar – ourselves.

Norval Morrisseau, a celebrated shaman artist of the Ojibway tribe, has become almost a mythical figure in contemporary Canadian Art. Monsters and creatures from other worlds, animal and bird spirits, the Earth and the Water Manitous (Ojibway spiritual beings) inhabit the world of Morrisseau. His paintings communicate his dreams, visions, shamanic out of body experiences and voyages to other worlds. But more importantly, they create an unmistakable sense of the uncanny in the viewer, which, according to Freud, refers to “the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and
dread.” How is this effect created? It is the structure of this experience of the uncanny that will be explored in this study.

The strongest dimension of the uncanny in Morrisseau’s art is revealed through its esoteric subject matter. He was always fascinated with spirituality, and his art reveals his essential hunger for answers to very basic questions about human existence: Who am I? Where did I come from? How did I get here? Where am I going? What happens when I die? How exactly is it going to happen? What is the transformation like? Where do I go when I leave here? What is here and what is there? Is there a different world? Perhaps, different worlds? Do I go anywhere at all?

But there are certain questions that we simply cannot know the answers to. Morrisseau paints them anyway. For example, we all use the word “death,” but it is a signifier without a signified that we can fully understand. What can we be less certain about than death? D-E-A-T-H signifies something that we never experienced ourselves, but only saw others go through. Once they go through it, however, they cannot tell us about it. What if this other world of spirits and ghosts is available to some of us with special powers (like shamans) while we are still in this world? This is the birth of the Uncanny.

The world of Morrisseau is filled with spirits, magic, transformation, and shamanic flight. He paints questions and suggests provocative answers of parallel worlds with his images that bring us back to the repressed unconscious. He makes us frantically search for evidence to prove him wrong. But what evidence can we summon to argue against the possibility of the world of spirits? Rhetorically, a negative thesis can never be proven, thus we stand defeated in the shadow of the uncanny possibility.

Describing the uncanny, Freud tells us that “an uncanny effect often arises where the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary.” Otherworldly experiences constitute the subject matter of hundreds of Morrisseau’s paintings. Is this not the border between reality and fantasy that the artist dares to cross, but not all of us dare to follow? Have we not considered this realm only imaginary until we saw it presented as real in his art? Morrisseau’s deployment of such themes as the double, possession, flight, death, resurrection, and human-animal metamorphoses, is partly responsible for representing the uncanny in his artwork.

The uncanny aura of Morrisseau’s paintings is greatly enhanced by the original ritual value of his art as part of shamanic practice. The artist explicitly states that his pictures originate at and are later brought from another plane of existence. Morrisseau says that he has to travel to the astral plane to receive his images and bring them from there. He explains, “when I show them to people on this plane, they can see that they [paintings] have great power because they have come from a powerful place.”
Morrisseau’s art is inseparable from his practice of shamanism. The artist himself never divided the two. His shamanic practice was mostly expressed through his paintings, and majority of his works are devoted to the representation of his shamanic visions. When Morrisseau first started practicing art, his friend and mentor Joseph Weinstein recalls, the concept of art as a profession was a novelty for him. He did not know what an artist was, he just wanted to be a shaman and tell the world about his experiences. Tom Hill in his article, “Indian Art in Canada,” says that “art for art’s sake” was a purely Euro-Canadian cultural concept that was not familiar to the North American Indian. He explains that the aboriginal art forms had an established ritual function in cultural life, and everything that was made by North American Indians served some well-established purpose in community.

Shamanism has been defined as “a religion practiced by indigenous peoples of far northern Europe and Siberia that is characterized by belief in an unseen world of gods, demons, and ancestral spirits responsive only to the shamans.” Morrisseau learned the shamanic rituals from his grandfather who taught him “to communicate with and acquire blessings of power from the other beings who also inhabit the universe.” If this vocation is not uncanny, what is? To travel to different worlds, then bring knowledge and visions back and represent them on canvas is all part of Morrisseau’s mystical celebrity.

Morrisseau’s paintings brought into the open sacred beliefs and rituals that had been kept secret from the public and carefully transferred in private from one shaman to another. This is very similar to Freud’s definition of the uncanny as “something that should have remained hidden but has now come into the open.” This violation was not taken lightly by his elders, and it was considered a serious offence as “sacred images are held to be imbued with power” and “must be treated with respect and caution.” But to the captivated public, this breach of secrecy created a “titillating sense of mystery and a frisson of liberation from the repressed of the subconscious” thus creating an additional layer of the uncanny effect.

Morrisseau’s art is not a product of imagination; it is part of his psychic reality. It is a genuine record of his shamanic voyages. For him, it is as real as the hand that holds the brush. This is a key point to understand - the condition of true reality is responsible for amplifying the uncanny effect. According to Freud, if an artist or a fiction writer invents a world that is fantastic and involves supernatural entities like demons, spirits, ghosts or monsters, such figures do not necessarily have any uncanny quality. “We adapt our judgment to the condition of the writer’s fictional reality and treat souls, spirits and ghosts as if they were fully entitled to exist, just as we are in our material reality.”

Not so, however, if an artist claims that he paints reality, like Morrisseau does. By doing so he
betrays us to a superstition we thought we had surmounted; he tricks us by promising us everyday reality and then going beyond it. We react to his fictions as if they had been our own experiences.12

We react viscerally before we can conceptualize our reaction intellectually. This constitutes another element of the uncanny in Morrisseau’s art.

In The Uncanny, Freud says that a surprising manifestation of unusual forces in a normal person can distort an otherwise familiar image of a fellow human being, and a living person can be perceived as uncanny.13 The practice of shamanism is by definition connected to the ability of an otherwise normal person to access, summon and command some special powers invisible to the rest of us, and this supernatural facility makes the individual that displays it uncanny. The artistic persona gains a new layer of the uncanny because the artist possesses this special uncanny mode of learning and knowing about the universe - shamanism. During his mysterious shamanic rituals, he becomes a Gnostic, and we witness a transformation of a fellow human being into more than a mere mortal. A shaman can see the world that is not visible to ordinary people. It is as if someone standing next to you tells you she sees a ghost “over there,” but no matter how hard you are trying to see it, you cannot. You can doubt what that person is telling you, or you can believe it. It is always a choice, but no matter what you choose, before you do so, unconsciously you may experience the feeling of the uncanny, even if only for a split second.

As we have seen, Morrisseau’s mysterious vocation of a shaman and the esoteric content of his art play a dominant role in creating the uncanny aura around his work. This is further enhanced by the form his art takes. An interesting aspect of Morrisseau’s artistic form is the constant presence of black colour in his paintings. I think this stylistic device creates the potential for the uncanny in two distinct ways. First of all, the presence of blackness or darkness, according to Nicholas Royle, the author the most recent book-length scholarly study of the uncanny, can serve as a catalyst to suggest this unconscious turn to the uncanny in the viewer. In his book, The Uncanny, Royle claims that “the uncanny is what comes out of the darkness.”14 Freud’s explanation of how we react to darkness also seems suitable for tackling the dark aspect of Morrisseau’s palette. Freud ends his The Uncanny with a kind of verdict: “As for solitude, silence and darkness,” he says, “all we can say is that these are factors connected with infantile anxiety, something that most of us never wholly overcome.”15 So, we are doomed to react in a predictable way when facing darkness, and Freud’s verdict is primeval horror.

Another way, in which darkness comes to play a prominent role in creating the sense of the uncanny, becomes clear when we consider
Morrisseau’s treatment of space around each figure. Each figure seems to be enclosed in a distinct organically shaped black space that can be argued to be reminiscent of the womb or the tomb, or the both of them. Freud says, “some would award the crown of the uncanny to the idea of being buried alive,” and later suggests, “this terrifying fantasy is merely a variant of another, which was originally not at all frightening, but relied on a certain lasciviousness; this was the fantasy of living in the womb.” Is it possible that this dark space the artist designates for each of his characters to exist in takes us to that subconscious fear of being buried or unborn?

Another element in Morrisseau’s uncanny art form is related to the intellectual uncertainty that has been named the essential condition for the emergence of a sense of the uncanny by Jentsch and Freud. Often the spectators of Morrisseau’s art can experience the sense of intellectual uncertainty and bewilderment because of the most peculiar technique of his painting and the resulting lack of intelligibility in the images he creates. Every painting contains a multitude of colourful shapes and forms that are morphing, unclear, amorphous, sometimes doubling and are never stable. Borders of the objects and subjects, and their body parts are fluid, frequently indiscernible and entangled, breached or merged into a new organic shape. Thus emerges the uncanny horror of the transgressed borders. The inside is no longer contained and is pouring outside, or, perhaps, it is the outside invading and penetrating the inside? It is hard to tell. The first glance does not provide much comfort or clarity to the spectators. They are unsure of what they see on the canvas.

Erich Neumann, the author of the book, Art and the Creative Unconscious, emphasized this fluidity of form as a distinct feature that helps create the feeling of uncertainty and mystery:

This is why the art of primitive peoples, of children, and of the insane arouses so much interest today; everything is still in mixture and almost unarticulated. It is almost impossible to render this phase of the world faithfully, because we are still in a formless state of creative disintegration; protoplasm, mingling decay and new birth - amorphous, atonal, disharmonious, primeval.

Let us backtrack for a moment. We are first intrigued by the themes of Morrisseau’s art, then mystified by the persona of the artist, and perplexed by the artistic form of his work, but the uncanniest of all experiences emerges when uncanny leaves the canvas and crawls into our mind making us lose certainty about our own self. When looking at Morrisseau’s art, we are susceptible to a moment of paralysis and an unconscious shift when, as if by magic, all of his monsters become us, and we are parts of them. We gravitate
towards the canvas and recognize the uncanny possibility of living out the lives of his spirits and monsters on canvas through our imagination. Why? I think this unconscious transference of identity is possible because the unfamiliar monsters are, in fact, familiar to our psyche. A prominent contemporary philosopher, Richard Kearney, says that “the human obsession with strangers, gods and monsters […] is symptomatic of the wound inflicted by the refusal to acknowledge oneself-as-another.” He also maintains that many monsters live within us, and the only way to find peace is to face the monsters and acknowledge that they are an integral part of us, and that “we are strangers-to-ourselves and that we need not fear such strangeness or ‘act it out’ by projecting such fear onto Others.” But to come to this recognition and accept this truth is nothing less of the uncanny because it involves acknowledging the unfamiliar inside the most familiar - ourselves.

I see in Morrisseau’s art this uncanny quality that makes us go back to the beginning and ask the questions we once knew, but decided to repress or abandon altogether. With his art, he intentionally leads us back to these most fundamental questions about our essence as he is constantly presenting man in his relation to the absolute, the sacred, and the spiritual.

The levels of the uncanny in and around Morrisseau’s art are many, but their cumulative effect is always the same. His art is a bridge to the universal unconscious. When we witness a transformation of an ordinary man into a shaman and a Gnostic on canvas, our experience does not stop there; some transformation happens inside of us. Morrisseau invites us to go with him - to leave the familiar and safe ground of what we call reality and step into the Mystical Unconscious, into Mythology and into his Uncanny Reality.

By looking at Morrisseau’s worldview that is different from ours, we experience something strange and uncanny, which makes us question our assumptions about the world we call real and about our real self. We go back to the questions about the mystery of our existence we never answered for ourselves. In his essay “Norval Morrisseau - Shaman Artist,” Greg Hill describes the exact process beautifully:

As a seer, his [Morrisseau’s] paintings allow us to travel with him to different planes of existence. We can comprehend, or at least contemplate, ourselves as spiritual beings. This is Morrisseau’s gift to us, a sense of openness and freedom that releases us from our worldly pursuits and propels us to a place that causes us to rethink our assumptions about reality and become more accepting of alternate ways of understanding our place.

Not only that. He awards each one of us with supernatural abilities.
Morrisseau’s belief in the universal ability of all human beings to become mystics and make sense of their own existence by undertaking a personal spiritual voyage is voiced most beautifully and succinctly in my favourite quotation of his: “Everyone is born a Shaman but soon forgets.” Uncanny, is it not?

Notes
2 ibid., p. 150.
3 N Morrisseau, ‘My name is Norval Morrisseau’, in L Sinclair & J Pollock (eds), The Art of Norval Morrisseau, Methuen, Toronto, 1979, p. 49.
6 ibid., p. 11.
8 Phillips, p. 50.
9 Phillips, p. 148
10 Phillips, p. 76.
12 ibid.
13 ibid., p. 150.
15 Freud, p. 159
16 ibid., p. 150.
17 ibid., p. 125.
20 ibid., p. 8.
Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: What’s the Most Uncanny of Them All?

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The Human in the Monster: Images of Divs (Demons) in 14th to 16th Century Shahnamas

Francesca Leoni

Abstract
In the Shāhnāma (The Book of Kings, ca 1010 - an epic poem that relates the history of ancient Iranian kings - fantastic encounters are very frequent and take many forms. Legendary heroes and kings are described as fighting enormous dragons, as well as meeting extraordinary beings, such as talking phoenixes and animal-headed trees. Their most significant deeds, though, are those accomplished against divs (demons), hideous creatures that threaten the human order. While hybridity and monstrosity constantly characterize the representations of these beings in illustrated versions of the poem, we assist to a significant transformation - and progressive humanization - of their imagery from the 16th century on. These monsters change from impassive half-human/half-animal creatures to deformed humanoids with disproportioned limbs and caricaturized physiognomies. At times, they almost look more “human” than the men fighting them, which are instead shaped according to well-established, but rather artificial iconographic conventions. My paper reconstructs the changes in the imagery of divs between the 14th and the 16th century and discusses the artistic implications and the historical factors underlying them. It also raises questions about the cultural values attached to specific visual choices, aiming to prove that precise notions of personal and social appropriateness shaped the protagonists of such artful compositions. The case of demonic imagery - and its tension with other figurative types - offers the opportunity to challenge the derivative role traditionally attributed to miniature painting in the Islamic world. In fact, it proves that the pictorial space was a locus for the articulation of relevant historical and cultural issues and not only a way to embellish classical works of Persian literature.

Almost a thousand years ago Abu’l-Qasim Firdawsi presented his Book of Kings, Shahnama, to Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (r. 998-1030), the ruler of a large region comprising modern-day Iran and Afghanistan. This epic poem - a work of enormous proportions counting some 50,000 rhyming couplets - was claimed to be the most complete version of Iran’s past history. “I framed this story of the days of yore,” declares the author in an elaborate panegyric addressed to his dedicatee, “selected from the book of men of lore […]. Deem not these legends lying fantasy, as if the world were always in one stay, for most accord with sense, or anyway, contain a moral.”
The poem recounts the history of ancient Iranian kings from mythical times until the fall of the Sasanian dynasty (224-651), occurred in the seventh century by the hands of Arab invaders. In spite of its historical intentions and contents though, fantastic encounters abound in the text. Legendary heroes and rulers are both described as fighting enormous dragons, as well as meeting extraordinary beings, such as talking phoenixes and animal-headed trees. Their most significant deeds, though, are those accomplished against *divs*, demonic hideous creatures that constantly threaten the human order. *Divos* represent kings and heroes’ archenemies, and even when the fiends to fight are human, they are considered as fools led astray by Ahriman, their powerful master.

While hybridity and monstrosity constantly characterize the representations of these beings in the numerous extant versions of the poem, we assist to a significant transformation and a progressive humanization of their imagery across the centuries, particularly in the sixteenth century. These monsters changed from artificial animal-like creatures to uglyfied humanoids with disproportioned limbs and caricaturized physiognomies and expressions. Because of this, they almost look more human than the men fighting them, who, instead, are represented according to well-established albeit rather artificial iconographic conventions. In this paper, I will outline the changes of imagery of *divs* between the fourteenth and the sixteenth century and discuss some of the historical factors that underlie such modifications. I will also raise questions about the cultural values embedded in specific visual details, showing how a number of principles were reflected or challenged in *divs*’ appearance and in their changing nature.

A short digression is necessary at this point, in order to define the features that characterize Persian painting and better understand the unique quality of demonic imageries. In the Islamic tradition, painting did not follow a mimetic approach as it occurred in the West. While nature was certainly a source of inspiration for Persian artists, their training was based on past painters’ works and styles, more than on direct observation. Talent and artistic excellence were rarely measured in terms of originality and freshness, but more in terms of how closely well-established models were imitated, to the point that distinguishing between copy and original was hardly possible. Two paintings, the first signed by Bihzad and the second by Nanhai, now gathered in the “Gulshan Album” made in 1608 for the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605-27), well exemplify this trend. Furthermore, the fact that painting remained mostly confined to the arts of the book, and to a limited group of literary texts, facilitated the elaboration of stock compositions, whose constituents could be slightly modified and rearranged to suit similar episodes in other parts of the same manuscript.

From a technical point of view, this was realized with the help of pounces and paper models, which allowed the replication of groups of people
and settings in a number of different works normally realized in the same workshop. Thus, a certain repetitive quality and standardized appearance for recurrent figures such as kings and knights characterize the numerous versions of classical works of literature, such as the case of the Shahnama. These aspects should be borne in mind when considering the implications that specific pictorial changes possessed in the Persian world.

How does the iconography of divs differ from the above-mentioned tendency? What factors determined the shifts and what are their implications? Finally, how do these examples affect our knowledge of artistic creativity and production in the context of the Persisanate tradition? A good case-study is offered by the paintings illustrating the episode of Hushang, one of the first kings of the Shahnama, as he kills the Black Div, his father’s murderer. Among the earliest painted versions of this tale is a small illustration in a detached folio currently in a private collection. The painting conforms to the pictorial conventions of the time, which structured images in narrow horizontal bands located within the ruled text. The scene has a simple layout; yet, it appears somehow overcrowded, with a number of characters whose bodies and activities are not always easy to discern. In spite of this, the two protagonists are recognizable in the confused mass through their attributes and the visual conventions they respond to. Sitting on an elephant in a canonic royal pose is King Kayumars, Prince Hushang’s supporter during the expedition against the Black Div. Both look towards the just vanquished demon, the dark, massive, and indistinct creature lying on the ground. Two more monstrous beings appear in the painting, depicted while struggling with the king’s attendants. Although biped, they resemble two animals with their exaggerated feline and canine features topped by curved black horns. Thus, divs were conceived and represented as monstrous combinations of deformed animal and human features from the very beginning. Although scale and proportion are hardly respected, especially in this early phase of book painting, their larger size also appears as a distinctive peculiarity of their appearance. The same can be said for nakedness, which remains a constant feature of their imagery throughout the centuries.

About a century later, the same scene was depicted again in a slightly more elaborate composition, with the addition of horsemen, landscape elements, and with overall wider palette. Nevertheless divs are still discernible for their distinctive animal-like horned heads, which dot the steep and arid mountains set as a background. They are still fairly innocuous enemies, mostly resembling deflated puppets in their weakened and lifeless postures. Worthy of notice is the tendency to display many of these creatures removed from the centre of the image and placed along the borders of the pictorial space, a way to convey their existence outside the “natural” order in
metaphorical terms. I will come back to this point in the second part of the paper.

With the advent of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722) to the throne of Iran at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the arts of the book flourished enormously supported by both royal and aristocratic patronage. The most magnificent outcome of this intense phase is a luxurious version of the Shahnama made for Shah Tahmasp (1524-1576). Also in this manuscript - started by Tahmasp’s father Shah Isma’il (1501-1524) in the 1520s and completed some twenty years after - we find the image related to Hushang’s mission against the Black Div. In a dazzling and colour-bursting page, the young and preciously dressed prince firmly holds a black horrendous creature. The latter’s face is contracted in a painful and terrorized grimace, his hands desperately trying to free himself from the deadly grip, while the rest of his body continues its inexorable fall to the ground. Around them a fanfare of soldiers, angels and evil spirits chase each other, following a spiral movement that from the core expands to the rest of the page saturating it. Divs appear as running away, kneeling and begging for mercy, hidden and yet threatening from the margin, when not wrapped in an energetic hand-to-hand battle with feline fellows.

Apart from this lively participation, with traces on their faces expressions of rage and fear that are totally absent from their human counterparts, their bodies acquire more normal dimensions and proportions. In addition to this, among the new features of their imageries we also find protruding genitals, something virtually absent until the Safavid time. As a consequence, their new appearance strengthens the contrast with the “good” characters in the space of the painting, augmenting the latter’s importance as emblems of positive qualities. Sexual details, in fact, are never indicated in princely figures, whose status is codified in terms of apparel, and whose morality is indicated by measured and composed attitudes as much as by an essentially “covered” body.

While the sexual emphasis remained distinctive of the first century of Safavid painting, facial expressions and “human” emotions continued to characterize demons in the following century. This is well-proven by another illustration of the same episode dating from the second half of the seventeenth century. Apart from his spotted red skin, animal-like ears, horns, and curious holes on knees and elbows, his body appears to have lost many of the monstrous features it possessed in the past. First, his size does not exceed that of the other characters in the representation; second, his feet and hands appear as totally human in both shape and proportions, as does his bloated abdomen, also visible in the royal figures. A comparable white creature - à la mode with his long moustaches - coarsely reclines with his eyes closed behind Hushang. From a safe location behind the mountains,
their hideous companions assist to the scene with remarkably sad expressions, a detail that increases the painting’s general gloomy atmosphere.

Popular lore and beliefs, through which the exploits of Shahnama’s heroes and legendary kings were preserved before achieving a written form, affected the elaboration of divs’ iconography in ways that remain uncharted. Similarly, central Asian shamans - who used masks to evoke spirits - and Indian demons share with the Iranian demons a number of features, which time does not allow to analyze in detail. At the same time, as it has frequently been asserted in the field of teratological studies, the monstrous creations of every civilization are aberrant projections of intimate struggles, and grow out of the most problematic experiences. Analyzing Persian divs in this last perspective, I argue, can shed light on some of the reasons why these beings were visualized in a certain way. Determining what factors shaped their appearance is a particularly crucial issue considering that no exhaustive description of them exists, either in this poem or outside it, that contributed to the process and facilitated the work of painters.

The word “monster” identifies an entity that signifies by showing forth, from the Latin term monstrare, “to show forth.” As expressions of entities falling outside the natural order, then, Persian monsters can be seen as aggregating on their bodies a number of features that are considered unacceptable in the normal world. The latter was only initially that of the lost “golden age” celebrated by the Shahnama, in which the first divs appear. Through time, in fact, it increasingly mirrored the contemporary condition, as well as the issues that a radically changing Iranian society considered as new concerns. Appropriate sexual habits - strictly heterosexual and limited to the conjugal space - became paramount in Safavid society, already under the early rulers. In this sense, I contend, it is not surprising that the images of divs in that period acquired genitals, symbols of deviated sexual appetites.

These creatures’ bodies are thus inscribed with signs of defect and wickedness, in palpable, and intentional, opposition to the figures identifying the valid virtues and values of Persian culture. Divs’ over-sized and naked bodies, caricatured and unbalanced attitudes clash against paladins and princes’ slender figures, precious apparels and composed gestures, all of which are facets of “the perfect man” they personify. Their fulfilment as heroes of the poem, and as cultural emblems of virtuosity, passes through a direct confrontation with such embodiments of perversion. Actually, I maintain, divs are fundamental for the comprehension and general assimilation of the positive principles embodied by their human antagonists. How were we to understand the sense of prowess, obedience, and loyalty, were it not for acts of coward, unruly, and mean behaviour?

The contrast of opposites is the Shahnama’s leit motif. In absolute terms, in fact, the epic is traditionally interpreted as staging the eternal battle between Good and Evil. Furthermore, the poem aimed at celebrating and
transmitting traditional principles of honour, obligation, loyalty, and prowess to future generations of Iranians. There was no local or foreign dynasty that ruled Iran, or even part of its territory, that failed to understand the text’s potential as tool of political legitimacy and ideological assimilation. The hundreds of illustrated copies produced through the past ten centuries bear witness to this fact.

Various conclusions can be drawn from this preliminary analysis. The presence and unique development of these images imply a precise notion of evil and a need for its visualization from a certain historical moment on. The case-study offered by divs’ imagery invites us to reconsider the role and the power that images possessed in this tradition. It also calls for their incorporation among the tools of the historian in order to reconstruct the complex facets of the Islamic world, and, specifically, of its Persian-speaking area. Scholarship has so far ignored this fact, consequently overlooking the implications this also has for the assumed an iconic quality of Islamic art.

Images of divs also shed further light on the dynamics of word-image interaction in the context of the Islamicate tradition. From the examples considered in this paper, it can be inferred that when paintings joined the narrative in the space of the book, text and images integrated each other in order to realize the poem’s ultimate goal: The transmission of Iranian cultural memory. On the one hand, the verses affected the format and quality of the paintings, while providing it, in most of the cases, the general thematic background for the images to depict. On the other hand, illustrations augmented the cultural density and impact of the narrative, by offering a more immediate, but not less sophisticated, formulation of the issues embedded in the poem.

Such a reading invites to break up with traditional interpretative approaches of Persianate painting, which see this artistic form as subsidiary to a predominant textual experience. Indeed, it revenges a more complex synergy of verbal and visual elements that, as we saw, worked in tandem and mutual integration for a more efficacious reception of the text’s deep meaning.

Notes


3 In spite of the fact that Firdawsi drew upon pre-existing written sources of this history, such as the Pahlavi *Khvatay-namak* and the compilation of Iranian history ordered by Abu Mansur ‘Abd al-Razzaq at the beginning of the tenth century, and despite the incorporation of about a thousand verses composed by the poet Daqiqi, his version of the *Shahnama* integrates a great deal of popular lore and oral traditions. On the impact that these had on the formulation of the epic, see, in particular: O Davison, *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings*, Cornell University Press, 1994 and K Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2003.

4 Both the word “div” and “Ahriman” go back to ancient Iranian traditions and beliefs. For a general introduction about the terms and their various meanings see ‘Ahriman’, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, I, 670-71; ‘div’, VIII, 428-31.

5 A good reference tool is the ‘Shahnama Project’ website (see Bibliography). This online resource gathers illustrated manuscripts of the Persian epic produced between the 14th and the 19th century from collections across the world, and allows following the pictorial development of the poem in chronological progression. The examples discussed in this paper are taken from this website.


9 Ebrahimi Collection.

13 An extensive study of the manuscript including a facsimile was realized by M B Dickson & S C Welch, The Houghton Shahnama, 2 vols., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1981.
16 A very informative introduction can be found in J J Cohen, Monster Theory: Reading Cultures, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996.

Bibliography


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It’s Alive! (Again): The Rise of Reanimation in Science and Modern Medicine

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Abstract
Tales of reanimation have become a pervasive part of popular culture. From religious lore, as in Jesus’ resurrection of Lazarus, to the Vodoun ritual of zombification; from literary classics such as Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and H. P. Lovecraft’s ‘Herbert West-Reanimator’ (and their cinematic permutations) to modern pop-culture portrayals, such as George Romero’s Night of the Living Dead series, these stories and myths explore the notion of corporeal existence after death.

In these fictional accounts, there is typically a catalyst that causes expired flesh to live once again, whether miraculous, occult, natural, or medical. Analogues to the fictional origins of reanimated flesh can be found throughout science and modern medicine. With the advent of surgical techniques, electrical defibrillation, and various medications, scientists and surgeons have been reanimating flesh for years. From medieval experiments to the 20th century genesis of organ transplants, from the reversal of cardiac arrest to miraculous patient recoveries, this paper explores the means by which modern Dr Frankensteins raise the dead.

Keywords
Reanimation, Frankenstein, Science, Medicine

43 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. 44 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.
“The Gospel According to John,” from The King James Bible

The New Testament may seem like an unlikely source for horror stories, but when Jesus Christ resurrected Lazarus, he, like Victor Frankenstein, became a practitioner of the science of reanimation. Reanimation myths that began with the Bible have persevered as cultural legends, classic and modern literature, and in the reality of medical practice. Science and medicine provide many avenues for the reanimation of inanimate flesh. While electrocuting the human cadaver is unlikely to produce any reaction more stimulating than a foul odour, Frankenstein’s medical vision is, at least in part, a medical reality.
Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus*, first published in 1818, has been one of the most enduring tales of reanimation. With more than ninety onstage and film dramatizations and such a presence in the public imagination that the doctor’s name is synonymous with the monster, “Shelley could not have chosen a subject with more relevance to twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers.” In addition to continued cultural significance and moral implications, reference- and comic-book writer, Michael H. Price, speculates that “history and science have long since validated *Frankenstein* as a plausible argument.” Even the preface to *Frankenstein* states, “the event on which this fiction is founded has been supposed […] as not of impossible occurrence.” The reanimation in *Frankenstein* was both influenced by and influential upon science and medical practice: Past, present, and future.

A discussion of reanimation necessitates a discussion of death. Death was once simply considered the cessation of the vital functions of the body; breathing, heartbeat, and circulation. However, with the advent of newer medical technology and organ transplantation in recent decades, a new definition was needed, and the criteria for “brain death” emerged. Brain death is defined as the permanent and irreversible cessation of brain function, while a person who has suffered a cardiac arrest is considered clinically dead. What normally comes to mind when a person is described as “dead” is someone who is both brain dead and clinically dead, but a clinically dead person can sometimes be revived, and a brain dead patient may be clinically alive, maintained on a ventilator and life support.

The difference between clinical death and brain death becomes very important in regard to the reality of human reanimation. Scientist Louis Pasteur’s experiments in the 1860s showed that the spontaneous generation of life from non-living material does not occur. The potential for the clinically dead patient’s revival, or reanimation, suggests that the patient’s tissues, while inert, are actually not yet dead; several minutes of hypoxia (or lack of oxygen) are needed to cause tissue death, including brain death. So while the clinically dead patient is not initially brain dead, he/she quickly becomes so if no attempt is made to resuscitate. The amount of time passing between cardiac arrest and this irreversible brain death will differ based on individual variances; hypothermia, for example, is noted to extend this time considerably by lowering the body’s metabolic demands.

The reason it is so important to make this distinction between brain death and clinical death is that, in light of Pasteur’s experiments, when the human body is truly dead, it should be irrevocable. A person who is revived with medical interventions was never actually dead; the body’s vital functions simply were not continuing on their own accord. In other words, the victim was clinically dead, but not brain dead. According to these
principles, once true death has set in, it should be impossible to cause the body to rise and live again as Dr Victor Frankenstein did.

This is where the case of Richard Selzer generates interest. Selzer is a surgeon and a writer who recounts his own death and return to life in his autobiographical book, *Raising the Dead*. He was pronounced dead after a cardiac arrest, during which efforts at resuscitation were unsuccessful. A nurse observed Selzer’s body for ten minutes after his death was pronounced, noting “the fixity that is incontrovertible.” Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, Selzer took a breath, followed by a return of electrical activity on his EKG monitor and regular breathing, a return from death seemingly no less miraculous than that of Lazarus’ resurrection by Christ. “It is true!” Selzer writes. “After ten minutes of certified death, this man has […] risen. Risen! Such a word does not belong in an intensive care unit.”

While the accuracy of the determination of his death was questioned, nurses who were present insist that his EKG was flat and they could detect neither a pulse nor a blood pressure reading from him.

Evidence, anecdotal and academically recorded, exists to support the idea that the human body can sometimes survive extended periods of time without exhibiting signs of vital functions, such as respiration and heartbeat, and that certain individuals may even exert conscious control over them. Perhaps the best known of these individuals is a 19th century British officer known as Colonel Townsend, who willfully ceased his heartbeat and respiration, entering a state of “suspended animation.” For thirty minutes, he remained this way, his body becoming so cold and stiff that the physicians who had witnessed the event actually declared him dead at which point, Townsend slowly began to revive himself, having made a full recovery by the next day. Interestingly, the timing of Townsend’s return to life implies that he may have been aware of his surroundings, awakening himself as a sort of retort to the physicians’ proclamation of his death.

Townsend’s descent into suspended animation was intentional; imagine, however, having such a state induced against one’s will and without the knowledge that this state differs from true death. Anthropologist Wade Davis did extensive research in Haiti in the 1980s regarding the myth of the Haitian zombie, an unfortunate soul supposedly killed and resurrected via a combination of a folk preparation called “zombie powder” containing the powerful neurotoxin tetrodotoxin, found in certain species of puffer fish, and the magical powers of the bokor, or Vodoun sorcerer. Zombification is usually performed as retribution to some crime or misdeed. An individual pays the bokor in much the same way a person might contract a hit man, and once the victim is transformed into a zombie, the bokor possesses the person’s soul. The fear, then, in Haiti, is not of the monster, but of becoming the monster.
While Davis stops short of verifying zombification as fact, he does cite several cases in western culture in which illness and/or pharmacologic agents rendered individuals unresponsive to the degree that they were declared dead, only to be found at a later time with active respirations and heart rate, often on a table in a morgue or mortuary, much to the horror of both the “deceased” and the person preparing the body. Upon investigation of the ethnobiology of the zombie powder, Davis concludes that it may be possible for the powder to create a state of apparent death and that the victim, once recovered, may believe him/herself to be a genuine zombie. Even more terrifying, Davis also suggests that in this drug-induced sort of suspended-animation, the victims of zombification may be aware of the declaration of their deaths, their burials, and their reanimation.

This phenomenon is strikingly similar to Juliet’s experience in *Romeo and Juliet*. When Friar Laurence describes the potion that would allow her to escape the fate of an arranged marriage, “And in this borrow'd likeness of shrunk death/Thou shalt continue two and forty hours,/And then awake as from a pleasant sleep,” Juliet jumps at the chance. While the idea (a concoction that temporarily renders one’s vital signs undetectable or absent) is essentially the same, the cultural context (and expert storytelling) create the difference between living as an enslaved zombie and waking peacefully in order to be with one’s true love. Of course, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the end result of tampering with life and death is far from the traditional “happily ever after,” and the horror of waking up next to your beloved’s corpse may rival the horror of a bokor owning and commanding your soul.

The science of reanimation has roots that begin much earlier than the establishment of colonial Haiti and the penning of Shakespeare’s works. Historically, while scientific knowledge of the human body was limited, attempts to revive the dead were not constrained by ignorance or lack of technology. The human race has a long and colourful record of attempts at resuscitation, some of which seem monstrous in their barbarism.

In antiquity, bodies were warmed with various substances (including, most interestingly, burning excrement) as a means to counteract the cooling of the cadaver. Whipping was another technique, commonly attempted in order to stimulate the victim. In the case of both warming and whipping the victim, success was only achieved if the person was simply in a deep sleep or unconscious, and neither were particularly pleasant ways to be woken up.

From the Medieval period through the nineteenth century, methods of reanimation ranged from the moderately effective to the patently bizarre. The importance of respiration was addressed with the use of fireplace bellows for artificial ventilation, which was, surprisingly, successful enough to inspire the modern-day forms of ventilation. The bellows did have a
major flaw: Overdistension of the lungs was often fatal in and of itself, having much the same effect on the lungs that too much air has on a balloon. Fumigation, on the other hand, involved exhaling tobacco smoke into the victim’s rectum and was evidently used with some success by Native Americans and colonists in North America at that time. Based on the lack of attention to vital organs and the unpleasant nature of the treatment, it seems reasonable to guess that the people who were successfully revived by fumigation must have been unconscious rather than dead.

The latter eighteen century saw the origin of organizations in Europe focusing on resuscitation. Dutch guidelines at the time recommended warming the victim, placing the head lower than the feet and applying abdominal compressions (in cases of drowning), stimulation with strong odours or fumigation, ventilating with bellows, and, of course, bloodletting. Creative manoeuvres emerged to promote ventilation and circulation, such as rolling the victim back and forth on a barrel or on the ground and laying the victim (chest down) over a horse’s back and trotting the horse. A member of the London Humane Society during this time period apparently also applied an electrical shock to the chest of an unresponsive child, inducing the return of pulse and respiration.

This reanimation via electricity may have been based on a scientific discovery that was a vital inspiration for Shelley’s Frankenstein. In 1786, Italian scientist Luigi Galvani discovered, much by accident, the effect of electricity on nerve tissue. Dissecting a frog during a lightning storm, he found that every time his scissors touched a nerve, the frog’s leg twitched. This inspired him to conduct a series of experiments on the effect of electricity on nerve tissue. Thus the theory of Galvanism was born, a theory both that Shelley acknowledges discussing as a means to human reanimation prior to penning her masterpiece and that young Victor Frankenstein was captivated by after witnessing a tree destroyed by lightning.

Galvanism, along with an understanding of human respiration, led to the creation of the “Re-Animation Chair” in the early 1800s by Dr V. De Sanctis. Referred to as the “Code Blue” of its day, it involved a tube and a wire passed into the victim’s gullet. The wire was attached to a Voltaic Pile, an early form of battery created by Galvani’s friend, scientist Alessandro Volta. After the wire was passed, a bellows was attached to the tube for ventilation purposes. Once the rescuer was satisfied that the tube and wire were properly situated, manual ventilation was performed while another wire that was also attached to the Voltaic Pile was applied to the outer chest, forming a circuit. At approximately 20 to 50 volts, the contraption is described as successful, while 60 volts and above produced chest pain and palpitations. The voltage used in the Re-Animation Chair
was similar to voltage levels found to be effective in esophageal stimulation of the heart in the 1950s. While Galvani’s experiments took the scientific community by storm, they seem tame in comparison to reanimation research spurred by the mass executions of the French Reign of Terror. As the guillotine emerged as the preferred tool of the executioner, rumours circulated that the heads of guillotine victims retained consciousness and, in fact, writhed and ground their teeth for a matter of minutes after beheading.

These rumours inspired a variety of experiments. Several different types of animals, most often dogs, were decapitated and then given a new source of blood flow, whether by manual injection or by connection to a living dog. These dogs’ heads were found to exhibit basic reflexes when stimulated with electricity; this seems inconclusive, however, when considering that Galvani’s dead frogs exhibited reflexive movements during dissection. Later experiments with human heads after death by guillotine had similar results; when invigorated with dog blood, the facial muscles contracted reflexively.

Still, not everyone interested in the consciousness of heads felt the need to perform macabre experiments. One French physician named Beaurieux observed a beheading, and upon calling the condemned’s name just after the guillotine blade dropped, the decapitated head twice opened its eyes and met Beaurieux’s gaze. He observed, “I was not, then, dealing with the sort of vague dull look without any expression that can be observed any day in dying people to whom one speaks. I was dealing with undeniably living eyes which were looking at me.” While the consciousness of the decapitated heads of the guillotine victims was debated, no scientist of the era succeeded in fully reanimating the human head, which is probably fortunate for the heads.

While eighteenth- and nineteenth-century doctors and scientists were limited in their endeavours by current medical technology, advances in the field allowed for more involved experiments. In the early 1900s, Charles Guthrie (who, with colleague Alexis Carrel, had perfected the art of anastomosis, or connecting two blood vessels together) managed to transplant a dog head onto the base of another dog’s neck, creating a living two-headed dog. The transplanted head exhibited, once again, only reflexes, and the two-headed dog was euthanised several hours after the surgery.

During the 1930s, American scientist, Dr Robert E. Cornish had some success killing and reanimating man’s best friend with a mix of medications, hyperoxygenated blood, and artificial ventilation. The dogs were named, appropriately, Lazarus I, II, III, and so forth. After his canine successes, Cornish wanted to attempt his procedure on humans, but his request to attempt to reanimate executed convicts was ultimately denied.
The short film, *Experiments in the Revival of Organisms*, chronicles Soviet Dr Sergei Bryukhonenko’s achievements in canine resurrection. The film shows both a heart and lung functioning independently outside the dog’s body, both infused with blood from a device called the “autoejector” (an early precursor to the current heart-lung machine). The autoejector also manages to instil life into a decapitated dog head, and the head is noted to make several different types of movements, including licking its snout and responding to sound. Finally, the autoejector serves to reanimate an entire organism. A dog is drained of blood until the heartbeat and respiration stop. The dog’s blood is placed in the autoejector, oxygenated, and pumped back into the dog after ten minutes of death. The dog’s vital functions and spontaneous movement eventually resume, and the film concludes with several happily gamboling dogs, all of which had been killed and reanimated in this way.

Another Soviet scientist, Vladimir Demikhov, actually transplanted puppy heads with several organs and front legs still attached to adult dog necks in the 1950s. The puppies’ cognitive functions seem to have been preserved, as Demikhov wrote that “the donor’s head bit the recipient behind the ear so that the latter yelped and shook its head.” The transplanted puppies also attempted to free themselves from their moorings on the adult dog necks, but to no avail; the puppies were doomed to short, immobile lives. The most successful of these transplanted puppy-dog creations lived 29 days before tissue rejection set in.

In the 1960s, American Dr Robert White also made headlines with his radical surgeries; he would remove the brain of a living animal and, after cooling the organ to prevent hypoxia and cell death, he connected the still-living brain to another animal’s blood supply. The preserved brain was then implanted into the neck or abdominal cavity of its host. Essentially, memories and the ability to reason and imagine would remain intact, but without any sensory input, the consciousness would exist in a void, without sight, sound, touch, taste, or smell. Dr White was very candid about the existence the brains must have had, noting that “people [in isolation chambers] have gone literally crazy, and it doesn’t take all that long.” Isolation caused Frankenstein’s creation to become a monster, as he so eloquently explains to his creator, “everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend.”

During the next decade, White performed another medical feat: The transplantation of a rhesus monkey’s head onto the body of another decapitated rhesus monkey. The head transplant, or “whole-body transplant,” as White thinks of it, allows the head to continue functioning, although the severed spinal cord renders the person a quadriplegic. White sees this as beneficial to patients who are already quadriplegic with failing...
bodies. Skeptics, however, claim that it is medically useless and unethical, and that it complicates the issue of identity. “The issue of who someone who had received a head transplant would ‘be’ is extremely complicated.” Essentially, although your brain would retain your memories and identity, the rest of your body would assume someone else’s medical history, identifying marks, and fingerprints. It would, however, be a step up from the brain-only transplant, allowing the head to communicate with the outside world.

These experimental procedures are objectionable to many for obvious reasons. They are examples of humanity playing God, numerous Dr Frankensteins constructing monstrous amalgams of animals and human bodies. One may wonder, in disgust and disbelief, how a scientist or doctor can even imagine such horrors, let alone execute them. However, despite the grotesque creations of these men, their experiments have added valuable contributions to the medical field particularly in terms of resuscitation and organ transplantation. Without Carrel’s and Guthrie’s innovation of anastamosis, a great many surgical procedures (including organ transplants) would be impossible. Demikhov’s research, while profoundly disturbing, demonstrated that multiple-organ transplants were feasible. White’s research is, if nothing else, remarkable in and of itself, although perhaps more worthy of horror than practical application.

Two-headed creatures and conscious heads are exceptional in their science and in their moral uncertainty. The means by which human flesh is reanimated in modern hospitals are expected, and it has become protocol to raise the dead. When the words “Code Blue” are announced over a hospital intercom, every attempt is made to revive the patient physically, as in CPR, medically, with drugs, and/or electrically, with the use of defibrillators and pacemakers.

While it is possible for a person’s heartbeat and respirations to spontaneously resume while CPR is being performed, most unresponsive patients are not so easily revived, and CPR serves to maintain organ viability while other lifesaving measures are employed. A variety of medications can be given to a patient in cardiac arrest. Epinephrine, or adrenaline, can kick-start the heart, while atropine blocks the mechanisms that slow the heart rate. During the early 1900s, around the same time that the use of the above mentioned medications was emerging, author H.P. Lovecraft’s 1922 literary creation Dr Herbert West used the technique of injecting drugs in his attempts to raise the dead. He experiments with an array of injections, creating a legion of cannibalistic monsters that eventually punish him for his hubris. Of course, patients in a hospital are only clinically dead for a matter of seconds or minutes before resuscitation attempts are initiated, while West’s “patients” have been dead much longer and have already exhibited signs of decomposition. The recipients of
modern life-saving treatments are more likely to thank their doctors than try to eat them.

Dr. Frankenstein’s fascination with galvanism came to full fruition with the defibrillator. Certain cardiac electrical rhythms are treated with defibrillation. A defibrillator is used to deliver and electric shock that activates all heart cells at once, followed by a moment of electrical inactivity and hopefully thereafter, the return of normal electrical activity and pulse. Implanted pacemakers and automatic defibrillators also regulate heart rhythms with electricity based on programmed settings.

Frankenstein’s experiment was likely a crude precursor to these modern forms of Galvanism. In the novel, Mary Shelley left the gory details of Frankenstein’s reanimation a mystery, dropping only tantalizing hints of the methods to the scientist’s madness: “I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet.” Meanwhile, cinematic and pop culture incarnations glorify the use of electricity as a catalyst, imagining Rube-Goldberg contraptions to snatch lightning out of the sky. Perhaps the most enduring image is that of James Whale’s 1931 film, *Frankenstein*, with a crazed Victor crying triumphantly, “It’s alive!”

Reanimation, in its mythical, fictional, and realized forms, follows a tortuous path through history. It pushes the boundaries of plausibility and, like many other scientific and medical developments, forces us to ask basic ethical questions, from the definition of humanity to the sanctity of life. Countless stories in film, novel, and graphic form have explored the moral dilemmas and repercussions inherent with human intervention in death. Some horrific, some profound, and some comedic, they range from the classic literature mentioned earlier to recent pop culture creations such as George Romero’s *Dead* series of films and Max Brook’s pseudo-reality *Zombie Survival Guide*. The walking dead of our world have been portrayed as flesh-hungry zombies, as victims, generally as something to be feared, avoided, or killed.

Yet, for all the monstrousness involved, reanimation has proven to be fertile ground for legitimate medical practice. Organ transplantation is a modern life-saving treatment that is, at its core, the removal of an organ from the dead (or brain dead) and reanimation thereof in another human body. Medicine not only restores people from the brink of death, but also routinely invigorates the silent heart and gives breath to inert lungs, reproducing that most complex series of chemical and physical reactions that we call life. Life, that miracle whose genesis can be theorized and sermonized, but never agreed upon, can be sparked and guided like a burgeoning flame by the hand of humanity. It is a power long sought for and hard-earned, a triumph that must be tempered with some degree of
humility, lest we end up haunted by our creations (and recreations) like the unfortunate Dr Frankenstein.

Notes
2 ibid., p. xviii.
10 ibid., p. 46.
12 ibid., pp. 1-11.
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24 ‘The Re-Animation Chair’.
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PART 4

Monstrous Diversions
**Shadow of the Colossus: The Monster in the Landscape**

Ewan Kirkland

Abstract

*Shadow of the Colossus*, released for the PlayStation 2 in 2006, was the acclaimed spiritual successor to the Japanese art game, *Ico* (2002). Structured as a series of elaborate boss battles, players explore a vast and haunting landscape searching for a succession of giant monsters. These huge creatures must be defeated through elaborate battle sequences in a quest to resurrect the protagonist’s dead lover. However, through the game’s progress, the player becomes increasingly unsettled by the virtual genocide they are required to perform, and increasingly ambivalent towards the game’s hero. This paper explores how this mounting ambivalence is generated. Initially, the game established a David vs. Goliath scenario, pitting a tiny avatar against enormous monsters twenty times his size. But as players’ prowess grows and successive creatures fall - each accompanied by mournful music and slow motion death sequences - the power dynamic shifts, instead constructing the protagonist as villain and the monsters as underdog. Creature design, their bodies an amalgamation of rocks, crumbling architecture, moss, grass and ivy, represent the monsters as natural elements within a landscape in which the player is the intruder. Destroying these creatures constitutes a form of desecration, upon defeat each monster’s temple effigy collapsing in a pile of dust, releasing smoky spirits which bow over the protagonist in silent judgement. Moreover, the technical and artistic skill involved in bringing these enormous animated figures to the screen enhances the impression of senseless destruction players wreak upon these magnificent creations. Gradually, the player realises that the avatar, and not his adversaries, is the real monster in this landscape.

Keywords

avatar, boss battle, landscape, videogame

1. **Playing Shadow of the Colossus.**

   This paper will explore *Shadow of the Colossus* a videogame released by Sony Computer Entertainment for the PlayStation 2 in 2006. The game takes the form of an epic quest involving a series of spectacular battles. Players control a protagonist named Wander riding his trusty steed, Agro, through a vast, deserted landscape, full of trees, mountains, rivers, lakes, and ruined monuments, including a desert, a beach, a waterfall, a coliseum, a secret garden, and an ancient village. In order to bring his dead lover, Mono, back to life, Wander must defeat sixteen colossi, huge monsters which reside
in various locations throughout the world. Holding his sword aloft, Wander can direct a beam of sunlight, which points in the direction of his next enemy. Once the colossi are located, they must be defeated by discovering their one weakness, a spot on their body which glows with a silver symbol, into which Wander must plunge his sword. The player has to climb each creature, scurrying across the surface of their bodies - a combination of fur, scales, and architecture-like features - clinging to the appropriate spot on the colossi, then stab it repeatedly until the monster is destroyed.

The game involves many skills familiar to videogames. Searching for the monster in the landscape involves navigating an often treacherous game space. Players must locate the hidden pathway or concealed entrance, winding their way through the maze-like terrain. Working out how to defeat the monsters constitutes the puzzle aspect of the game. This involves not just locating the weak spot, but working out how to reach it. Often, players must stun, topple, or trick the creatures in order to climb up the side of their bodies. For example, a sword carrying colossi must be goaded into striking the ground so the player can run up its weapon and strike at its vulnerable area. One flying colossi requires shooting with arrows until it swoops, allowing the player to jump onto its back, climb along its spine, and plunge their sword into its neck. Another wall-climbing colossi has to be knocked onto its back so that players can stab its exposed underbelly. Solving these puzzles involves patience, trial and error, lateral thinking, as well as speedy button depression and quick response.

In many respects, Shadow of the Colossus is a videogame stripped bare. It follows a simple formula: Find monster, kill monster, find next monster. The game takes as its sole focus, the boss battle, the big tricky creatures who punctuate the end of each level in more traditional action adventure videogames. The main difference with Shadow of the Colossus is that there is nothing in between these climactic encounters. There are no other smaller creatures to defeat, no mini quests or minor goals. There are no other characters apart from the catatonic girl who lies in the temple to which the player returns after each defeat, and Wander’s horse, Agro, who follows the hero wherever he goes.

The game takes place in a bleak, desolate, yet hauntingly beautiful and wonderfully-realised landscape, dotted with the remains of some long-dead civilisation. The only life here is the colossi which are as beautifully realised as the waterfalls, temples, and billowing dust planes. As the game progresses, as players work their way through the increasingly robust colossi, destroying what remains of the sentient life in this deserted landscape, the effect is one of gradually increasing disquiet. The sense that Wander’s quest is a profoundly selfish and destructive one, and that these colossi, many of which must be worried into fighting, do not deserve their fate of being slaughtered to save a single life.
As the game progresses, the player becomes increasingly unsettled by the virtual genocide they are required to perform, and increasingly ambivalent towards the game’s hero in whose actions they are profoundly implicated.

2. The Art of Shadow of the Colossus.

Discussing videogames in terms of emotions, effect, subtle shifts in tone, ambivalence and ambiguity undeniably evokes questions concerning the status of videogames as art. As a media and cultural studies critic, I am extremely suspicious of notions of art as a category indicating innate or ontological value. I nevertheless acknowledge and believe it important to interrogate constructions of art and artistry as a historical, cultural, and discursive category. In previous work on the artistic situation of videogames, I have found particular value in John Ellis’ historical understanding of film art as a conception which emerged through journalistic practices of definition and promotion. Ellis argues:

A definite object is constituted by these notions, by the discursive system of which they are a part, an object that can be designated, that affects films written about, films seen and even some films made within the independent cinema.¹

*Shadow of the Colossus* is evidently part of an emerging cannon of celebrated videogames, reflected in the title’s presence within recent publications and forums. The game’s discussion within these sites clearly reflects familiar discourses of artistry. James Newman and Iain Simons British Film Institute book, *100 Videogames*, includes the title,² as does Matt Fox’s more popular reference book *The Video Games Guide.*³ Newman and Simons praise the “emotional intensity” of the gaming experience. Deeming *Shadow of the Colossus* “a remarkably enigmatic game,” they comment upon the “ambiguity and complexity” of the “emotional landscape” in which the colossi’s characters are “drawn with maturity and richness.” Fox’s review similarly uses adjectives like “subdued,” “melancholic,” and “bleak and evocative” in describing a game “that makes you question your morality when it comes to slaying monsters.” Ben Sherman’s online feature on the title considers the way game structure is designed to emphasise emotional responses from the player: A sense of isolation, guilt, uncertainty.⁴ Emotion, ambiguity, maturity, richness, complexity; these are all aspects associated with works of artistic value.

There are reasons why *Shadow of the Colossus* - and not for example, *Tetris, Grand Theft Auto, or World of Warcraft* - lends itself to critical frameworks associated with high art and culture. These are present within aspects of the game’s aesthetics, its structure and its tone. In his study
of narrative in videogames, Barry Atkins argues the form’s poor cultural value results from connections with popular genres such as war, sci-fi, and fantasy. Such generic aesthetics are largely absent from Shadow of the Colossus. There is none of the explosions, pyrotechnic technology, or fantastical imagery associated with these popular forms. There are no hoards of aliens or zombies or Nazi soldiers, no ray guns or tanks or missile launchers. Only a man on a horse with a sword and bow in a subdued and sepia-tinted landscape. If any fantastic civilisations once populated these places they are now long gone, leaving behind a vast and empty world evoking a sense of peaceful mournful stillness.

Even though this is a technologically sophisticated videogame, the low-tech circumstances of its protagonist together with the wild natural landscape dotted with overgrown ruins enhances the Spartan aesthetic of the game, an austerity more readily associated with art than commerce. Game progress is slow and methodical. Defeating the colossi is not a crude matter of hitting fire as rapidly as possible, but of working out the trick to defeating each creature, searching out its weak spot, watching its behaviour, determining the most expedient path to reaching its Achilles heel. This game is cerebral rather than physical, another association of high rather than low culture. Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin argue videogames produce a sense of cultural anxiety - evident in recurring discussions of videogame violence - because of their perceived potential for “visual immediacy.” Such aspects are diminished in the slow, ponderous pace of Shadow of the Colossus where players might spend half an hour travelling to find their adversary, and an hour more working out how to destroy it.

Shadow of the Colossus was the acclaimed spiritual successor to the Japanese game, Ico, and through its association with this similarly critically acclaimed title, Shadow of the Colossus also has authored status. Authorship continues to have a prominence in discourses of art and artistry, as evident in the persisting popular status of film auteur discourses and recent discussion of “quality” TV.

Shadow of the Colossus, therefore, features the aesthetics, the design, the pace and cultural situation of an artistic rather than a commercial product. These aspects cue the player for an emotional rather than a visceral encounter, while contributing to the manner in which the game is experienced.

3. The Experience of Shadow of the Colossus.

In keeping with my media and cultural studies background, this is a very rationalist way of understanding the emotional effect of Shadow of the Colossus, as a product of historical, discursive, cultural practices. But I am also a player of the game, and in working my way through its many levels, I - like many of those reviewing the title - was struck by the increasing sense of
unease I felt at the task I was expected to perform. In addition, to these cultural and discursive processes, part of the game’s unique impact can be attributed to specific aspects of game design which induce a self-reflexive or critical perspective in the player. Undoubtedly, an aspect of the distillation effect discussed above, by reducing the game to those two key elements of videogame play - exploration and the boss battle - these are thrown into relief. Moreover, these two aspects which *Shadow of the Colossus* makes its own inform each other, extenuating the emotional impact of both.

Movement through space is a fundamental aspect of much videogame play, a fact underlined by Henry Jenkins and Mary Fuller’s discussion of Nintendo videogames. Spatial progression, rather than traditional narrative, is seen as the videogame’s defining mode. *Shadow of the Colossus* underlines this sense of exploration by removing visual pyrotechnics and spectacular adversaries, by ensuring players progress at a slow horse’s gallop, by making the journey itself a feature in its own right. Technically, the landscape of *Shadow of the Colossus* is wonderfully rendered. Light falls through tree branches onto forest floors, water eddies and ripples over rocks and roots, the world is full of beautiful grottoes, tranquil groves, hidden ruins, stunning views. The long uneventful protracted journey also allows players time to think, something not possible in more visceral games, to consider their actions and the slow deliberation with which they hunt out and then slaughter each colossi.

Many action-orientated games are full of action, movement, exciting visuals, flames, explosions, bodies falling, clashing, destructing, or inflicting destruction on other bodies. By stripping the game bare of such distractions, and channelling player agency in the direction of a single battle, the effect of that encounter is profoundly more dramatic. If the world of *Shadow of the Colossus* is beautiful, the colossi are similarly visually arresting. Far larger than most videogame adversaries, many tower over the player’s avatar, over twenty times Wander’s height. Rich and varied in design, some animal, bird-like or humanoid, they share many qualities of the landscape from which they emerge, an amalgamation of rock, carved stone, grass and ivy. Despite their threat to the player, the beauty of the landscape is visually reflected in the beauty of the creature design, a combination of the organic and inorganic, suggesting ancient beings, long overgrown by nature, lying undisturbed until the player rudely awakens them with his presence. That the creatures are so visually, technically, and artistically stunning, so few and far between, and so wonderfully realised as complex adversaries produces the unsettling sense that the player is destroying something of value, maybe even something of beauty, in contrast to the usual videogame trigger-finger fodder. The technical and artistic skill involved in bringing these enormous animated figures to the screen enhances the impression of senseless destruction players wreak upon these magnificent creations.
This is enhanced by the painful animations which mark the destruction of every colossi. Each successive creature’s death is depicted in slow motion accompanied by mournful music. Again, this creates a tone which is dramatically different from the triumphant music and satisfying explosions which mark the end of most boss battles. Each death sees the monster’s stone effigy in the temple where Mono lies crumble to dust, suggesting the desecration of something sacred. Each death sees the protagonist return to the temple, surrounded by a gathering of dark smoky spirit creatures, the ghosts of the murdered colossi who seem to peer down over the protagonist in silent judgement.

Gradually the player realises that the avatar and not his adversaries is the real monster in this landscape.

Notes

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It Came from Four-Colour Fiction: The Effect of Cold War Comic Books on the Fiction of Stephen King

David Kingsley

Abstract

Stephen King, whose latest work is a serialized comic book adaptation of his Dark Tower opus, is obviously and admittedly influenced by a fusion of traditional horror and the horror comic books from his youth: Tales from the Crypt, Vault of Horror, Haunt of Fear. Much work has been dedicated to King’s place in the horror pantheon - King’s Randall Flagg ranked with and judged against Lovecraft’s “The Rats in the Walls,” Bloch’s Norman Bates, and Campbell’s The Doll That Ate Its Mother - but not enough discourse has centred on how an early diet of horror comic magazines and prose fiction synthesized and moulded King’s sensibilities of horror and forged his notions of what constituted a monster. It must be remembered that King’s earliest published fiction, “I Was a Teenage Gravedigger,” was published in a comic book style magazine and owes its debt to the O’Henrys of horror: The EC comics’ bullpen. The comics of King’s childhood and adolescence heavily promoted literal monsters, ranging from the sublime and relevant Mr Mind’s Monster Society of Evil to the ridiculous double-threat of Goom and Googam (the father and son would be conquerors from Dimension X). These literal terrors, however, always represented that era’s figurative fears, such as McCarthyism and nuclear science. Today, there exists a dearth of unexplored and unresearched fiction, with King’s addition as a writer of graphic literature now elevating that medium to an art form, which shaped an entire generation’s conception of monsters. Furthermore, with both King’s earliest and latest writings existing as contributions to illustrated literature, this presentation documents how comic books’ depictions of monsters contributed to King’s conceptions of monsters and how King, in turn, lent his vision of the monstrous back to the form and genre to be interpreted by the present and future generations.

Keywords

Comic Book, Stephen King, Monster, Dr Doom, Green Goblin, Cold War

Whether it is the war criminal living down the street, or a clown which resides in the sewer drain, the focus of bestselling author, Stephen King, never strays too far from the monsters which inhabit the horror genre. Even in those stories where an antagonist may appear free from paranormal underpinnings, it is likely that the influences which led to that character’s conception were the same as those which dictated King’s creation of
supernatural conflicts: Chiefly, comic books. Freely admitting that, to him, there exists no greater epitome of terror than the horror comics of the 1950s, King, in his 1981 genre treatise, Danse Macabre, codifies these comic books as “William B. Gaines’s horror comics - Weird Science, Tales from the Crypt, Tales from the Vault - plus all the Gaines imitators[…]” That the late publisher of Entertaining Comics (EC) was actually William M. Gaines, and as EC never published a title known as Tales from the Vault, blindly interpreting King’s fiction as thus inspired would misinform any discourse to be guided by his assertion. The monsters, motifs, and messages, of author Stephen King are, instead, more attuned and attributable to the subsequent decade’s science-fiction and superhero magazines.

Tyson Blue, whose The Unseen King is an indispensable overview covering King’s earliest excursions into fiction, notes that the author’s seldom-seen early manuscripts “are one-punch tales of horror and fantasy, with a tendency to O. Henry snap endings with a twist, reminiscent of the EC Comics which had been popular about five years before […].” Although that which distinguished Entertaining Comics did contribute to the content of “I Was a Teenage Grave Robber,” King’s first published story, Blue’s citation that this story is beholden only to EC’s gallows humour and rotting revengers ignores King’s admission that he had never stopped reading comic books.

Much changed for the illustrated art form, in the decade between the discontinuation of Gaines’ horror titles and the publication of “Teenage Grave Robber,” so for a researcher, then, to limit him or herself to examining solely the impact of EC on King severely narrows the scope on what they should be examining. As the difference in content is between comic books proliferative with pulp monsters pulled from the post-WWII ether and comic books where monsters’ rampages were resultant from unchecked nuclear testing, it risks robbing King’s works of the meanings he culled from the latter era’s atomic-age aggrandizing and ignoring the Cold War morality and socially aware statements present in King’s initial publications.

Published in 1965, “I Was a Teenage Grave Robber” appeared first in the independently published magazine, Comics Review, before being reprinted as “In a Half-World of Terror” in the second issue of Stories of Suspense, a horror fanzine. Like its publication history, which bridged superhero and horror, “Grave Robber” chronicled the happenings of Danny Gerad who, “sort of like Bruce Wayne […],” is independently wealthy when his parents are killed in a car crash. After finding himself separated from his fortunes and dropped from the university, the once self-sufficient orphan resorts to bodysnatching for Weinbaum, a mad scientist. Weinbaum subjects the purloined cadavers to radiation, which transforms the larvae feasting upon them into three tremendous super-maggots.

Nuclear giants, such as they appear in “Grave Robber,” were not a standard ingredient in The Tales from the Crypt formula. Rather, they were
gimmicks perpetuated by EC’s rivals, after US Senate decency hearings, in 1954, forced Gaines to discontinue their popular horror line and made it impossible for the remaining horror publishers to release titles featuring the traditional genre mainstays, such as zombies, werewolves, and vampires. Literally and figuratively defanged, the remaining publishers - most noteworthy of which was Timely/Atlas - moved from the phantasmagorical to the fantastic, populating their pages with anthropomorphic A-bomb analogues and other-dimensional overlords. Cold War horror comics, as defined by historian of graphic fiction, Mike Benton, always involved a “huge destructive creature […] [which] mutates from an atomic blast […]” that, after “terrifying citizens,” is destroyed by “a brave scientist or a quick-thinking kid.” King’s story helps prove Benton’s trope - with Weinbaum’s conspicuous presence and also with the giant cyclopean grubs incinerated by Jerad - but denies credence to Blue’s assertion. “I Was a Teenage Grave Robber” is not an EC appropriation; it is a Timely/Atlas pastiche.

Timely/Atlas Comics (later renamed Marvel Comics) was the home of anthologies featuring the likes of Gigantus, Googam (Son of Goom), and Gorgilla. Long after the encroachment of genre magazines had led to the demise of their superhero titles, the failed conquests of these would-be alien plunderers and irradiated also-rans comprised nearly the whole of that company’s publishing line. Even their most popular icons - Captain America, The Sub-Mariner, and The Human Torch - had ceased publication by October, 1955. When Marvel re-entered the cape-and-cowl trade, in 1961, with The Fantastic Four, the book was marketed, covertly. Initial covers for the series were designed to highlight the familial team’s power-providing deformities - invisibility, inflammability, malleability, and a hideous calcified hide - which the team would use to thwart standard space-invaders and Atlas-esque brutes, thus, to an unsuspecting customer base, disguising heroics as horror. With the genesis and mindsets of The Fantastic Four nemeses like The Soviet Super-Apes and Kurrgo: Master of Planet X straying little from the atomic nascence and machinations of Gorilla-Man and Groot: Monarch of Planet X, early Marvel Comics’ periodicals offered little variety from later issues of Atlas’ Journey into Mystery and Amazing Adult Fantasy.

The latter title, Amazing Fantasy, would inauspiciously premier the popular superhero, Spider-Man, whose spotlight in the horror anthology’s fifteenth and final issue would be shared with Martians and a mummy. Like The Fantastic Four, Spider-Man owed a debt to the monsters which preceded him. A year before radioactive venom would bestow upon Peter Parker the proportionate strength and speed of a spider, an atomically-charged arachnid that had gained the attributes of a human appeared in a 1961 issue of Journey into Mystery. Peter Parker, Spider-Man’s alter-ego, would be placed in the care of his Aunt May and Uncle Ben, however, characters sharing the
Parkers’ names and likenesses had appeared two months prior, in *Strange Tales*’ “Goodbye to Linda Brown,” where Ben and May tended to a mermaid niece. It would appear that the Marvel superheroes did not herald the conclusion of Atlas’ monster imprint, but continued it. The elements of horror inherent within these fledgling titles were not lost on Stephen King, who, having read them, commented:

Perhaps the “new generation” of comic monsters is best epitomized by those created by Stan Lee’s Marvel Comics, where for every superhero such as Spiderman (sic) or Captain America, there seems to be a dozen freakish aberrations: Dr Octopus […]; The Sandman, who is a sort of walking sand dune; The Vulture; Stegron; The Lizard; and most ominous of all, Dr Doom, who has been so badly maimed in his Twisted Pursuit of Forbidden Science that he is now a great, clanking cyborg who wears a green cape, peers through eyeholes like the archers’ slits in a medieval castle, and who appears to be literally sweating rivets.

Stan Lee, Marvel Comics’ editor-and-chief, wrote, with illustrator Jack Kirby, over one-hundred issues of *The Fantastic Four*, and created, with artist and co-writer Steve Ditko, *The Amazing Spider-Man*. Lee, Kirby, and Ditko had successfully collaborated, for years, to fashion bizarre creatures and fantastical stories for titles like *Strange Worlds* and *Tales to Astonish*. Lee had, in fact, crafted, with Kirby, the previously noted *Journey into Mystery* tale, “The Spider Strikes,” and a subsequent pairing with Ditko had produced *Strange Tales*’ prototypical aunt and uncle. These artists imparted upon King a visually-oriented language he would later employ in the composition of his own monsters, such as the vividly described gargantuan grubs of “Teenage Grave Robber.” As his career progressed, King’s indebtedness to the illustrators became more pronounced, with prominent villains that they had created appearing, by name and by likeness, inside King’s body of literature and film, and with Steve Ditko’s brushstrokes specifically acknowledged as the basis for one of King’s lesser adversaries.

Ditko’s stories from *Tales to Astonish* had been rife with unreliable first-person narrators, and ambiguous twist endings, which makes it appropriate that the illustrator is, then, associated with a character from Stephen King’s 1978 short story, “Nona,” which, recounted by an incarcerated murderer, relates how that killer may or may not have been abetted on his killing spree by the title’s verminous femme-fatale. When first struck by the delusion of Nona, it is at Joe’s Good Eats, a diner, where a truck-driving assailant who accosts the unnamed narrator is described as “look[ing] like something out of a Steve Ditko drawing.”

11 It must be
emphasized that the artist King uses for association is not a member of the EC bullpen, and underscored that, when King returned to a truck-stop setting, in his directorial debut, *Maximum Overdrive*, he would cast what is probably Steve Ditko’s most popular villain, The Green Goblin, as that film’s antagonist.

Marvel Comics’ Green Goblin, co-created by Ditko and Stan Lee, concealed businessman Norman Osborn’s identity beneath a manufactured countenance not unlike those indigenous to Atlas’ fission-fuelled fiends, freeing Osborn to use his mastery of mergers and acquisitions in an attempted unification of the warring New York mobs. Douglas E. Winter had posited that the monstrous mask, as it factors into King’s fiction, is a bifurcated symbol, representing “the explicit externalization of [characters’] surrender to evil […]” and also “an externalization of Everyman’s possible evil[…]” Osborn’s deliberately sub-human guise served the same purpose, obscuring and subsuming its wearer’s human features and characteristics as Osborn succumbed to his alter-ego’s mania. Later tied to shadowy conspiracies working within the American military-industrial complex - and climactically revealed as the neglectful father of Spider-Man’s Empire State University roommate - Osborn was never a paragon of virtue and had gained his powers from a formula he had swindled from his equity partner, Mendel Stromm. The serum proved volatile, however, and literally exploded in Osborn’s face, leaving his body superhumanly strong, but doing so at the expense of his sanity. A new dominant personality, the Goblin, emerged from Osborn’s splintered psyche and shrouded itself in green, after the colour of Stromm’s stolen potion. Where Atlas’ monsters acted as general denunciations of nuclear testing, The Green Goblin would serve as a particular indictment of the Cold War’s cutthroat industrialist who helped escalate the arms race.

In much the same manner that Osborn had embezzled the brainchild of his former partner, King would later appropriate Osborn, using the character like Lee and Ditko had, in the perpetuation of a purposeful agenda. The year in which “Nona” premiered also saw the re-release of “Trucks,” a short story which would provide the frame for King to construct *Maximum Overdrive*, his directorial debut. In *Overdrive*, King lays siege upon a North Carolina truck stop, The Dixie Boy Diner, whose patrons and employees are held hostage, inside, by abruptly animated appliances, while held at bay, from outside, by sentient semi-trucks. Tony Magistrale ascribes to King’s directorial debut an anti-capitalist agenda which befits The Green Goblin’s appearance as the film’s central antagonist, a gargantuan bust ornamenting the grill of a semi-truck orchestrating the lethal gridlock:

The “mechanized revolt” appears to be motivated as much by human stupidity, greed, and an overdependency on the machine as it is by the effect of a stray comet. Humans exploit
and abuse one another all through this film; they treat each other with the same callous disregard that they apply toward the machinery that serves them.\textsuperscript{13}

Unilaterally levelling these allegations at viewers situates them in the empty driver’s seat of the Happy Toyz Co. rig, where audiences must confront a corporate identity which they once believed themselves to control. Initially, Osborn had believed himself to be the goblin’s pilot, but he, too, found himself overthrown by technological means he had constructed for the furthering of his enterprise. Having hitched its ideology to the effigy of Lee and Ditko’s jade mogul, \textit{Maximum Overdrive} uses The Green Goblin as a conscious signifier of mankind’s marginalization.

In the same manner as which Stromm’s explosive serum lent its emerald hue to the garb of Osborn’s goblin, King colours his motorcade master the same shade as the “effect of a stray comet,” which controls it. With both iterations of the character existing to chide consumerist obsession, it is not too incredulous an assumption to make that both Lee/Ditko and King paint their goblins the colour of the American currency which possesses the individual and infests society. Less than a year later, Stephen King would follow \textit{Overdrive} with \textit{The Tommyknockers}, a novel which continued and culminated the themes from his film. As Magistrale had defended the literary merits of \textit{Maximum Overdrive}, he championed \textit{The Tommyknockers} as “a thinly disguised parable of nuclear energy and the willingness of modern communities to risk human safety and the sanctity of land for the corporate promise of clean and cheap energy.”\textsuperscript{14} The fusion of nuclear misgivings with corporate mistrust, in \textit{The Tommyknockers}, twinned Atlas’ radioactive monsters and Marvel’s industrialist super-villains.

Two incongruous explanations had been offered for the machines’ spontaneous cognizance in \textit{Maximum Overdrive}, the aforementioned comet radiation, and a spacecraft concealed behind this comet. As the Tommyknockers refer to deceased extraterrestrial pilots, who, in their spacecraft, have been buried beneath a small Maine village, for millennia, the UFO explanation \textit{Overdrive} provides proves most satisfying. Where the alien forces of King’s film occupy Earth’s machinery, those in his novel mentally subjugate the living population, telepathically commanding the townspeople to begin their excavation. Essentially an interstellar nuclear reactor, the spacecraft, as opposed to uranium, derives its energy from the enslaved citizenship, drawing power from the town’s participation in “The Becoming,” where the Tommyknockers’ ghosts eschew their hosts’ personalities for a linked and shared consciousness, referred to by King as “a nearly perfect form of collectivism.”\textsuperscript{15} During this process, King describes someone stricken by the ethereal presence as “lit with a lurid green light, making [the character] look like a comic-book monstrosity […].”\textsuperscript{16} Although
this passage harkens back to the forces driving The Green Goblin, insomuch as he appears in Maximum Overdrive, the spirits responsible for the town’s physical and physiological mutation operate as a different facet of Cold War commentary. As the unseen Tommyknockers force unwitting minions into an incredibly advanced campaign to harness the atom, the otherworldly artifact becomes indicative of totalitarianism and heedless science.

An earlier citation from Stephen King had noted that Dr Doom, Marvel’s most enduring archetype of villainy, had become, like characters from The Tommyknockers, “badly maimed in his Twisted Pursuit of Forbidden Science [...]” The character, designed and embellished upon by Jack Kirby, would be similarly motivated by global domination and appears in King’s recent work as equally analogous of the great sky travellers, their “Forbidden Science,” and their authoritarian control. Where King’s use of The Green Goblin is to admonish the nuclear age capitalist, his allusions to Dr Doom, who ruled the faux soviet-bloc nation of Latveria with a literal iron first, castigates fascism. In what appears to be a recurring portent of some import to co-creator Stan Lee, Doom had begun his PhD in villainy as the Empire State University roommate of future Fantastic Four patriarch, Reed Richards (Mr Fantastic). Having lost both parents to Roma purges, Doom immigrated to America, using his scholarship to secure funding for a machine which would allow him to commune with his dead mother. When, after analyzing Doom’s notations on the device, Richards found flaws in the mathematical equations governing its pseudo-science, Doom accused him of jealously sabotaging the hotline-to-hell, which, like a familiar CEO’s stolen serum, blew up in his face, badly disfiguring him. After his expulsion, Doom wandered the Tibetan wastelands, until taken in by a subversive sect of monks that indoctrinated him with the forbidden knowledge which he had sought. Upon his “graduation,” he was bequeathed a suit of armour that he donned, still hot, from the forge, thus exacerbating his earlier deformity. It was in this armour that Doom returned to Latveria, his fictional country of origin, using his mastery of magic and science to usurp control for himself, a political gambit which would bring him into combat with The Fantastic Four, The Amazing Spider-Man, and Stephen King’s most popular protagonists.

Stephen King’s Dark Tower novels follow a band of interdimensional gunslingers, on a quest to revive the crumbling infrastructure of The Dark Tower, which serves as the nexus for an infinite number of worlds. Wolves of the Calla, the fifth novel in the series, finds this posse positioned in a cursed town (called a Calla), whose children are, every generation, abducted, later to be returned deformed and dim-witted. King had, decades prior, acknowledged Robert Browning’s “Child Roland to the Dark Tower Came” as these novels’ major thematic wellspring, but, here, the greatest influence on the wolfen kidnappers are Browning’s “The Pied Piper of Hamelin” and Lee and Kirby’s Dr Doom:
All the personality these things had was in the masks and clothing they wore.

“Crazy or not, I know what they are, Eddie. Or where they come from, at least. Marvel Comics.” […]

“They look like Dr Doom,” Eddie said.

“Yeah,” Jake said. “It’s not exact, I’m sure the masks were modified to make them look a little more like wolves, but otherwise…same green hoods, same green cloaks. Yeah, Dr Doom.”

Implicit is that the entirety of the Wolves’ personality and behaviour is forged onto the iconography of their masks, similar to how, in Maximum Overdrive, The Green Goblin’s effigy is synecdochic to the history and motivations of the evildoer after which it is visually modelled. Both Doom and Osborn seamlessly transition from their four-colour homeworlds, where political and economic clockwork corrupts them so completely that they find themselves more machine and monster than man, to the bestsellers of Stephen King, where the masks of their mechanical counterparts disguise engines, literal lifelessness. With a face that, in “the Marvel mags,” has been forever hidden to all save he (including the readers), it is an appropriate anticlimax that, when Stephen King unmasks his Dr Dooms, it exposes nothing more than featureless faceplates and mass-manufactured origins. As The Green Goblin of Maximum Overdrive, is better understood by that film’s closeness to The Tommyknockers, Dr Doom’s insertion into King’s horrorscape is equally elucidated when comparing Tommyknockers’ themes to those found in Wolves of the Calla.

The extraterrestrial-induced mutations, in Tommyknockers, and the conversion of the independently-thinking individuals into UFO engine batteries, results in an anti-individualist atmosphere punishing to all “characters who [do not] seek to subsume their identities and freedom within [the town’s] great communal persona […]”. The violent jurisprudence exercised upon Calla Bryn Sturgis by the lupine marauders nullifies any of the individuality and humanity that had been present in Lee and Kirby’s human symbol of Cold War totalitarianism. Both of these conflicts argue that extending governorship through inculcation will result in both a loss of autonomy - with the coercive ruler neither distinguished nor exalted by their villainy - and, consequentially, will annihilate any final vestige of humanity. This incurred loss caused Marvel Comics’ Victor Von Doom and Norman Osborn’s subversion into Dr Doom and The Green Goblin, but, in King’s fiction, is evidenced by the characters’ total mechanization which, while underscoring their remove from humanity, takes the characters’ ethical disintegrations to a metaphorized most logical conclusion.
Created in 1962 and 1964, at the apogee of The United States’ involvement in the Cold War, Doom and The Goblin acted as avatars for the fears of that era’s perpetually frightened citizenship: Unchecked governmental abuse, abroad, and unmitigated corporate conglomeration, at home. These figurative antagonists, found in The Fantastic Four and The Amazing Spider-Man, had evolved from the less abstract monsters published in magazines under the company’s former incarnation, Atlas Comics, whose nuclear didacticism had directly inspired King, as well. Though other pundits would accredit the author’s meditations on monstrousness to the pages of Entertaining Comics, the use of mutation, masks, and monocracies, as they figure into King’s fiction - from his first published story through films, short stories, and novels that he has released as recently as 2003 - indicates otherwise. As EC had been all but discontinued by 1954, it could not have imparted the literary antecedents which prefigured the atomic admonishments of “I Was a Teenage Grave Robber” and The Tommyknockers, nor the Cold War political and economic remonstrations of Wolves of the Calla and Maximum Overdrive. Only the Marvel Comics’ monsters and super-villains, published much later, could have concerned King’s fictions with toppling the North American marketplace, while, in the assured mutual destruction of any exploitive social order, equally occupying them in overthrowing the yoke of Eastern-European oppression.

Notes

4 Blue, p. 20.
6 ibid.
7 Blue, p. 19.
10 S King, Danse Macabre, p. 47.
References


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Monstrosities Made Real: The Use of the Real to Support the ur-Real in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs)

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Abstract

Until now, online games have adopted a standard schema of the usual pantheon of monsters: Orcs, trolls, undead, ad nauseam. However, if the monstrous is truly the Real that has been distorted and misshapen, then it is the presence of a non-standard monster committing monstrous atrocities that truly represents an ur-Real monster. There are increasingly frequent reports of monstrously Real behaviours occurring in the ur-Real world, e.g., the theft of in-game belongings, con games, and aberrant sexual behaviour. The use of the Real to reify the ur-Real is an interesting new twist that demands examination and redefinition. This paper seeks to accomplish that feat. Building on prior research, this paper seeks to discover how the player-rhetors of ur-Real worlds further solidify their implicit identity structures through the use of physically tangible objects. Specifically, how player-characters use real monsters to make the ur-Real monsters more tangible. Furthermore, this paper seeks to demonstrate that the ur-Real use of physical referents is making the line between the Real and the ur-Real even more blurred. Although the paper will investigate examples from a variety of sources, the main focus will be on the MMORPGs Ultima Online, World of Warcraft, and Second Life. Additionally, the paper seeks to expand the definitions of rhetoric, community, and communication to include the ur-Real worlds located within the Internet. Specifically, the paper seeks to move the analysis of communication beyond the Real world and into the virtual or, as the author describes it, the ur-Real world of online computer gaming. Furthermore, the paper analyzes how these games seek to more firmly cement their place in the Real through the addition of physically external, but internalized tools.

Keywords

MMORPG, World of Warcraft, ur-Real, rhetoric, identity

In the introductory chapter to Communication as Culture, James Carey tells us that that the “media of communication are not merely instruments of will and purpose but definite forms of life; organisms, so to say, that reproduce in miniature the contradictions in our thought, action, and social relations.” In short, that the medium of our communication - as well
as the communication itself - is not simply a mirror of the world in which the communication existed. Rather, it is a self-sustaining being that once engaged takes on significantly new meaning.

Although the world of online games, specifically the MMO, is beyond what Professor Carey had in mind when he penned his text, it is nonetheless a medium of communication and, as such, a being with a mind of its own. It is because this new medium of communication was conceived in an analogue world, but continues to gestate in a digital one that we need to further examine how it “reproduces [...] contradictions in our thought, actions, and social relations.” Indeed, it is the contradiction between wanting the ur-Real to [re]create an identity, yet needing elements - monsters - of the Real world that is what this paper will address.

Specifically, this paper will seek to answer why the MMO medium of communication or, as I term it, the ur-Real, carries within it examples of the Real world’s atrocities. With apologies to Stephen Donaldson, I believe it is best to describe the online MMORPG community as “ur-Real,” because although it is not the reality we corporeally exist in, it is nonetheless an existence, a community of ways. It is the conscious use of imitation and competition by the player-characters that draws them together as a whole and, thus, creates a culture in which they can exist. Yet because it is non-corporeal, we need to set it apart.

Until now, online games have adopted a standard schema of the usual pantheon of monsters: Orcs, trolls, undead, ad nauseam. However, if the monstrous is truly the Real that has been distorted and misshapen, then it is the presence of a non-standard monster committing monstrous atrocities that truly represents an ur-Real monster. There are increasingly frequent reports of monstrously Real behaviours occurring in the ur-Real world, e.g., the theft of in-game belongings, con games, and aberrant sexual behaviour. Indeed, the question that demands answer is: Why do persons use of the monstrous side of the Real to reify the ur-Real?

This is not a question that will be answered quickly. To begin, we must have an understanding of what is Real. I use a capital “R” to label it so that we know it is something of importance. For example, when we speak of “Truth,” we know that we are discussing more than just whether or not someone is telling us falsehoods. We are discussing over-arching concerns, such as “Is there a God?” or “Why are we Here?” Most definitions of what is Real focus on whether or not an instance is “not imaginary, fictional, or pretended; actual.” Therefore, if we are to understand “Reality,” it must be an instance of something that is substantial and genuine.

Moreover, this instance of Real-ness that we are attempting to describe must be human-centred. The reason for this is simple. Humans, by their very nature, create the reality around them. Whether that reality is in a computer or in an open field, how we understand and communicate either
instance of Reality is through the use of human-created symbolic language. Kenneth Burke, a scholar and rhetorician, once defined humans as a “symbol-using animal” and that this trait determined our reality. Burke explains in the following passage:

The “symbol-using animal,” yes, obviously. But can we bring ourselves to realize just what that formula implies, just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by “reality” has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems? Take away our books, and what little do we know about history, biography, even something so “down to earth” as the relative position of seas and continents? What is our “reality” for today (beyond the paper-thin line of our own particular lives) but all this clutter of symbols about the past combined with whatever things we know mainly through maps, magazines, newspapers, and the like about the present?4

Therefore, it is only through our language that we can gauge what is and is not Real. That description must be of something that is authentic and grounded in fact. Any instance we seek to designate as real, must be able to be sensed not only by ourselves, but also by others. Finally, we must be able to communicate that reality to others that are either present or not present in that instance. Thus, have a beginning: A framework for what is Real is determined by the symbols of our language that are used to describe and, thus, create the Real.

With that framework of the Real, we can begin to see how the monsters that we see everyday in the Real begin to appear in the ur-Real. The nightly news informs us of deadly epidemics sweeping the globe. Much the same occurs in the MMO. In World of Warcraft, the British Broadcasting Corporation reported a “deadly plague” epidemic was occurring:

The digital disease instantly killed lower level characters and did not take much longer to kill even powerful characters. Many online discussion sites were buzzing with reports from the disaster zones with some describing seeing “hundreds” of bodies lying in the virtual streets of the online towns and cities.5

A similar incident also happened in another MMO, Sims Online, when a disease transmitted by “dirty guinea pigs” killed player-characters.6 Indeed, online gaming has even resulted in the physical death of the player. The newspapers and radio reports also inform us of horrific crimes. The ur-Real
Monstrosities Made Real: The ur-Real Monster

has its share of examples as well: The MMO Second Life is currently under investigation by German police because it discovered a “trading group [whose] members pay for sex with virtual children.” Additionally, there were “‘age play’ groups that revolve around the abuse of virtual children.” This incident is in addition to charges of rape lodged with Belgian Police in May, 2007. The list of incidents where ur-Real objects and gold are stolen inside and outside of the game are so commonplace that they, like their Real equivalents, blend into the background noise of the ur-Real worlds in which they occur.

Thus, we begin to see that the monsters that were safely locked outside of our homes are beginning to rear their ugly forms in our ur-Real homes as well. However, we still have not answered the questions as to why we find them in the ur-Real. Are these monsters in the ur-Real because “anywhere people gather, we bring all of our potential with us - for love, for sex, for community and creation, and for violence and destruction, too”? This is certainly part of the equation, but I believe it is for two more significant reasons that we see Real monstrosities in the ur-Real world.

A combination of two theories explains the need for the monstrous in the ur-Real. The first is Kenneth Burke’s theories behind why humans communicate in certain ways. Specifically, it is my hypothesis that humans seek out certain media to communicate in order to evoke certain emotions from their communication targets. The second is James Carey’s theory of the “ritual mode of communication.” Specifically, humans beings no longer use communication media to garner and disseminate information, rather “as dramatically satisfying, which is not to say pleasing, presentations of what the [ur-Real] world at root is.”

Burke would have us believe that we express ourselves in a variety of methods and those methods change depending on our circumstances. However, he cautions us that “self-expression today is too often confused with pure utterance, the spontaneous cry of distress, the almost reflex vociferation of triumph, the clucking of the pheasant as he is startled into flight.” So how do we avoid this confusion? Burke’s best clarification comes in the statement that “the self-expression of the artist [rhetor], qua artist, is not distinguished by the uttering of emotion, but by the evocation of emotion.” Therefore, how we identify ourselves is not found directly in the words we utter to our audience, rather it is found in the emotions we evoke from our respondents.

Since it is the evocation of emotion that fixates the player-character’s identity within the ur-Real, it follows that a monster or monstrous act would allow the player-character behind the monster/act to evoke far more emotions than threatening the monster/act. The monstrous act of rape, for example, is always about a display of power and dominance. A player-
character threatening pseudo-sexual subjugation is far more impotent at evoking an emotional response of fear and dominance than the one who actually commits the atrocity. Some have argued, however, that the ur-Real instantiations of rape are not the equivalent to the corporeal act. Indeed, some authors would go so far as to state “no matter how disturbed you are by a brutal sexual attack online, you cannot equate it to shivering in a hospital with an assailant's sweat or other excretions still damp on your body.”

However, if the emotions evoked in the victim are nigh identical, has the same monstrous act not been committed? I believe that Burke would agree that it has. Indeed, according to Burke, the identity of the corporeal rapist and the ur-Real rapist would be the same.

Burke touches on this aspect when he mentions “it is inevitable that all initial feelings will undergo some transformation when being converted into the mechanism of art.” Therefore, as player-characters, claims of identity through feeling-evocation will be somehow altered depending on the channel through which the emotions are transmitted to the audience. Indeed, the player-character is aware of this transformation to such an extent that the medium becomes part of the evoked identity. Burke provides support for this when he posits that “the philosopher does not merely use logic to convince others; he uses logic because he loves logic, so that logic is to him as much an end as a means.”

Monsters in the ur-Real are kindred spirits to Burke’s logician. These monsters seek out the ur-Real because they identify with the setting; they agree with the parameters; and the agree with the need to [re]create identity through monstrous acts.

Realizing that the claim that monstrous player-characters go to the ur-Real to commit their monstrous acts may seem a bit beyond the pale, I suggest that we also consider that the ur-Reality of the MMO is not just a game. It can be, for some, an all-consuming obsession. For others, it is seen as an oppressive job. To answer the critics that assert that the MMO is just a game, let us equate it - albeit temporarily - with a hobby. In doing so, I would again reference Burke’s comments on the subject: “Hobbies are occupations: They are symbolic labour, undertaken as compensation when our patterns of incessitous labour happen for one reason or another to be at odds with out profoundest needs.” 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 “hobby” is not a passing fancy either. It is a primal need. As Burke notes, we are “the only animal to [his] knowledge that seeks to define itself.” Thus, this is not a pre-occupation in my mind, but it is an occupation in the forefront of all of our minds. 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.” Indeed, whatever actions we present - which are received by our audience - becomes part of our identity.

MMOs are valid locations to discover the “complex of attitudes” that form who we are. With that established, we can now make the argument that the personal equations we discover within MMOs are different only in perspective. If our identity is comprised of two elements, personal equations and a sense of reality, then there must be a relationship between the two. That relationship must be as such: If one element changes, the other must remain the same. For example, if I change my “sense of reality,” and I still have a need to express my identity, I must maintain the same set of personal equations in order to fulfill that need. Whether or not player-characters go into the ur-Real with the express purpose to fulfill a need to [re]create identity, they nonetheless will do so. Because all they have are sets of personal equations. The reality has changed. Therefore, they will change the material
conditions in order to suit their liking. In doing so, they will evoke emotions in others. With that evocation, they express their identity.

Whether they do this intentionally or not, they will cause the same set of emotions as they do in the non-game world. For example, there are characters in-game that are referred to as “pkillers.” These player-characters revel in causing grief to other characters by “killing” the other character. Does this mean that the “pkiller” (let us refer to her as “Johanna”) is, in real life, a murderer? If we find that, in combination with player-killing, that “Johanna” makes statements of this “only being a game” and “people should lighten-up,” she is presenting us with a personal equation. Johanna could not be a murderer, per se, because she has not, in the “other” reality, killed anyone. If the sense of reality has changed, then the personal equations must remain the same and therefore, her actions must represent at least one equation. However, that set of personal equations must also reflect the fact that, in the ur-Real, she has become the monster: Striking fear in those around her. If player-characters wish a reality that is an escape from the corporeal one, then why do they continue in the ur-Real where they feel the same anxiety in the Real? The answer is found in what should become a corollary to Burke’s identity creation through emotion evocation theories. Specifically, if the identity of the other is created through the evocation of our emotion, then our identity is further solidified and even moved closer to the ideality of identity by the emotional reflexes we exhibit. We more fully know ourselves through the other’s actions. This is why player-characters use the monstrously Real to reify the ur-Real: It is one of the few ways for them to truly identify themselves and their own internal monsters.

If we are to believe Voltaire, that “if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him,” then surely the corollary to that argument must be that if monsters do not exist in our current reality, we must invent them. Prior research has established to a fair certainty that the ur-Real is a community and a culture. To that end, the culture must have within it a pantheon of what is good and what is monstrous. What is clean and what has been perverted. Although one might be able to make the argument that the entire creation of the ur-Real is a perverse version of the Real, it is nonetheless a forgone conclusion that even within a perversion there must exist that which is regarded as more perverse (i.e., new, novel, unique) than the surrounding perversion.

Both Burke and Carey allow us access to a Truth we would rather not hear: We need our monsters. No matter how far we seek to run from the past, we are still haunted by the nightmares of our childhood and how they made us feel; how they made us Real. Now, we find them not under our beds, but beside us in the ur-Reality of the MMO.
The ur-Real is not simply a passing fad. It is the wellspring from which world-changing ideas will come a-borning. Some authors have even claimed that virtual worlds that contain the ur-Real will be so widespread that by 2016 “half of us will have interactive avatars, with those aged between thirteen and thirty spending around ten hours a week socializing in 3-D visual environments.”

Not only is the ur-Real here to stay, but the understanding how to deal with ur-Real monsters will only serve to help us better understand how to deal with the monsters in the Real world.

Notes
2 Stephen Donaldson is the author of *Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*. In which, 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. For much the same reasons, since the MMORPG community is not of this world, it is ur-Real.
10 Carey, p. 21.
12 Burke, *Counter-statement*, p. 53.
14 Lynn, p. 2.
15 Burke, *Counter-statement*, p. 54.
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