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Freeing Woman from Truth and the Unknown: Using Kahlo and Irigaray to Liberate Woman from Haggard's *She*

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Abstract

This article utilizes Haggard's novel *She* as a sample of the kind of patriarchal writing that has contributed to the imprisonment of Woman in the Western tradition qua Truth and Unknown. These latter notions have needlessly problematized Woman as an enigma, something to be sought, excavated, dissected, and dominated. The inability of Man to finally grab hold of said Truth and/or Unknown has led to a further complication of this problematization in so far as Woman becomes demonized qua Monstrous. In response to this the present article seeks to locate an escape route for Woman. This escape is sought through art; in particular, the visual art of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. Through interweaving the philosophical writings of Luce Irigaray with both Haggard's text and the work of Kahlo I advance the thesis that Woman can be liberated from the stigma of the Monstrous only by confronting this Monstrosity from within what Woman has been made.

Key Words

Painting, literature, philosophy, feminism.

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Haggard's novel *She* is a story of the adventures of three white Englishmen who, after inheriting a pseudo-prophetic scroll, set off on an expedition to find a lost civilization in Africa. The *objet petit a* of this journey is an infamous white goddess whom the men must find. This white goddess is Truth or the Unknown incarnate, however she is greatly feared and legend has told of her violent and destructive nature. In short, Haggard's novel is a British colonial re-telling of the same story that has been propagated generation after generation in the West: Woman and her affiliation with Truth and the Unknown. Notice: Throughout the present article I have used a capital W to stress the conceptual notion of Woman that is being negotiated in the works of Kahlo, Haggard, and Irigaray. By means of this designation I only intend to differentiate Woman qua concept from woman qua particular individual. The same applies to when I have used a capital M to designate Man. There is no other intended meaning other than this cursory note.

This article does not ask the question why it is that Woman has been defined by such categories as Truth and the Unknown and/or why these categories are represented in violent and destructive ways. These are questions more suited for a psychological study. The present article does however attempt to solve the subsequent question: How does Woman become liberated from these categorizations? That is to say, if Haggard's novel is colonial in tone, then the present article takes a remarkably postcolonial approach to the problem of Woman's affiliation with Truth and the Unknown. More precisely, this article seeks to provide a conduit through which one may pass in order to decolonize one's mind of such notions as Woman *qua* Truth and the Unknown.

Slavjo Žižek, in a chapter of his text *The Fragile Absolute* entitled 'Why is the Truth Monstrous?' tells his reader that: '[I]n contrast to a simple animal feigning, man can *feign to feign*, he can *lie in the guise of truth itself*.'[1] That is to say that man has such a great investment in the fictional narratives that create his world that without these narratives Man's world would

not exist. More precisely, the truths that these fictional narratives propagate are Truth itself. In this article I compare and contrast two different fictional narratives that pertain to Woman and that speak to the notion of Truth: what Truth is and where it is located? The first is Haggard's *She*; the second is a selection of paintings from the corpus of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo; both media represent Woman differently.

I argue that Haggard falls victim to traditional tropes in literary style that border on the pre-existing structures that have repressed woman over the centuries in the West. In place of this I suggest that Kahlo's depiction of her body *qua* eviscerated Woman initiated a radical shift in how Woman is perceived relative to notions of Truth and the Unknown. In other words, in her grotesque and graphic illustrations of Woman (her body) she liberates Woman from this particular stigma. This article is divided into two major sections: the first is an exegesis supplemented with commentary of Haggard's *She*; the second, I provide a close visual analysis of the paintings of Kahlo and articulate how her visual art initiates a radical shift away from the traditional Eurocentric perception of Woman. Throughout both sections I will dialectically integrate certain philosophical insights from the corpus of Luce Irigaray as this will comfortably shore up the points being made throughout concerning the place of Woman today.

The *sine qua non* of Haggard's story *She* is Ayesha's ['She'] appearance as the Good Woman. I do not wish for this to be interpreted along a moralistic axis of thought, I only want to state that she is represented *qua* Good Woman insofar as she is represented as such throughout the story (e.g. she is white [pure], clothed in white [pure again], and adorned as ruler of the land [noble leader]). The irony to all this is that she appears Good to the three men in spite of the Evil that she incarnates throughout the story. To begin, it must be established that it is Ayesha [Woman] who is being transgressed in the journey of the men. That is to say, Ayesha is first alluded to in the letter left to Leo from his biological father articulating the land in which She dwells:

> On the coast of Africa, in a hitherto unexplored region … far inland [there] are great mountains, shaped like cups, and caves surrounded by measureless swamps … [the people] are ruled over by a *beautiful white woman* who is seldom seen by them, but who is reported to have power over all things living and dead.[2]

I do think that it is important to emphasize the fact that the land is described in metaphors the mimic the topology of the typical female body: great mountains shaped like cups (i.e. breasts), caves surrounded by measureless swamps (i.e. vagina with fertile endowments – as swamps and marshes are some of the most ecologically plentiful systems on the planet), as well as the beautiful white woman with power over all life and death (i.e. white of course signifying virginal purity as well as Woman's capacity to bring forth life [birth] as well as take it away [e.g. miscarriage]). In any case, it is the body of Woman that is situated as the terrain to be sought out and conquered: for it is where Man shall find Truth.

The reader first encounters the notion that Woman is aligned outright with Truth and that this Truth is monstrous through Leo's reading of his father's translation of the potsherd. In the following Leo is reading the narrator – Amenartas' – monologue: 'Now I [Amenartas] say to thee, my son, Tisisthenes, seek out the woman, and learn the secret of Life.'[3] Later it is revealed that if he should fail then the task would be passed on to the succeeding generation's child (male) until the woman is slain. Leo is merely the most recent incumbent. This secret that the potsherd speaks of is something categorically Unknown; hence why it is considered a secret that need to be sought out. Anachronistically, (a page prior), it is noted that:

> The unknown is generally taken to be terrible, not as the proverb would infer, from the inherent superstition of man, but because it so often is terrible. He who would tamper with the vast and secret forces that animate the world may well fall a victim to them.[4]

The land, as well as the woman, that the men seek is pitted against them because both are constitutively elusive – Unknown. It is important to orient oneself here in the literary foreshadowing of the horror that awaits the travelers. As they proceed along their journey they will encounter many horrific phenomena. However they will subsequently conjure up many fictions throughout their journey to both comfort them from these manifest horrors as well as justify their end goal of attaining Truth. These narratives tend to always involve the apparent beauty and attractiveness of the Truth they seek in the end (Woman/Ayesha).

One can imagine that such imaginary constructions originating from Haggard's protagonists would thus be rather sexist in nature. Indeed Haggard's text as a whole is decidedly sexist. The reasons for this assertion are threefold: first, it is narrated from a male standpoint; Women are only given the illusion of a privileged social existence when in fact they are subservient to the power of men; and finally there are overt misogynist references made by more than one of the main protagonists. To begin with the first point: upon the first encounter with Billali, the elder, Holly – the primary narrator from whose perspective virtually the entire story is narrated – recites the following:

> We came to find new things…we are tired of the old things; we have come up out of the sea to know that which is unknown. We are of a brave race who fear not death, my very much respected father – that is, if we can get a little fresh information before we die.[5]

Evidently, there is a skewed emphasis being placed on the power of mind over the body. That is to say, Holly's desire to gain a little information before they die elevates the 'mind' side of the traditional western mind/body dichotomy (the latter being that which Woman has traditionally been associated).

The second aspect to the sexist narrative of Haggard's text is the reversibility of the privilege women seem to have in the Amahaggar culture. As the protagonists learn more about the Amahaggar culture they become familiar with the politics/economy of their sexual contract:

> [W]omen …are not only upon terms of perfect equality with the men, but are not held to them by any binding ties. Descent is traced only through the line of the mother, and while individuals are as proud of a long and superior female ancestry as we are of our families in Europe, they never pay attention to, or even acknowledge, any man as their father, even when their male parentage is perfectly well known.[6]

This appears to be a remarkable advancement for female empowerment. However this would be merely a cursory reading, for we learn latter on that the truth is quite the opposite. Although in this culture women do as they please and they are worshipped because without them life cannot go on for 'they are the source of life'[7] they are only worshipped until a certain point. That is to say, 'till at last they get unbearable.'[8] At this point, 'we rise, and kill the old ones as an example to the young ones, and to show them that we are the strongest.'[9] Woman is here reduced to her reproductive capacity; more precisely, her sexual contract is functionally lived in fear of a

masculine uprising. In this scenario only the young women are worth-while whereas men are privileged in their later years.

Third and finally, both Holly and Job are explicitly referred to by Holly as misogynist. After witnessing Job's reaction to being kissed by a woman of the Amahaggar Holly reports: '[N]ever shall I forget the respectable Job's abject terror and disgust. Job, like myself, is a bit of a misogynist – I fancy chiefly owing to the fact of his having been one of a family of seventeen.'[10] Through grounding (justifying?) Job's misogyny in his familial upbringing Holly illustrates the men's misogyny as constitutive of their psychological development.

In this respect Haggard's text can be further extended in an analysis of some of the other customs of the land, especially the laws of the Amahaggar:

> [T]he caves in which they lived had been hollowed out of rocks by men, perhaps the same who built the cities. They themselves had no written laws, only customs, which was, however, quite as binding as law […] Only *She* was obeyed throughout the length and breadth of the land, and to question her command was certain death.[11]

One can see here a fictional parallel to story of the origin of civilization that Freud presents in *Totem and Taboo*. In brief the myth runs thus: prior to any conception of an ordered civilization there existed a band of brothers and the father, the later having absolute access to sexual gratification allotted by his domination of the women of the primal horde. Feeling alienated the brothers revolted against the father; killed and consumed him. Following this event the brothers experienced an overpowering sense of guilt at having murdered the father who they strove to become. They saw their own fate in him and thus swore to a pact never to transgress the father by abstaining from sexual gratification (Women). In short the father became more powerful in death than he was in life.[12]

There are two aspects of this story which are different in Haggard's fictional re-writing of this myth. Instead of the father of the primordial horde there is a mother: Ayesha (the totemic figure-head). Second it is the men who are the subjects upon which the figure-head predominates. Her presence is what allows for the men to carry about there business with purpose. Without this taboo of She and the idea/memory of her, the order of the Amahaggar society would regress into utter chaos. This regulatory power of She/Ayesha is witnessed when Holly and his company probe the inner recesses of Ayesha's being. The essence of this myth is embodied in Billali's proverb when he informs Holly:

> *'Mistrust all men, and slay him whom thou mistrustest overmuch; and as for woman, flee from them, for they are evil, and in the end will destroy thee*.' It is a good proverb, especially the last part of it: I think it came down from the ancients.[13]

In the same way that Freud's Father is more powerful in death than when alive, the symbolic-Ayesha that has been constructed over the years of story telling and myth – as passed down from the ancients -- is more powerful than the real-Ayesha.

Probably the most interesting scenario in Haggard's book has to be Holly's ruminations upon gazing at the stars. Here we have the protagonist of the story, a man of vision, of purpose, descended from the hard-boiled no non-sense world of British rational empiricism gazing up at the stars of the firmament in wonder. I want to quote at length Holly's reflections upon gazing at the stars because they are important for establishing the significance of his (and his company's) relationship to Ayesha once she appears:

> Here was a glorious sight by which man might well measure his own insignificance! Soon I gave up thinking about it, for the mind wearies easily when it strives to grapple with the Infinite … Knowledge is to the strong, and we are weak. Too much wisdom would perchance blind our imperfect sight…The truth is veiled, because we could no more look upon her glory than we can upon the sun. I would destroy us.[14]

This act of gazing upon the stars illustrates the sub-conscious awareness of Man's essential nothingness. However Holly's musings on the void of Being signify a lack of rootedness in the world. He has no apparent meaningful connection to things around him. Irigaray suggests that without this grounding or rootedness in a common-something we seek 'regeneration by means of re-implantation in fertile ground – man having exhausted his resources.'[15] This is what we see in Haggard's *She*: explorers from a disillusioned European culture searching for an escape from the limits of logic plumb the subconscious. In other words these men seek to re-implant (note the connotation to with pregnancy) 'in' Ayesha in order to bring about a new life for-themselves. As fall-out from the disillusionment of late-modern European culture (or as Irigaray would have it, a complete lack of a 'common ground') the explorers in Haggard's novel forge on, straight into direct contact with this female figure who at times (so the impression is given by the narrator) displays a kind of maternal role for the protagonists.

There is a problem with this development in plot. By 'regressing' to stages of psychical development that, as Irigaray notes are 'prior to *ideation*', (that is to say, in the protagonists' attachment to the 'mother' Ayesha) the explorers lose the stability of their egos and instead tend toward an identification with their ego-Ideal (the part of the ego that is most closely identified with the 'maternal' super-ego). The ego-Ideal is that aspect of what we are that can only be esteemed by appeasing the demands of an authoritative figure. However, when the ego becomes blurred to the point where the borders separating it from the figure of idealization are no longer discernible the ego strives to separate itself from this figure. This separation is typically connoted as 'matricide'. Julia Kristeva writes in *Black Sun*: 'Matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation.'[16] Holly and his compatriots are trapped in a self-imposed terror, under constant fear of 'She' (Super-Ego/Aeysha). They witness her wield her purely destructive maternal power [Note the reference here to Lacan's notion of the Real] in her judgment of the cannibals. It is not until Ayesha perishes in the 'Flame' (Spirit of the Flame) toward the end of the story that the protagonists then become 'Free men'. Matricide (here represented in the death of Ayesha) is 'the first step on the way to becoming autonomous.'[17]

However it is important to take notice of the contingent nature of this matricide. On purely psychoanalytic premises it is all fine and well (that is to say, as a necessary stage in the progression of psychic development). Yet it is the recurrent manifestation of this 'matricide', for example in literature, which needs to be addressed. It appears that throughout the lineage of Western literature there has been the tendency to demonize Woman, just as Ayesha is in *She*. Much of what modern psychoanalytic theorizing is concerned with is negotiating the relationship between the Symbolic and the Real. For now, the Symbolic is to be understood in terms of that which presents itself to and organizes our consciousness (i.e. The Law of the Father) and the Real to be that which does not lend itself to representation (i.e. the pure materiality of our Being: the Mother). Since that which cannot be represented (the Mother) signifies all that we are not (i.e. the void of our Being) we become terrified at the prospect of our own annihilation and run head on into the Symbolic. This neurosis manifests itself through, for example, literary devices (e.g. Ayesha's purely destructive power); hence man's desire to destroy that which threatens to destroy him. The remedy for this demonization of woman can be found in the paintings of Kahlo supplemented with the writings of Irigaray.

In Chapter 12 subtitled 'She', Ayesha (*The-one-who-must-be-obeyed*) makes her first appearance in the story. The orchestration of how Haggard sets the stage for this event is classic. Ayesha is originally behind a curtain (one could also interpret this as a metaphor for a veil). The narrator describes her thus: '…not only the body, but also the face was wrapped up in soft white, gauzy material […].'[18] Upon her unveiling in chapter 13, Holly describes her thus:

> I gazed … at her face, and – I do not exaggerate – shrank back blinded and amazed…This beauty, with all its awful loveliness and purity, was *evil* – at least, at the time, it struck me as evil. How am I to describe it? I cannot – simply, I cannot![19]

Holly's inability to comprehend and subsequently express that which he perceives in Ayesha's appearance is symptomatic of the masculine gaze beholding an instance of the Uncanny (*Unheimlich*). Freud writes that 'the 'uncanny' is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.'[20] Freud's favored example of such an uncanny experience is the sight of the female genitals: 'This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning.'[21] Perhaps one might choose to read Holly's reaction as symptomatic of the greater context that this event is situated within: a cave (i.e. an 'uncanny' vagina). In any case the imagery used by Haggard is functionally a literary trope of an instance of the Uncanny advanced by Freud.

However psycho-sexual theory did not stop with Freud and thus a reading of literary tropes such as 'the cave' must be expanded to include modernized conceptions of Freud's work. Freud thought that the reason why female genitals were an instance of the Uncanny is because they are the kind of phenomena that should have remained repressed yet did not remain so. To this extent, Irigaray agrees with Freud insofar as she believes that the feminine vagina (or, Woman's Sex) has been forgotten by the patriarchy. Irigaray illustrates this forgetting of the feminine sex by citing from Freud's theory of Femininity:

> [B]oys … derive pleasurable sensations from their small penises and connect its excited state with their ideas of sexual intercourse. Little girls do the same thing with their still smaller *clitoris*. It seems that with them all their masturbatory acts are carried out on this *penis-equivalent*, and that the *truly feminine vagina* is *still undiscovered* by both sexes.[22]

From the very beginning of our psycho-sexual development the Woman's Sex is forgotten; in fact, it does not even come into consciousness such that it can be forgotten.

However, because of culturally constructed social roles, Woman has been made to repress her Sex from ever becoming manifest (Hence the title of Irigaray's book: *This Sex Which is Not One*). Since, in reality, it is the boy that has an actual penis, the girl's 'penis' being merely a functional imitation (and a lacking imitation at that) the boy is encouraged to be 'active' through his sexual organ. The girl (Woman) is encouraged to become (passive) in her being. Irigaray continues:

> [I]n order for 'femininity' to arise, a much greater repression … will be required of the little girl, and, in particular, the transformation of her sexual 'activity' into its opposite: 'passivity' […] The tendency toward self-appropriation will find its complement in the desire to be possessed, the pleasure of causing suffering will

> be complemented by feminine masochism, the desire to see by 'masks' and modesty that evoke the desire to exhibit oneself, and so on.[23]

Aeysha is the literary embodiment of feminine sexuality reduced to passivity. She dwells in a cave (the undiscovered 'forgotten' vagina) passively waiting for a male to discover her. At the same time she is compelled to exhibit herself for Holly and company, showing them all her power and glory; that is, why she is to be possessed: sexually desired. The powers that she exhibits are acts of destruction and death (Cf. 'pleasure of causing suffering' in the above quotation). This forgotten sex, once encountered will not express itself as if it were grateful for being left for dead. Fanon cites Sartre in his *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> What would you expect to find when the muzzle that has silenced the voices of black men is removed? … When these heads that our fathers have forced to the very ground are risen, do you expect to read adoration in their eyes? [24]

The 'return of the repressed' (Ayesha/feminine sex) is met with in psychoanalytic theory by two defensive mechanisms that Irigaray points out: Religiosity and Terror,[25] two themes that are prevalent in Haggard's *She* through Ayesha's character. The Uncanny powers of the forgotten.

The final two scenes of Haggard's text that I want to analyze deal strictly with the metaphor of Truth and whether Truth can actually be unveiled. The two scenes can be collapsed into a continuum for the sake of time and space allotted here. The scene is where the travelers are standing before the Temple of Truth. Ayesha turns to Holly (who is otherwise at a loss to account for what he see before himself) and says:

> Canst thou not guess, oh Holly…where then is thy imagination? It is Truth standing on the World, and calling to its children to unveil her face. See what is writ upon the pedestal […] *Is there no man that will draw my veil and look upon my face, for it is very fair ... No man is there born of woman who may draw thy veil and live, nor shall be. By Death only can thy veil be drawn, oh Truth!* [26]

Here Holly is falsely led by Aeysha to think that Truth is indeed something out there in the world that wants to be unveiled and/or discovered. How could he not believe this as he stands before such an impressive material incarnation of this notion? However the answer as to whether or not this can actually happen (Truth becoming unveiled) is witnessed at the very end of the novel during the 'Spirit of the Flame' scenario. When Ayesha steps into the fire which was meant to restore to her years lost awaiting Kallikrates (Leo), the fire consumes her entirely, throwing her throughout the years of change that she had been held stagnant within. Haggard has Holly articulate some of the horrifying changes that they bear witness to through Aeysha's inferno:

> [S]he was shriveling up….skin changed colour … dirty brown and yellow…parchment paper […] 'Kallikrates,' she said in husky, trembling notes. 'Forget me not, Kallikrates. Have pity on my shame; I shall come again, and shall once more be beautiful, I swear it – it is true! *Oh – h – h* ' and she fell upon her face, and was still.[27]

It may appear at this instant that Holly and company have experienced the unveiling of Truth at the expense of Woman and indeed if this were the case it was experienced as horrifying. However upon closer examination I assert that this is not what happened.

If we lend our eye to a less cursory reading of the text we notice that actually nothing is unveiled. There is simply a constant process of change (i.e. a constant process which Aeysha can be understood as the embodiment thereof) throughout the entire story. For instance there is the prefigurative notion of Truth that Holly and his troops bring to the civilization of the Amahaggard. This prefigurative is the understanding of what the Truth might be before bearing witness to the figure of Aeysha. There is then the cave scenario. This is what encapsulates the essence of Haggard's depiction of Woman *qua* Truth. The explorers venture into the cave where they 'see' Aeysha. The image or notion of Truth that they now have shifts from the prefigurative they brought with them to the Truth that they see before them at present. She is then literally unveiled; yet another layer of Truth, another shift in understanding. Then (finally?) the Fire scene passes where She withers away into a wrinkled mass of nothing.

During each 'unveiling' it turns out that in fact nothing is being revealed such that that thing might be Truth. By the end of Haggard's story, the protagonists have returned to England with the understanding that what they have witnessed is the actually horrifying face of Truth; a sense of the Divine. This interpretation reifies Woman *qua* bearer of Truth and further represses her within the patriarchal domination of the West. An alternative would be to read the events of Haggard's story would be to interpret the cave as a metaphor for the constant process of unveiling/revealing in general. Truth is no more in Woman than it is 'in' the white gauze that covers her, or 'in' the cave she dwells. This is because the cave itself is made of same material of the world which it resides within. The cave is just as much part of the world as the world is part of the cave. Consider Irigaray:

> For if the cave is made in the image of the world, the world … is equally made in the image of the cave. In cave or 'world' all is but the image of an image. For the cave is always already an attempt to re-present another cave … the mold which silently dictates all replicas […].[28]

Every portrayal of a cave is an attempt to represent another cave. That is to say, each cave posits another cave (or place) where Truth is located. This process bursts into a chain of affirmation such suggests there is no end goal (Truth *qua* Thing) but only Truth *qua* process. Haggard overlooks this interpretation.

Before moving on I want to take a moment to reiterate what our task in this article and where we are at present. We began with the project of outlining how Woman is represented as being affiliated with Truth and the Unknown and how this has proved detrimental to her being in the society. I have illustrated this using Haggard's *She* as a paradigm example of how Woman is portrayed in literature as bearer of Man's *telos* that is the source of Truth and the Unknown. The task of explaining how one might break free of this oppressive frame of mind has yet to be executed. I want now to turn toward such a discussion. In what follows I engage at length with the paintings of Kahlo to show how her art allows for a space to open up where it becomes evident that Truth is not to be affiliated with Woman, but is to be found *qua* Irigaray: in-between.

The work of Mexican visual artist Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) offers the late modern subject another approach to the notion of Truth hitherto structured and conceptualized by white European men. Hererra writes that:

> Her [Kahlo's] art was not the product of a disillusioned European culture searching for an escape from the limits of logic by plumbing the subconscious. Instead, her fantasy was a product of her temperament, life, and place; it was a way of coming to terms with reality, not of passing beyond reality into another realm.[29]

Frida's paintings are quite violent and graphic in nature. However, it is this graphic nature of her work which allows for a revaluation of the notion of Truth and its place within Woman.

As a point of departure I want to take two of Kahlo's paintings: *A Few Small Snips* and *The Broken Column*. First the former. *A Few Small Snips* exemplifies among other thing the 'pain' Kahlo was experiencing in her own life. Hererra writes: '[H]er [Kahlo's] own pain being too great to depict, she projected it onto another woman's calamity. In the latter [*A Few Small Snips*] a naked, bloodied woman lies on a bed beneath her dagger-wielding murderer.'[30] On top of Frida's existential angst represented on the canvas, one can see a brilliant commentary on the association of Truth with Woman. In Frida's painting Woman is murdered. She lies on a mattress with her body contorted in two different directions and littered with puncture wounds from the stabbing – indicated by the knife the male assailant is holding beside her. This painting depicts a veritable blending of the internal with the external. In psychoanalysis this called primary narcissism. Laplanche and Pontalis write that primary narcissism is 'invariably taken to mean a strictly 'objectless' – or at any rate 'undifferentiated' – state, implying no split between subject and external world.'[31] What is significant about Kahlo's representation is that the eruption of the internal into the external reveals nothing new. There is no 'object' *qua* Truth to be revealed. From the wounds emerge the Lacanian Real, or that which is wholly unrepresentable. No new knowledge is discovered. Here Kahlo shows this eruption of the Real through the pure materiality of Woman's blood: total non-signifying flowing materiality.

This analysis can be expanded through a consideration of *The Broken Column*. The first thing that the viewer might notice is that her body [Kahlo's] is penetrated by a litany of nails. The feminine body (or the supposed house of Truth) is literally being attacked. The nails might also represent the tools implemented in the erecting of a building: a house, for example. If one chooses this interpretation then there appears to be an attempt to keep this 'house' (Woman) together. For she is being torn asunder; held together by the steel corset that she is depicted wearing. In the middle of her body, stretching from head to pelvis, there is a giant chasm resembling a fault line after an earthquake. Herrera comments that: '[I]nside the gap a cracked Ionic column replaces her own deteriorating vertebrae. Penetrating from loins to chin, the column looks phallic.'[32] Here one sees Kahlo's tacit psychoanalytic commentary on the notion of Truth's association with Woman. Kahlo presents to her audience her body divided in half, again with the internal revealed. However, what is 'revealed' is nothing new; only that which was already known to man: the phallus (the Symbolic). The take home message in these two paintings is that Truth does not reside 'in' Woman, nor is it affiliated with Woman in any way. What *A Few Small Snips* (1935), for example, represents is that Man's attempt to excavate the Truth from the body of Woman amounts to nothing more than a 'bloody mess' (e.g. physically, socially, or both).

From her reading of Freud's lecture 'On Femininity' Irigaray interprets the classical psychoanalytic reading of the development of female sexuality thus:

> Endowed with very little autonomy, the girl child will be […] less capable of making the 'objective' cathexes that are at stake in society, her behavior being motivated either by jealousy, spite, 'penis envy,' or by fear of losing the love of her parents or their substitutes.[33]

Irigaray is emphasizing the interpretation that Woman's sexuality is defined by lack. That is to say, Woman (or Man) defines female sexuality by virtue of the fact that she does not have a penis and thus is not subject to the anxiety instilled through the threat of castration. It should, however, be emphasized how strongly Irigaray opposes this essentialization of Woman. As a result Woman is perceived as an enigma insofar as her actions/gestures are interpreted as hysterical and rationally unmotivated. We see this in Haggard's *She* with Aeysha's execution of Ustane. The treatment for this psychosis, as Freud diagnosed it, is to capture the phallus (penis) for oneself (Woman). This manifests itself in Woman's desire to have a child (and a male child at that). Irigaray continues to deride Freud thus: 'The woman has to be induced to privilege this 'sexual function'; the capstone of her libidinal evolution must be the desire to give birth.'[34] However, due to the fact that Aeysha is of the supernatural she is unable to propagate the flesh *via* child. As such she is unable to bring to a close the endless repetition of the Same (e.g. as evidenced by her destructive behaviour) and, like Kahlo's repeated attempts to conceive following her accident, is condemned to further psychological torment because of said repetition.

Kahlo's *My Birth* re-evaluates this Freudian interpretation which essentially problematizes Woman as something that must be subject to the masculine gaze. A biographical reading of the painting will help here:

> *My Birth* is an odd nativity: none of the three figures in it is alive. A frighteningly large head, identified by its joined eyebrows as Frida, emerges from her mother's womb. The half-born baby drooping into a puddle of blood refers to the child that Frida had just lost in a miscarriage, which made her wish that he too were dead. A sheet that shrouds the mother from the waist up makes her spread legs seem all the more naked.[35]

The first option open to interpretation is that this painting can be a representation of Frida's birth *from* her mother. Or, if we open this painting up to a more 'loose' postmodern interpretation we might choose to see the shroud as covering up Frida's contorted and involuted head emerging from her vagina. In this interpretation Frida is giving birth to herself – or more precisely her own identity. Through giving birth to herself and not a child proper, Frida is not subjecting herself to the problematization that Freudian psychoanalysis would have her *qua* Woman pigeon-holed as: hysterical (*vis* penis envy).

However this is not to suggest that Woman's supposed lack of a structured connection to some object through which she can sublimate her libidinal drives is to be disregarded absolutely. We can see that this theoretical edifice which allows for Woman to be 'hysterical' offers a remarkable model for liberating Woman from being subject to an alignment with Truth and thus oppressed under the weight of the Unknown. That is to say, women's decentralized position relative to the, albeit dated medical norm in question, privileges Woman a certain 'space' to ebb throughout. More precisely, if one is outside the norm *ab initio* then that is where one resides with no need to be corrected to the norm, for there literally is no norm to which to return. Any attempt to enforce such correction would amount to nothing more than fascist coercion. There is no Truth to 'get right'! One is rhizome rather than tree. One can see this in how Kahlo represents her place [Woman's place] relative to the Land. For so long in the history of Western thought Man has placed Woman in caves (*vis* Haggard). Recall Irigaray's interpretation of this notion. Irigaray reads Plato's myth of the cave as 'as a metaphor of the inner space, of the den, the womb or *hystera*, sometimes the earth.'[36] In short the cave represents that which is mysterious and must be investigated, for who knows what horrors

might lurk within? In Kahlo, woman is not in a cave, she is 'in', 'on', and 'throughout' the Land.

Consider two of Kahlo's paintings: *Roots* and *Henry Ford Hospital*. Re-writing Plato's myth of the cave, Irigaray writes: '[T]he journey to the presence of truth takes advantage of topographical gaps which will never be taken into consideration.'[37] Man is too focused on the goal represented by the end of the tunnel (e.g. reaching orgasm) that he 'forgets' the myriad of diversions and offshoots that are right beside him, below him, above him. That is to say he misses the multiplicity of Other ways to become oneself that are always-already where he 'is'. Kahlo's *Roots* shows this 'rhizomatic' structure or topology of Truth (not what might lead to Truth, for there is no particular Truth; only a global Truth insofar as this Truth is everywhere at once, like the transcendental OM of the East). Grassy leaves, branches, and roots are illustrated as traversing Kahlo's body as she lays 'on', 'in', and 'throughout' the earth all at once; not buried in a cave. Holly and his company are victims of a traditional Western stereotype that reifies Truth as embodied 'in' a cave (i.e. 'in' Woman). Instead Kahlo's painting suggests Truth may 'pass through' Woman or indeed she may be 'part' of the greater assemblage of Truth, but she cannot be pigeon-holed as the sole embodiment of Truth proper.

To develop the matter further, Irigaray writes on the significance of 'whiteness' in the cave thus:

> Glowing bright and white, the 'truth' of the Idea therein reserves itself [*qua*] source of light […] The system is an extrapolation of the *white* light that cannot be seen as such but allows us to see and gives us an awareness of the black.[38]

This typical Western metaphysical mythology (specifically used here in the sense that Plato uses it in his Cave Myth in his *Republic*) about a source of light (white) inside the cave casting the shadow on the wall (black) still propagates the myth that there are discoverable and discernible truths to be reached if only one could rotate ones head and look behind. Instead, with respect to Kahlo's *Henry Ford Hospital*, as Herrera reports, Frida once said that she 'painted the ground earth color in order to express her loneliness.'[39] That is to say that:

> Frida looks diminutive in relation to her bed and to the plane in which it floats. Disjunctive scale and the way the bed is tipped up in intentionally incorrect perspective add to the feeling of disconnectedness and helplessness.[40]

However, I think that Frida's painting offers up a much more positive, active interpretation. For example, her use of the brown 'earthy' tone signifies an allusion to the organic processes of the land: always shifting and moving, never static; always dynamic. It may be a certain shape one day, another shape the next.

On top to this the apparent tropes that Kahlo uses to evoke a sense of loneliness and helplessness are not unlike the tropes that existential writers utilize. Existentialism is not necessarily a philosophy of despair and alienation (*vis* technology with respect to one's authentic relationship to nature), but instead an opportunity to take pleasure and joy in this alienation and create of one's self and existence. Kahlo's painting is saying something quite profound about the nature of Truth in contrast to the apparent black/white dichotomy found in the imagery of Haggard's cave in *She*. Truth is radically Free. That is to say Truth is void. Truth is open. Undetermined. The beauty of *Henry Ford Hospital* is that it shows that even when one is stranded upon the barren waste land of Western development (see the industrial buildings on the background and the lack of anything save Frida in the fore) Frida situates Woman as still connected to life all around her (i.e. her destroyed pelvis, a snail, the child even if it never was,

etc.). This exploded representation of her body resembles Irigaray's notion of the polymorphous perversity of Woman's sexuality freed from the constraints of the patriarchy.

> In fact, a woman's erogenous zones are not the clitoris or the vagina, but the clitoris and the vagina, and the lips, and the vulva, and the mouth of the uterus, and the uterus itself, and the breasts… What might have been, ought to have been, astonishing is the *multiplicity of genital erogenous zones* ... in female sexuality.[41]

This is Kahlo.

One final painting of Kahlo's remains to be analyzed: *Without Hope*. This is an interesting painting as it offers up a plethora of interpretation. The painting illustrates Kahlo lying in bed, naked, covered by sheets. In front of her is an easel upon which one might perceive that she is vomiting up the apparently undigested contents of her stomach. However because of the cone shape of the vomit and the fact that Kahlo's mouth is barely open, it may also be interpreted that she 'is being force-fed, and the painting is meant to convey her disgust when the doctors made her eat pureed foods every two hours or when, after an operation, they said, 'Now you can eat anything'.[42] Whatever the case, it is the apparent ambiguity between inside and outside and/or consuming and abject-ing that I wish to exploit in my interpretation as it pertains to Woman and Truth, continuing with the theme of the cave that has factored so pertinent to the discussion.

Whichever way one chooses to approach the meaning of *Without Hope* what we are presented with are the 'forgotten' or 'repressed' elements that make life possible, whether it be food or vomit. These are examples of the 'abject'. Although the term has specific connotations in the work of Kristeva I do not wish to pursue this path here. I want to narrow in on the notion of the 'forgotten' as in the 'Forgotten Path' of the cave. This is a topic that one finds addressed in Irigaray more than any other modern thinker as it pertains to the Feminine. Irigaray writes of the path *in between*: 'Of the 'go-between' path that links two 'worlds,' two modes, two methods, two measures of replicating, representing, viewing, in particular the sun, the fire, the light, the objects, and the cave.'[43] Irigaray embraces this forgetting. The fact that it has been forgotten only implies that when it is made visible again through an artist such as Kahlo the significance of its impact upon the psyche of Man is made all the more powerful. It hits Man as though he walked straight into a wall stumbling through the cave.

> This is a key passage, even when it is neglected, or even especially when it is neglected, for when the passage is forgotten, by the very fact of its being reenacted *in* the cave, it will …sustain the hardening of all dichotomies, categorical differences, clear-cut distinctions […] Between truth and shadow, between truth fantasy, between 'truth' and whatever 'veils' the truth.[44]

Man had forgotten that in order to excavate into the bowels of the cave he must first have to pass through an 'in-between'; an in-between which is neither 'in' nor 'out', 'here' nor 'there'. He must indeed pass through the abject first. How does Kahlo circumvent this forgetting? She presents Woman (herself) in all its phenomenal nature: abject and all. There is no veil. There is nothing to hide. By turning her insides out and/or portraying her outsides going in, Kahlo distorts the rigid dichotomy of a separate inner and outer. By virtue of this, Truth cannot be located 'in' Women, because the 'in' is already 'out'.

I want to round off this discussion on the significance of Kahlo's art and what it has to offer the patriarchal cannon that oppresses Woman by aligning her with the Truth and the Unknown. It has to do with Kahlo's body and how she lends it to representation. Irigaray writes

that 'Descartes situates [the] place of inscription solely in the brain.'[45] This is a remarkably early modern way to experience a phenomenon. That is to say it is a perception of reality boiled to its base cognitive level. Irigaray's approach, and I argue Kahlo's as well, is to move this phenomenology of experience into the body and resist the reifying capacities of the mind. What we gain from Irigaray is that within the phenomenal person that presents them self to us, there is an always-already unknown aspect to their being that cannot be attained and yet pulls us in or calls to us to answer. This Unknown is not something of which to be fearful (Cf. Haggard's *She*) but rather is something to be embraced and welcomed, admired and adored (Kahlo's paintings of her wounded body). This is the case regardless of sexual difference (this is what Irigaray adds). There is a wonder that precedes a moralization of either Good or Evil. It is the commitment of one's entire body, not just one's cognitive faculties (i.e. reason or logic) to the experience of another. This was the failure of Haggard's patriarchy.

Notes

[1] Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: Or Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (New York: Verso, 2008), 72.
[2] H. Rider Haggard, *She* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2008), 34.
[3] Ibid., 36.
[4] Ibid., 35.
[5] Ibid., 76.
[6] Ibid., 79.
[7] Ibid., 107.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 85.
[11] Ibid., 86-87.
[12] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989), 184.
[13] Haggard, *She*, 103
[14] Ibid., 110
[15] Luce Irigrary, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 74.
[16] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 27-28.
[17] Kristeva, 27.
[18] Haggard, *She*, 131-132.
[19] Ibid., 143.
[20] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Complete Works*, trans. James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), 369.
[21] Freud, 398-399
[22] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is not One,* trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 34.
[23] Ibid., 36.
[24] Jean-Paul Sartre, Introduction to Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2008) 12-13.
[25] Irigaray, *Ethics*, 72.
[26] Haggard, *She*, 233.

[27] Ibid., 257.
[28] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 246.
[29] Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 258.
[30] Hayden Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 109.
[31] Jean Laplance and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973), 338.
[32] Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings*, 182.
[33] Irigaray, *This Sex*, 40.
[34] Ibid., 41.
[35] Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings*, 9.
[36] Irigaray, *Speculum*, 243.
[37] Ibid., 267.
[38] Ibid., 258.
[39] Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings*, 70.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Irigaray, *This Sex*, 64.
[42] Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings*, 187.
[43] Irigaray, *Speculum*, 246.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Irigaray, *Ethics*, 77.

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The Monstrification of the Monster: How Ceauşescu became the 'Red Vampire'

Peter Mario Kreuter

Abstract

Without any doubt the Ceaușescu regime has been one of the most cruel and most paranoid of all communist regimes after World War II. In Europe it's only comparable to Albania under Enver Hoxha. Especially the time after 1980, when the 'Titan of the Titans' decided to pay back the debts of the Romanian state only within a few years, became a very dark one in European history. The three 'F' reigned in Romania: foamă (hunger), frică (fear) and frig (cold). The cruelty of his reign, that lasted nearly 25 years, has been visible in a drastic way when we look at his end in the only bloody revolution in communist Europe in December 1989. Therefore it was more than amazing to see particularly the Western media reporting about him and his family creating many stories, which made a (reel-like) hyper-monster out of the (real) dictator. Instead of telling the truth about his mediocre character, his youth in communist organizations or his political advancement under the protection of the later party leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, newspapers and political commentaries have been filled with stories about presumed bank robberies in the late 40's, blood infusions with the blood of newborn babies and political rivals in the party killed by him personally. So what? What was the reason to do this? While the reports on Enver Hoxha have been quite objective containing only few moments of speculation, the whole information about Nicolae Ceaușescu has been speculative, ridiculous exaggerating and full of histories by hearsay that have never ever been critically checked and passed on until today. It is the aim of this article to present the major 'monstrifications' and to discuss them in the wider range of both a psychological and a historical level.

Key Words

Ceaușescu, media, monster, personal cult, Romania.

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1. The General Perception of the Ceauşescu Regime

> An entire epoch of corruption, terror, lies and denouncements, misery and starvation, hatred and suspicion, the fear of tomorrow is linked to the name of Ceauşescu. The ten-headed monster of Scorniceşti penetrated everywhere, cities and villages in the mountains or at the seaside, young and old people, no matter their sex, nationality or religion, forgiving nothing, avoiding nothing. All the day round, in the evening and at night, the monster spied on every movement and on every breath, invading us with his stammering and primitive thinking, with gestures of a psychopath, with language and grammar mistakes.[1]

When Ion Mihai Pacepa's book *Red Horizons* was first published in 1987, one could have assumed that the book was the result of the sick fantasy of its author who was one of the highest-ranking officers of the Securitate until his defection.[2] And even if some parts of the book are considered today as being exaggerating, nevertheless, it draws a clear picture of the

political ruthlessness and moral decay of the Ceauşescu clan and the miserable conditions the Romanian people had to live in.

In Western Europe and the United States, Ceauşescu was considered for many years as a kind of political joker, a thorn in the flesh of the communist system led by the USSR.[3] Based on the withdrawal of the Soviet troops in 1958,[4] he was able to create a special Romanian kind of communism, mixing up hard-line Stalinism with nationalism and rhetoric fragments of worldwide peace, nonalignment and non-intervention in internal affairs.[5] Therefore, his repressive internal policy against all kinds of dissidents, political or national, was tolerated or at least ignored. A change of the Western policy only began in the late Seventies, especially after the revolts in the Schiltal in 1977. The rise to power of Mikhail Gorbachev with his policy of *perestoika* and *glasnost* or the publishing of Pacepa's book marked the beginning decline of the Romanian autocratic regime. When the so-called revolution started in Timişoara on 16th December 1989, the whole Western world looked at Romania and the gruesome end of communism in this nearly forgotten edge of Europe.[6] For several days, newspapers in Germany, France or Great Britain reported abundantly about the bloody fall of one of the strangest and most paranoid dictatorships in world.

Not surprisingly that shortly after the execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceauşescu and the end of the hot phase of the uprising the first publications about the Ceauşescu dictatorship were put on the market.[7] The quality of these early publications was relatively low, especially when dealing with the last years of his reign and the uprising against him. But it was amazing to see how uncritical Western journalists and book authors accepted the semi-official numbers of dead or the histories told about the dictator and his family.

2. 'The Red Vampire'

A publication in German played a special role. The book was written in the first months of 1990 and printed in June of the same year by a right-wing would-be journalist named Joachim Siegerist. Siegerist, born in 1947 in Germany and of an obscure Balto-German origin from Latvia,[8] became notorious for his smear campaigns against the former chancellor and leader of the German Social-Democrats Willy Brandt, leading 1986 to an awful rabble-rousing book full of half-truth and inflammatory harangues, garnished with a primitive anti-communism, which seemed to come directly out of the tomb of McCarthy.[9] Immediately after the fall and death of Ceauşescu, he travelled through Romania, spoke to a lot of people and made hundreds of photos. It is not really clear how he did find his interview partners but it is amazing how many different people he spoke to. The result of his hard work was the book *Ceauşescu – the red vampire*, already mentioned before.[10] Like most of his books, it was printed in a small publishing house led by a friend of him.

Siegerist's book opens with one of the most gruesome fairy tales about Nicolae Ceauşescu: the infusion of baby-blood.[11] As for nearly all stories in his book, neither in this case Siegerist gives any sources or references where he did find his data about the presumed blood donation of newborn babies to the growingly old dictator.[12] The style of the description as of the whole book is sensational and smutty.

> Scenes like out of the hell. 20 babies, pitiful screaming, are laying neatly in a row on sterilised operating tables. So-called doctors are bending over the babies and drawing them blood out of their veins with 19/10mm-drain tubes. Altogether nearly three litres. Baby-blood for Nicolae Ceausescu, the red vampire of Romania. In a small room near the babies, the cleansed blood is given to the dictator for about two hours. Every month the same horrifying spectacle. […] I read this unbelievable horror story in an English newspaper at the beginning of

> January 1990 for the first time. I couldn't believe it. Then I travelled to Romania myself. One thing in advance: the story about the baby-blood is true. One of the responsible so-called doctors is now in jail.[13]

But that is only the start to 480 pages of pulp fiction. One can find a photo of the young Nicolae Ceauşescu with a caption having nothing in common with the simple portrait the photo shows: 'Ceausescu in the electoral campaign 1946 – in this time he committed his first personal murder. The victim: bank director Lupu'.[14] The book contains more than 100 photos, but a lot of them have nothing to do with the theme of the book, like the six photos made in a cancer ward for children[15] or the 15 photos made in one of the gruesome orphanages for mentally handicapped people.[16] Yes, Ceauşescu was responsible for the poor conditions they have to live in, but Siegerist is insinuating that he even was responsible personally for the fact of cancer and madness as well!

For the aim of this article, some chapters in the middle of the book are in the centre of interest. One of them, 'On the torture cemetery of the Securitate in Temesvar',[17] insists to be an authentic report of one of the torture and slaughter places of Ceauşescu's secret police Securitate. The chapter consists of eight pages, four of them covered with photos. Three of these photos show Siegerist 'at the torture table of the Securitate on the poorhouse's cemetery in Temesvar' or 'In the hand [of the author] the rest of a shovel used to bury the remainders of the victims tortured to death'.[18] The picture of page 199 became famous because it was printed in a lot of international newspapers in those December days of 1989, showing a row of half decomposed bodies – so-called victims of the Securitate, tortured to death or shot during the revolution. The state of decomposition shows clearly that this can't be the truth. Some of the 'victims' are more or less skeletons, and some of them show the scars of an official autopsy, but no sign of violation or torture. Siegerist indicates the complete number of victims of the revolution with 60.000, a ridiculously exaggerated number.[19] A few years ago, Thomas Kunze published the real number of people killed in the uprising in 1989. Following the official data of the Romanian government, exactly 1,104 people were killed, 162 of them before the 22nd December, 942 after this day. 495 victims were counted in Bucharest itself. The total number contains 260 soldiers killed in action and 65 members of the Interior Ministry.[20] Of course, in 1990, Siegerist could not know the exact number of the dead, but the use of a photo which obviously doesn't show victims of the uprising and the manipulative way of the whole book led us to one single explication: a notorious anti-communist hack writer used the hardest time of the younger Romanian history to produce a repulsing example of political demagogy. By the way: the same man who told Siegerist in 1990 about Ceauşescu's murder of bank director Lupu pretends in 1999 that the case was never ever really enlightened…[21]

In the case of Siegerist, the aim of the monstrification of Nicolae Ceauşescu is quite clear. But why does a popular presentation of dictators in history still insist upon 10.000 victims of the uprising in 2000?[22] Another example: Immediately after the execution of the dictator and his wife, stories about a possible Gypsy or Tataric origin of Ceauşescu were going round in Romania.[23] One can accept this, but why did the author of the first German language biography of Ceauşescu, written after his end, use this information by hearsay in his own book without any critical check of the origin or the sources?[24] And why did the newspapers accept every bit of information about the riots and the fighting in Romania and the way of life of the Ceauşescu clan without any critical comment in the stormy days of 1989?[25]

3. Horrific News in Newspapers

Well, the newspapers… Before the revolution of December 1989, Romania has had no greater impact on the pages dealing with foreign policy. If there was some information to find,

it dealt in general with the destruction of villages and the installation of so-called 'agroindustrial complexes'. One rare example of such an article was the whole-page one out of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* from 27th February 1989. Contrary to the headline 'The senseless destruction of villages in Transylvania follows the schedule',[26] the article presents also examples from other parts of the country, focussing on a very sad case from Ghermaneşti, a village about 30 km in the north of Bucharest. But we have to wait until the beginning of the upraising in Romania for finding articles covering whole pages and giving a real-like image of the life under Ceauşescu.

Well, again the newspapers... It was really amazing stuff being written in those days in the newspapers. Let's start with the *tageszeitung* from Berlin from 23rd December 1989. The whole editorial staff of the left-wing paper from Germany must have been under shock. Or what explanation might enlighten mistakes like 'French Prime Minister Mitterrand'[27] (who was in reality *Président de la République* and the head-of-state) or geographical identifications like 'the Western Hungarian town Temesvar'[28] (which is a Western *Romanian* town). More interesting for our case is an article on page 3. Reporting about the uprising and the fighting in Romania, the *tageszeitung* tried to get in telephone contact with a citizen in Sibiu. 'In Hermannstadt (Sibiu) Ceauşescu's son Nicu was the local party leader. A citizen of the town reported via telephone that 'asiatic looking soldiers' have been involved in the fighting.'[29] No comment from the editorial staff, no question from where in Romania may come these 'asiatic soldiers'. We know that the USSR preferred to send to Hungary or to Czechoslovakia conscripts from Kazakhstan or from Uzbekistan, but Romania was left by the Soviet troops in 1958. Was this information a reflex of the Romanian disgust of the Russians who had brought communism to Romania? Or was it only the shock of the frightening moment? We don't know, but it is amazing that a left-wing newspaper printed this semi-racist information without the smallest notice on the doubtable state of this news. But the article has a continuation.

> The East Berlin news agency 'and' reports about 4,600 killed and 1,860 arrested persons only in Temesvar. 7,000 are sentenced to death. The fighting continues also in Caiova [sic!], Rechitza [sic!] und Neumarkt Mures [sic!]. In Arad children of parents, having participated in demonstrations, have been taken from their schools and have been executed.[30]

What's that? Hearsay information from the GDR news agency is cited without any commentary. And have a look at the names of the mentioned cities. No one is written correctly, neither in their Romanian forms (Craiova, Reşiţa, Tîrgu Mureş), nor in their German ones (Craiova, Reschitza, Neumarkt am Mieresch). One can really feel the complete ignorance of the staff towards Romania and its culture, and one can imagine how surprised they must have been about the so-called revolution, the riots and the whole situation in a country having been for such a long time a terra incognita also for this editorial board. And now they are printing everything they could get – without any check of the source or the quality of the information. By doing this, the *tageszeitung* helped to create the monster-like picture of Ceauşescu of those days.

But they have not been alone. About two weeks after the death of the dictator, the weekly conservative paper *Rheinischer Merkur* printed a report on the economical situation of the Romanian people after Ceauşescu. The article contents a photo of an older woman with headscarf, holding in her arms a couple of *covrigi*, pretzels. The accompanying text is 'For decades the people has had to starve. Food was exported in order to bring foreign money to the country. Fresh bread [sic!] in Budapest [sic!] – a woman buys as much as she can hold.'[31] Well,

pretzels and bread, Budapest and Bucharest, Hungary and Romania, such a lot of countries and capitals you could lose the overall view…

This kind of journalism was no privilege of German newspapers. French newspaper *Libération* was able to spread the information that 'Sibiu (160.000 inhabitants), the old fief of Nicu Ceausescu, was 'nearly complete destroyed' by fire, reported the Yugoslavian agency Tanjug.'[32] I have been for the first time in 1993 in this town, and it is, as it was, a nearly complete preserved Saxon town. Nobody there knew anything about a disastrous fire in the December days of 1989. The total number of victims in those days is also in *Libération* indicated by the number of 60.000.[33]

4. A Numbers Game…

60,000 is the number of choice in December 1989 when talking about the people killed in the upraising against the dictator. All major newspapers have indicated it, and some examples have already been cited in the article. Even several days after the end of Nicolae Ceauşescu, this number appears in the papers, f.e. in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: 'In the fighting around Christmas, around 60,000 Romanians have been killed.'[34] Or in the *tageszeitung*: 'Prime Minister Petre Roman expressly denied reports about Arab mercenaries in the service of the secret service Securitate. But he confirmed the number of victims: 60,000 people have been murdered or killed in action. The US-embassy and other Western diplomats in Bucharest spoke only of 6,000 victims.'[35] Only a few days later, lower numbers began to circulate, closer to that mentioned by the foreign diplomats.

> The number of victims in the upraising against Ceausescu was indicated by Brucan [member of the executive committee of the *Front al sălvarii naţionale*] with less than 10,000. The number of 60,000 victims, a number spread in the times of the riots, means the complete number of executions in the 25 years long reign of the dictator.[36]

10 days later, again the numbers are changing: less than 10,000 victims in the so-called revolution and less than 50,000 victims from 1965 to 1989 – no chance for 60,000![37] And so the number sank from month to month leading finally to the numbers Kunze mentioned in his book.[38]

5. A Pale-Pink World…

If you have enough of killed people and fighting in the streets, try another aspect of Ceauşescu's Absurdistan. About four years after the fall of the regime, a group of Western journalists was led to one of the private residences of Ceauşescu. There the journalists have found kitsch, nothing but kitsch, and the richness of details in one of the articles being the result of this visit shows the other side of the *monstrification of the monster*: from serial killer to clown. 'A fairy tale loo in pink' was the title of this article,[39] and Zoe, the daughter of the dictator, lived obviously in a pale-pink Barbie-like world – on the one hand, the direct contrast to the poor conditions the average Romanian girl has had to live in. But one the other this rose-coloured world of Zoe Ceauşescu is nothing more but logical, coming out from the mediocre gust of a family, which has her roots in rural Romania and thought that this rose-coloured world means luxury.

6. … And the World of an US-President

Even today, Nicolae Ceauşescu is a kind of keynote in order to describe a really mad dictator. You won't believe it? Well, in the fall of 2002, US President George W. Bush made a

visit to several countries of the former Warsaw Pact, trying to find allies for the scheduled attack on Iraq and on Saddam Hussein. While visiting Bucharest, Bush compared Saddam Hussein to Ceauşescu.[40] Even worse, Bush was able to say in front of about 200,000 people the following words: 'The Romanian people know that an aggressive dictator should not be appeased or ignored, you always have to face him.'[41] One can ask: like Nixon did… with Mao? And by the way, Ceauşescu was a lot of things, but he never pursued an aggressive exterior policy. George W. Bush just used the monster image of Ceauşescu to describe his own personal family nightmare in Iraq.

7. Explaining the Explainable, but Hardly Understandable…

But how can we explain this horrification of a person, whose life and actions itself have been enough horrific? Why this exaggeration, why this hyper-monstrification?

On the one hand, one should not forget how strange, how crazy Ceauşescu's dictatorship was. Especially the time after 1980, when the 'Titan of the Titans' decided to pay back the debts of the Romanian state in only a few years, became a very dark one in European history. The three 'F' reigned in Romania: foamă (hunger), frică (fear) and frig (cold). But on the other hand, Ceauşescu was no mass murderer like Stalin or Pol Pot, and his ideology as such was not exaggerating in such a strange way as that of Kim Il-sung in North-Korea or Enver Hoxha in Albania. He was not a good speaker like Fidel Castro, he was no charismatic personality like Lenin, and he even was no leader to a new form of socialism like Tito was. Ceauşescu was a simple man from a rural area of Romania, nearly uneducated and primitive. But due to his natural sense for power and his friendship with the party leaders of post-war Romania, dating from their common time in prison, he was able to take control over a central position in the communist party, the cadre department. There he started his career, and after the death of Gheorghiu-Dej in 1965, he was able to enforce his position with his knowledge about the main personnel of the Romanian communist party. Between 1965 and 1971, he played the role of a reformer, and his masterpiece was his refusal to take part in the quelling of the Czechoslovak reform movement in 1968.

After 1971, he began to install his neo-stalinistic regime with nationalistic traits. Unlike his predecessors, Ceauşescu tried to enforce and to stable his regime not by pure terror and brutality, but with the aid of corruption of the main persons and carefully measured terror. Romania was not such a country of Gulags or working camps like Albania or the Soviet Union under Stalin have been, it was more the land of snoopers, privileges and scramble for posts and benefits. An almighty Securitate watched over the country and intimidated potential dissidents with various methods, and only in case of urgent real force was used against an adversary – but in those cases with an astonishing brutality. Especially in the last period of his reign, Ceauşescu tended to use repressions like placing someone under house arrest or sending him after a show trial for a long-term sentence to prison, but in principle his regime based on nepotism, payola and corruption of the whole Romanian society.

There was in Romania this Byzantinic cult of personality who became more and more ridiculous and browbeating at the same time. 'Titan of the Titans', 'Sweetest Kiss of the Fatherland', 'Genius of the Carpathians', 'Son of the Sun' – this are only some of the semi-official addresses used to celebrate Ceauşescu.[42] As a portrait, he was ubiquitous in the country, in schools, in factories, even in most of the manuals and books for the use in schools printed in Romania. In the propaganda of his time, there was nearly no communist party, but there were historical predecessors – Stephen the Great, Prince of Moldavia in the 15th century, was one of them, as well as Michael the Brave, who united in 1600 for the very first time Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania under one reign. Another one was Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the first Prince of the United Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia in the 19th century. Princes and

aristocrats… as predecessors of a communist ruler? What might sound weird has its logic. While neglecting the predominant rule of the party by replacing it by his own personal rule, Ceauşescu created an older, more traditional and especially Romanian line of legitimating his person. The whole staff of Romanian leaders became the basis of his leadership.[43] But in the very end, there was only Comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu, later on together with his wife Elena.

There were projects like the new city centre of Bucharest, which led to the destruction of more than 20% of the old town and the construction of 'Casa poporului', the second biggest building in the world, three times bigger than the whole complex of Versailles. There was the plan of the systematisation of rural Romania, the concentration of the people in agro-industrial zones and the destruction of more than half of the villages and small towns. Ceauşescu even planned to make an industrial zone out of the complete Danube Delta.

And then there were these hard years between 1980 and 1989, when nearly everything of the Romanian production went into export in order to pay back the debts of the Romanian state within a few years only. As a result, people in Romania lived in a dark, cold and depressive country especially in wintertime. That was no terror in the classical definition of the word – it was just a collateral phenomenon of the policy of a dictator, who was absolutely not interested in the fate of his people.

All this is so strange, so unbelievable and hard to explain. 24 years of Ceauşescu, and nearly no attempt to start a revolution! And if one tries to check out the real fundaments of his reign, he will be surprised to find nothing more than hypocrisy, bombastic personally cult and personal enrichment of all those being inflicted in the system. It was surreal, it was Absurdistan, it was something that is hard to describe.

Therefore, in search for a quick and easy-to-handle description for Western newspapers and TV stations, this inhuman and grotesque system with Ceauşescu at its head was described as monstrous, and while the uprising against him seemed to be so unclear and strange, his end so quick and unexpected, the news from Romania so disturbing and contradictory, a hyper-monster was made out of a primitive man who was the leader of a communist dictatorship. It is even today very hard to explain to an outside observer of Ceauşescu's Romania this mixture of such a lot of different elements, some of them even contradictory. 'Monster' is a very simple explanation, an explanation which may be understood, but which is not very helpful to describe the real monstrous character of Ceauşescu's life and times – a monstrosity which is often at its climax when looking at the simple and daily life of the dictator himself. Ceauşescu was a nobody, intellectually and as a personality. And till his end, he liked to eat his meals with his fingers.[44]

As a tentative summary a relatively simple conclusion can be drawn. The glorification of historical figures, so familiar to us all, is only one side of the same coin, whose reverse is monstrification. Both aspects are an integral part of what we call in common language historiography. In the last instance heroes and monsters are eventually made of the same stuff, human fantasy.

Notes

[1] Carol Roman, *Ultimele 100 de zile nefaste. Sfîrşitul clicii Ceauşescu* (Bucharest: Casa de Editare GLOB, 1990), 3.
[2] Ion Mihai Pacepa, *Red Horizons: The True Story of Nicolae & Elena Ceauşescus' Crimes, Lifestyle, and Corruption* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1987).
[3] Thomas Kunze, *Nicolae Ceauşescu: Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Links, 2000), 406.

[4] Ekkehard Völkl, *Rumänien. Vom 19. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1995), 178. One should not forget that this withdrawal was nothing more than the result of the absolute stalinistic policy Ceauşescu's predecessor Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej followed between 1947 and 1965. It was a sign of confidence into the future course of Romanian communism, not the result of a policy of independence.
[5] For a general overview see Kunze, *Nicolae Ceauşescu*, 187-301.
[6] Anneli Ute Gabanyi, *Die unvollendete Revolution. Rumänien zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie* (Munich / Zurich: Piper, 1990), 11-33.
[7] A look in Opritsa D. Popa and Marguerite E. Horn, eds., *Ceauşescu's Romania: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut / London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 19-22, shows the dramatic interest on Ceauşescu's reign over Romania after the events of December 1989. In the years between 1966 and 1994, 20 books about lifetime and leadership of Nicolae Ceauşescu have been published, 9 of them between 1990 and 1992.
[8] Siegerist, who became Latvian citizen in 1992, has changed his name to the Latvian version Joachims Zigerists and was several years the head of an ultra-nationalistic and notorious Christian splinter party in Latvia called 'Popular Movement for Latvia'. In 1997, a German court sentenced him to one year and nine months suspended jail for racist incitement of the masses.
[9] Joachim Siegerist, *Willy Brandt – Das Ende einer Legende* (Bremen: Moritz Deter GmbH, 11th edition, 1988).
[10] Joachim Siegerist, *Ceauşescu – Der rote Vampir* (Hamburg: Wirtschafts- und Verbands PR GmbH, 1990).
[11] Ibid., 10-13. This chapter is called 'Foreword'! What a dramatic opening!
[12] The horror-story of such blood infusions is rejected by Keno Verseck, *Rumänien* (Munich: Beck, 1998), 9.
[13] Siegerist, *Ceauşescu – Der rote Vampir*, 10-11. Just a detail is the fact that in Siegerist's book nearly no Romanian name is correctly written. The author could not have any deeper interest in the country or its inhabitants – he was only on his search for the crimes of a 'communist madman'. By the way: in which English newspaper did he read about this case…?
[14] Ibid., 40. Siegerist uses the photo and its manipulative text as a piece of evidence for the murder.
[15] Ibid., 275-290.
[16] Ibid., 291-322. Siegerist defines two of them as 'lunatics' (p. 321).
[17] Ibid., 194-201.
[18] Ibid., 195 and 197. On nearly the half of all photos of the book, 'the author' is doing something or showing something. In one case he holds a bone of a pretended victim into the lens of the camera!
[19] Ibid., 31.
[20] Kunze, *Nicolae Ceauşescu*, 393 with footnote 35.
[21] Ibid., 81 with footnote 190.
[22] *Diktatoren. Die größten Tyrannen und Despoten der Weltgeschichte* (Vienna: Tosa, 2000), 29.
[23] Frauendorfer, Helmuth, 'In den Ästen der Bäume hängen Kränze. Eine Reise,' in *Der Sturz des Tyrannen. Rumänien und das Ende einer Diktatur*, eds. Richard Wagner and Helmuth Frauendorfer (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1990), 11.
[24] Malte Olschewski, *Der Conducător Nicolae Ceauşescu. Phänomen der Macht* (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 1990), 54. The only sign for a pretended Tataric, Gypsy or even Turkish origin of

Ceauşescu is the original source of his name. The word *ceauş* is an Ottoman word meaning 'courier on horseback'.
[25] Verseck, *Rumänien*, 11-12 and 82-85.
[26] Barbara von Ow, 'Rumänien: Die sinnlose Zerstörung der Dörfer in Siebenbürgen läuft nach Plan – Mit Baggern gegen eine Lebensform', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 27 February 1989, 3.
[27] 'Ereignis DDR', *tageszeitung*, 23 December 1989, 4.
[28] 'Chronologie der Ereignisse seit 20.11.', *tageszeitung*, 23 December 1989, 3.
[29] 'Das Volk verjagt den Tyrannen', *tageszeitung*, 23 December 1989, 3.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Werner Gumpel, 'Größenwahn, Prachtbauten und geschönte Zahlen', *Rheinischer Merkur*, 12 January 1990, 11.
[32] Alexandre Adler, 'Ceausescu executé, le nouveau pouvoir s'installe', *Libération*, 27 December 1989, 2.
[33] Ibid, 5.
[34] Carl E. Buchalla, 'Eine Nacht, die in die Geschichte eingeht', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 27 December 1989, 3.
[35] 'Rumänien versucht sich in Demokratie', *tageszeitung*, 2 January 1990, 1.
[36] 'Rumänien soll eine neue Verfassung und ein neues Wahlgesetz bekommen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 January 1990, 7.
[37] 'Weniger Tote als angenommen', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 22 January 1990, 7.
[38] See footnote 20 in this article.
[39] Slavenka Draculić, 'Traumklo in Rosa', *Die Zeit*, 3 June 1994, 77.
[40] Jānis Vēvers, 'Bušs salīdzina Huseinu ar Čaušesku,' *Diena*, viewed 25 November 2002, <http://www.diena.lv/printout.php?id=169598>.
[41] Ibid.
[42] A not-at-all complete list may be found in Olschewski, *Der Conducător*, 82.
[43] Daniel Ursprung, *Herrschaftslegitimation zwischen Tradition und Innovation. Repräsentation und Inszenierung von Herrschaft in der rumänischen Geschichte* (Kronstadt: aldus-Verlag, 2007), 328-334.
[44] Pacepa, *Red Horizons*, 225-227.

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Monster as Victim, Victim as Monster: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Redemptive Suffering and the 'Undead'

Sarah Malik Bell

Abstract

When surveying the vast pantheon of monstrous incarnations, from Frankenstein's creation to Godzilla, it is nearly impossible to find a creature in the definitive works of fictional monstrosity that doesn't, in some way, owe its creation to a violently traumatic event. This paper analyses the monster as victim by comparing the symptoms of monstrosity to the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. It would appear that monsters, most specifically the undead monsters such as vampires, zombies, and Frankenstein, are merely hyperbolic representations of human post-trauma symptoms. The persistent presence of violent trauma at the birth of the monster, as well as a violent death at his end, implies that these monsters were purposely created as a way to manage society, as examples of how not to act in the face of overwhelming personal catastrophe. The fact that we, as consumers of monster stories, do not recognize monsters as victims and cannot pity them is due to our cultural belief in redemptive suffering. We believe, innately, that all suffering results in redemption, that all stories have a happy ending. The possibility that this might not be true is may be the most horrifying thing that we as human beings could be made to face. Either the monster deserves his fate, or our long-held belief in redemptive suffering must be called into question.

Key Words

Monster, undead, victim, trauma, suffering, cruelty, rape, post-traumatic stress, Frankenstein, redemption.

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> Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change.-
> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

It was two in the morning when he exited the bar, leaving behind him the laughter of good friends and the neon lights that painted the puddles of newly fallen rain beneath his feet. He was a tall man, young and strong and unaccustomed to vulnerability, and the impact of his feet on the pavement rang out in the comparative quiet all but covering the sound of the vampire's approach, swift as it was. The man in all his strength was brought down in one blow, face to the pavement, pain shuddering through the arms that had instinctively tried to cushion his fall, the taste of blood in his mouth where his teeth had jarred together lacerating his tongue. Stunned by the horror of the moment, it was already too late to fight back. He felt the weight of the vampire pressing against his back, the teeth of the beast penetrating his neck, the heat and the pain and the shock of it overwhelming his instincts, numbing everything. As his humanity was wrenched from him one thought overwhelmed all others: The taste of blood in his mouth, the hunger growing within him.

Thus the vampire becomes a vampire, the zombie becomes a zombie. The birth of the monster is a violent affair, and though the individual circumstances of each monstrous transformation may differ the essence of them can all be distilled down to a single word: Trauma. In fact, when surveying the vast pantheon of monstrous incarnations, from Frankenstein's creation to Godzilla, it is nearly impossible to find a creature in the definitive

works of fictional monstrosity that doesn't, in some way, owe its creation to a violently traumatic event. It is a trope that seems to transcend time and geography, infecting all of the world's most frightening stories. What is most disturbing about this trend is that few seem to notice it. Content to arm ourselves with metaphorical stakes and strings of garlic, we curl up on sofas to read or watch the monster's story unfold, and we are not replete until the monster has met a predictably gruesome end. Rarely do we pause to consider the monster's gruesome beginning.

It is at least possible that the inevitable death of the monster is inextricably tied in some way to its violent birth, that its very monstrosity is merely a reaction to trauma. In order to answer the question of whether or not this is so it is necessary to compare the symptoms of monstrosity to the symptoms of human trauma; we must analyse the monster as victim. If upon examination we find that the monsters we have created are really victims themselves, the question of why we have created them becomes paramount. If those that we have monstrified, vilified, staked, dismembered, and beheaded were so treated simply because they were exhibiting signs of overwhelming psychological distress, we must ask what our staking of these monsters says about us as a culture, and in what way this oddly prevalent, yet almost totally unacknowledged trope reflects our instinctive beliefs. We must ask why we have made victims into monsters.

1. The Monster as Victim

> Deep, unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state. -
> George Elliot, *Adam Bede*[1]

A dog that contracts rabies will turn on its master. In this scenario, rabies is a disease, a physical manifestation that changes the behaviour of the dog from something lovable and loyal to something vicious and cruel, but often trauma, itself, can create physical and behavioural changes that are every bit as real and uncontrollable as disease. In modern terminology it is said that victims who demonstrate noticeable changes in behaviour after a traumatic experience are exhibiting signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. The transformation of human to monster seems to mimic this development of alternate behaviours after trauma, and if we are to consider monsters as victims a key factor would be determining how their behaviour coincides with those diagnosed with this disorder. To do that we must first go back to the beginning, to the moment of transformation, to the trauma that made the monster what he is.

Trauma itself is a monster that takes many forms. From accidents to natural disasters, child abuse to war, trauma has many faces. It appears, though, that some faces are more psychologically damaging than others, more potent in terms of their ability to cause PTSD, more likely to give rise to monsters. Survivors of an earthquake and victims of a plane crash may be subject to the psychological after effects of these events, exhibiting hyper-vigilant behaviour when confronted with anything that reminds them of the experience, but by far the worst cases of PTSD are associated with episodes of cruelty.

'It has become apparent that traumas where there is no personal intent to do harm produce less severe PTSD than events such as assaults where personal agency is involved'.[2] This is because, beyond just losing trust in the ability of an aircraft to stay aloft or losing trust in the firmness of the earth beneath our feet, purposeful cruelty creates in the victim a loss of trust in the human world at large, a separation from humanity. As Jean Amery, a torture victim of the Nazi regime once said, 'Trust in the world includes all sorts of things […] [among them] the certainty that by reason of written or unwritten social contracts the other person will spare me –

more precisely stated, that he will respect my physical, and with it also my metaphysical being.'[3] Once these social contracts have been broken, it is impossible for a victim to reinstate them in their own minds. The world is forever altered from a place where certain rules are unbreakable to a place where anything is possible.

It seems clear that the birth of monsters is rooted in cruelty and assault, in the intent to do harm, but the identification of traumas most likely to cause PTSD can be distilled down even farther. 'Evidence suggests that rape is one of the most traumatic events and produces rates of PTSD higher than that produced by other events.'[4] It is interesting to note how many monsters have their 'becoming' rooted in the penetration of the body, the breaching of the borders of the self. Though it is rarely, if ever, entirely sexual in nature this penetration occurs in a startling number of monster encounters. Be it penetrating radiation from off shore nuclear testing, or the piercing fangs of vampire, zombie, or werewolf, all monstrous transformations seem to have their origins in the breaching of physical boundaries, the rape of the self.

Beyond the physical similarities, the trauma associated with the making of monsters has emotional parallels to rape as well. Rape results in a complete 'loss of self', a restructuring of the world far more extensive than that, which results from cruelty alone.

> Whatever identity [the victim] develops in freedom must include the memory of her enslaved self. Her image of her body must include a body that can be controlled and violated. Her image of herself in relation to others must include a person who can lose and be lost to others. And her moral ideals must coexist with knowledge of the capacity for evil, both within others and within herself.[5]

It seems clear that monster-creating traumas result in a similar 'loss of self', a similar confrontation of hypothetical moral ideals with a now intimate experience with cruelty and evil. It is this collision of past beliefs with present situations, this sudden, dark knowledge that causes post-traumatic stress, and that makes monsters.

Experiencing violent cruelty, experiencing rape, is in a way like waking from a pleasant dream into a horrifying reality. The dream is that we exist in a world where, as Amery stated, the borders of our physical and metaphysical bodies are inviolate. The touch of a friend is a thing of comfort, not a harbinger of violence. Strangers on the street are unknown but not frightening, and when we leave the house in the morning it is with the absolute certainty that we will return to it unharmed and unchanged. Cruelty is transformative. It changes the victims' perception of the world, and it changes the victims themselves. As Mary Shelley wrote in *Frankenstein*, 'Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change', and for the victim of assault, face down on the sidewalk, vampire teeth ripping into his flesh, it is certain that nothing will ever be the same.[6]

The violent and cruel trauma experienced by those who, in all of our favourite horror stories, become monsters is sufficient to warrant further investigation into the question of whether or not these creatures are 'suffering from PTSD', or, rather, are hyperbolic representations of the disorder. For further proof we must look to the symptoms experienced by those living with post-traumatic stress. Clearly, vampires, zombies, were-wolfs, and innumerable other monsters experience transformative change as the result of trauma at the hands, paws, or teeth, of someone else. The birth of the monster is bloody and cruel, the possibility of returning to 'life' as it was before clearly impossible. To quote Amery again, 'with the first blow from a policeman's fist, against which there can be no defence and which no helping hand will ward off, a part of our life ends and it can never again be revived.'[7] Trauma resulting from cruelty, then, is akin to death.

'Cruelty is a process that can so divide and disorder time that the person who experiences the cruelty moves from life to a kind of death.'[8] The pursuits of a lifetime become meaningless overnight, pleasant emotions become unresponsive, and the victim enters a trance-like state of non-existence.[9] At the same time, survival requires the 'dead' victims of cruelty to carry on in a similitude of life.

> Elie Wiesel has written, 'The problem is not: to be or not to be, but rather: to be *and* not to be.' Other survivors similarly speak both of having died during the [trauma] yet continuing to live. […] As contrary as it is to our usual logic and experience, this simultaneity of being and non-being should be understood literally. The co-presence of on-going death and on-going life […] is, for survivors, embodied reality.[10]

It is clear that there is some precedent for the identification of survivors with the 'living dead'. 'Victims of trauma […] may languish in a lethargic state that feels dead, or […] may develop the delusion that they really *are* dead.'[11] In this way, victims of trauma may quite literally be 'undead'.

Though certain of our monsters are actually classified as undead, all monsters, all sufferers of severe PTSD, are 'undead' in that the trauma they have experienced has opened up a gulf between life and death and they now occupy the space that lies in between. This may be because during the trauma they came so close to passing over the threshold into death that it is difficult to draw back from that point, to be alive again, or it could be that the person that existed before the trauma is so different from the person who emerged from it that their old life no longer fits, leaving the victim 'lifeless'. The literal living dead, the immortal vampire, the animated corpse that is the zombie, and Frankenstein's monster, sewn together from cadaverous remains, embody PTSD most efficiently precisely because they embody this bilateral existence so completely.

The question of whether or not these literally undead monsters also suffer from additional symptoms of the disorder is easily answered. In early research on PTSD it was found that the disorder was 'accompanied by such psychological symptoms as oscillations in affect or emotional storms, radical variations in self-presentation, and altered states of consciousness, including somnambulism and fugue states'.[12] In other words, violent moods, extreme changes in both the physical and emotional manifestations of self, strange alterations in awareness, sleep walking, and trance-like states are all symptoms of PTSD. In addition to these, substance abuse,[13] eating disorders,[14] insomnia[15] and 'interpersonal violence'[16] are all common manifestations of the disorder.

It is clear that we could analyse monsters in terms of these specific symptoms and find evidence that they do, in fact, suffer from them. We could ask if the zombie is merely a somnambulist with an eating disorder, the vampire only an insomniac addicted to human blood, but to focus on these specific symptoms is to minimalize the hallmark characteristic of severe PTSD, which is merely exacerbated by these symptoms, not defined by them. This characteristic is the isolation of the victim from the world around them, whether it be a literal isolation or only an emotional one. It is through this sense of isolation that the victim becomes separated from humanity completely, that they become 'other' than human.

'There is a relationship between exposure to traumatic events and poorer subsequent interpersonal functioning.'[17] The decreased function in the survivor's relationships with those around him is a sure indicator of PTSD. 'The victim [of severe trauma] may, in effect, try to live in a cocoon, walled off from a world perceived as dangerous',[18] to increase the separation between them and their old lives which have become frightening reminders of both their trauma

and their transformation. Because the victim is no longer sure of the humanity of those around him, or because he is no longer sure of his own humanity, a nearly unbridgeable divide is placed between the survivor and the inhabitants of his old life.

Complete isolation from the world around the victim can result in suicidal depression. It can also result in rage and in a desire for revenge.[19] In the words of Frankenstein's monster, 'I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me; and, finding myself unsympathised with, wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me, and then to have sat down and enjoyed the ruin'.[20] Here, then, is the root of our inquiry. The real issues of monstrosity are rage and violence. Arguments pointing out obscure symptoms of post-traumatic stress are moot in the face of the greater question of whether or not trauma can turn a previously tame person into a creature capable of the horrific acts that monsters routinely perform, whether or not a person can be so changed by their experience with cruelty that they become monstrous themselves.

'Disturbances in self-regulation, self-esteem, and self-representation are common sequels to trauma. In some instances, the sense of self is shattered'.[21] In other words, the person who emerges from a traumatic experience may not be the same one who existed before. Often survivors are encouraged to 'pick up the pieces', or 'pull themselves together.' The problem with this, in many cases, is that for the survivor of serious trauma 'no 'old' self exists to be pieced together again. […] The self that arises from the ashes may be a lost or shattered self, sometimes even one whose will and character have become infected by cruelty.'[22]

In this new world, the post-trauma world, where rules that prevent cruelty no longer apply to those who surround the survivor, the survivor themself may become immune to these social contracts. This may be why PTSD is associated with 'increased social maladjustment' and 'interpersonal violence'.[23] It is possible for a sufferer to experience periods of complete disassociation where an alternate, 'completely organized identity'[24] takes over, causing the victim to appear completely unlike their pre-trauma selves. Aggressive behaviour or repetitive re-enactment of the trauma can occur,[25] and at times the survivor can find themselves identifying more with the original aggressor than they do with their victim-selves, the 'old' them.[26] In short, the survivor becomes the aggressor, and the victim becomes the monster.

To analyse whether or not the monster can be treated with medication or psychotherapy is both completely moot and patently ridiculous. In fact, to suggest that they might be suffering from a psychological disorder at all, rather than just representing symptoms associated with trauma, is to give them more autonomy than they actually possess. Monsters are fictional creatures, without personal agency or a will of their own. '[They] are our children',[27] they do what we tell them to do. In this respect monsters are doubly victims. They are victims of both the traumatic incident and the author who created them, and both condemn the monster to a lifetime of trial and an almost always unavoidable and grizzly end. The pen seals their fate even as it writes them into existence. But, despite the fact that we have, in most cases, refused them a voice of their own, the monster still speaks. It asks us what we are so afraid of. '[It] asks why we have created [it].'[28]

2. The Victim as Monster

> 'I expected this reception,' said the daemon. 'All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things!' -
> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

The truth, which is so readily observable and yet so pointedly unnoticed, seems to be that before monsters were monsters they were victims, innocent bystanders drawn suddenly and violently into the midst of tragic stories. Their bodies, penetrated by the alien other, become

something they cannot control. Not-withstanding, the monster is villainised and removed from the world which he taints with his otherness, an otherness that even he himself cannot understand. Why, with the virtually limitless capacity of the human imagination, do writers of monster stories return again and again to this one train of thought, this one tainted trope? Why have we made victims into monsters?

Obviously, the 'victim as monster' trope has its origins in human experience. Many of the most infamous serial killers, as well as numerous other criminals, have a history of neglect, abuse, or trauma. But, statistically, the number of people who demonstrate violent reactions to trauma is very small. Only 7.5% of people who experience serious trauma are affected by PTSD at all, and of these sufferers only a minuscule portion are affected to the point that they commit acts of violence.[29] Though they may be a loud minority, the number of actual 'monsters' doesn't seem to be proportionately represented by fictional monster stories. The 'victim as monster' metaphor, then, does not reflect actual reality, but rather perceived reality, or perhaps something else entirely.

'The on-going stability of any society,' Edward J. Ingebretsen has stated, 'depends upon the presence of monsters. […] For this reason, the creation of the monster is as important a civic duty as the ritualized spectacle of its exorcism'.[30] The persistent presence of violent trauma at the birth of the monster, as well as a violent death at his end, implies that these monsters were purposely created as a way to manage society, as examples of how not to act in the face of overwhelming personal catastrophe. To a certain extent, this must be true. 'The monster polices the borders of the possible […] [he] exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot – must not – be crossed.'[31]

It is estimated that 75% of the human population has experienced extreme trauma, whether it be rape or a car accident, a hurricane or an air raid.[32] While it is true that not all of these traumas have the same psychological effects it is also true that trauma, in all of its forms, is fundamental to human experience, and so the need to police the borders of what are both acceptable and unacceptable reactions to trauma exists. The way in which monster stories are told reinforces the idea that the result of not dealing with trauma, of any kind, in a functional way is ostracism from the community and violent death.

Primarily, though, the story of the monster is a subconscious acknowledgment of something that we, as a culture, have difficulty accepting, 'a truth about [humanity] that we would rather deny, but which the [monster] brings to the fore.'[33] We have been taught to believe that, as Seneca said, 'Fire is the test of gold; adversity, of strong men.'[34] 'That which does not kill us', we are repeatedly told, 'can only make us stronger.' For every struggle, then, we believe that there is an ultimate payoff, an increase in happiness that is the natural result of surviving adversity. 'We want the future to 'redeem' the past to make it part of a life story which has sense of purpose.'[35] We believe, innately, that all suffering results in redemption, that all stories have a happy ending. The possibility that this might not be true may be the most horrifying thing that we as human beings could be made to face. We don't want to believe that suffering is just suffering, that there is no greater meaning behind it, that sometimes things, sometimes people, are just broken and they can't be fixed. We don't want to believe that sometimes the end of the victim, bloody as its beginning, is a sad and a purposeless one.

It is this horrifying truth that is unconsciously captured in every one of our most frightening tales, the story of the monster, the victim, whose suffering is non-redemptive, whose grim end is determined, not by conscious choice but by the uncontrollable results of cruel trauma. The story of the monster underscores the reality that our belief in redemptive suffering is sometimes morally problematic.[36] What does it say about the survivor of trauma who is not now stronger, but in fact completely shattered? This implies that somehow the lack of a 'happy

ending' is somehow the victim's fault. If, as stated in The Book of Positive Quotations, 'a diamond is a chunk of coal that is made good under pressure',[37] what is the value of something that crumbles under pressure? The simple answer is that, according to these generally accepted platitudes, the broken survivor has no value. They have in fact failed to act in a way that is 'human' and so are relegated to the exterior of society, outcast, expelled, staked, just as the monster is.

Despite the fact that nearly everyone will experience severe trauma, there is a stigma surrounding the survivor, a silence that creeps in to conversations when the trauma is revealed, a wariness that arises from the possibility that the event has left the victim partially or totally shattered and prone to acting out in unpredictable, non-human ways. In reality, there can be no real sympathy for the victim, just as there is no real sympathy for the monster, without relinquishing our belief in redemptive suffering. To believe that the monster's crimes are not his fault is to splinter our beliefs in our own moral agency, in our own ability to grow stronger through adversity. To pity the monster is a contradiction of our innate belief systems.

'Survival is itself an ordeal, a problem in which the survivor may find that SHE is the problem.'[38] Beyond the symptoms of PTSD lurks the greater issue, the sense of isolation, separation, from the rest of the world that is the hallmark characteristic of the disorder. We should question whether monsters become monsters as a result, not only of the original trauma, but of the continuing trauma of struggling through the world without support, under the weight of the accepted belief that they should be bearing up better than they are, that somehow their inability to process the transformative change that is inherent in trauma has made them deserving of the condemnation of those around them.

It is significant that a major factor in whether or not survivors of trauma develop full blown PTSD, the way that our monsters do, is the degree of social support that they receive from those who surround them.[39] In turn, 'how we respond to the suffering of others, especially suffering as serious as that of shattered selves, is significant in terms of the moral content of our character.'[40] As we arm ourselves with bowls of popcorn, and settle in to enjoy the staking of the monster, to watch the victims suffering end in pain and humiliation, the voice of these wretched creatures should echo through our heads. 'I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces, and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me?'[41]

Notes

[1] Lynn S. Arnault, 'Cruelty, Horror, and the Will to Redemption', *Hypatia, Inc* 18.2 (Spring 2003): 155-188.
[2] Michael J. Scott and Stephen Palmer, *Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (New York: Cassell, 2000).
[3] Arnault, 'Cruelty, Horror', 160.
[4] Stephen Joseph, Ruth Williams and William Yule, *Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress: A Psychosocial Perspective on PTSD and Treatment* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 1997), 57.
[5] Arnault, 'Cruelty, Horror'.
[6] Maty Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1831), 174.
[7] Arnault, 'Cruelty, Horror', 160.
[8] Ibid., 165.
[9] Scott and Palmer, *Trauma*, 21.
[10] Arnault, 'Cruelty, Horror', 166.

[11] Elizabeth A. Waites, *Trauma and Survival: Post-Traumatic and Dissociative Disorders in Women* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 21.
[12] Ibid., 5.
[13] Josephs, Williams and Yule, *Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress*, 22.
[14] Waites, *Trauma and Survival*, 13.
[15] Scott and Palmer, *Trauma*, 22.
[16] Josephs, Williams and Yule, *Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress*, 26.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Arnault, 'Cruelty, Horror', 26.
[19] Josephs, Williams and Yule, *Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress*, 90.
[20] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 121.
[21] Waites, *Trauma and Survival*, 104.
[22] Arnault, 'Cruelty, Horror', 166.
[23] Josephs, Williams and Yule, *Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress*, 26.
[24] Waites, *Trauma and Survival*, 14.
[25] Josephs, Williams and Yule, *Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress*, 31.
[26] Arnault, 'Cruelty, Horror', 17.
[27] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 20.
[28] Ibid., 12-13.
[29] Scott and Palmer, *Trauma*, xiii.
[30] Edward J. Ingebretsen, 'Monster-Making: A Politics of Persuasion', *Journal of American Culture* 21.2 (1998), 25.
[31] Cohen, 'Monster Culture', 12-13.
[32] Scott and Palmer, *Trauma*, xiii.
[33] Mark McGurl, 'Zombie Renaissance', *N+1*, 27 April 2010, 2.
[34] Arnault, 'Cruelty, Horror'.
[35] Ibid., 156.
[36] Ibid., 173.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 165.
[39] Scott and Palmer, *Trauma*, xiv.
[40] Arnault, 'Cruelty, Horror', 164.
[41] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 129.

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Digging Our Own Grave: Monster Trucks and America

Callie Clare

Abstract

Individuals have been modifying and repurposing automobiles for as long as they have existed. Some individuals modify these symbols of American progress and freedom to challenge common American characteristics and express personal identity and politics but others modify vehicles in such a way that, rather than challenging, reinforces common conceptions of American culture. This article traces the history of monster trucks from their beginnings in the 1970's as off-road vehicles for individual entertainment to their present day role as a multi-million dollar industry in corporate American culture. It closely examines how these modified vehicles reinforce dominant American characteristics of masculinity, destruction, and patriotism. This is becoming more complicated as each year these corporate monster trucks are transported to other countries around the world. Through the analysis of the numerous elements of the monster truck shows in particular (the truck names, makes, and styling, the music and performance of patriotic songs, the destruction of vehicles, and the element of competition), as well as the growing industry in general, it becomes evident that what is in fact being exported and promoted is a particularly destructive form of American exceptionalism and masculinity preoccupied primarily with domination and destruction.

Key Words

America, monster trucks, automobiles, masculinity, globalization.

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On a cold and rainy 'Sunday! Sunday! Sunday!' – actually, it was a Saturday – I made the trek to Toledo, Ohio for a Monster Jam monster truck show at the somewhat small Lucas County Arena. I arrived early enough to make an appearance at the Built Ford Tough 'Party in the Pits' where families with small children were posing for pictures in front of the monster trucks, sitting on the 4-wheelers lined up behind the trucks, and waiting in line to meet the drivers and have them sign official Monster Jam merchandise. There we all were, on huge mounds of dirt, that only days before had been ice for the Toledo Walleye hockey team, getting as close as we could to Iron Warrior, Brutus, Monster Mutt Dalmatian, Black Stallion, Avenger, and, of course, Grave Digger. Their bodies towered over us and their 66 inch tires seemed even bigger when standing right next to them – but we couldn't touch them since there were signs warning us that they may have sharp metal and glass imbedded in them from driving over junked cars day in and day out. The whole time I walked around, officials were chasing after me peddling the '2010 Monster Jam Official Souvenir Yearbook,' t-shirts, $15 cotton-candy in Grave Digger-shaped foam hats, flags, stuffed toys, and $10 Icees in Monster Jam collector cups. Succumbing to my consumerist tendencies, I purchased the Yearbook, and on the second page it welcomed me:

> Welcome to the premier event in live family entertainment, Advance Auto Parts Monster Jam […] proud to bring you the most famous monster trucks in the world and to provide you with one of the best entertainment values available today, at a time when everyone needs more value for their hard earned dollars. […] Take this opportunity to settle in and prepare yourself, because once the

> lights go down and the engines rev up, you will become part of one of the most exciting events in the world – Monster Jam![1]

Monster trucks have only been in existence for a little over 30 years, but during that time they have grown into a huge business with competitions, such as Monster Jam, touring across the United States and expanding to other areas of the globe, as close as Mexico, Panama, and Costa Rica. Like many industries and products before them, the exportation of monster trucks into other countries is a testament to the influence that the United States has in the current global economy. Not only is this business, but monster trucks are an exportation of culture, representing values, hobbies, and even frustrations of a mostly white, rural, working class sector of the American population. By first exploring the history and development of monster trucks and then analysing and interpreting the trucks and shows, I will explain how one single individual's innovation and modification of an American symbol has evolved into an industry that has been exported to, and even copied by, other countries in the world. This sharp turn towards capitalism also requires shifting frameworks of analysis, from Folklore theories on material culture and modification to a complex examination of monster trucks in an international context, borrowed from the hemispheric trend in the field of American Studies. After being sent through these varying frameworks and modes of thought, monster trucks emerge as complex representatives of the United States perpetuating the image of America as aggressive and destructive.

Monster trucks were introduced into American culture in 1975 when Bob Chandler of Hazelwood, Missouri, interested in making vehicles capable of extreme off-road activities, modified a 1974 Ford F-250 truck to accommodate much larger 48 inch tires.[2] Not only was this act of modification intended to help him pursue his interest in driving vehicles off the paved road, but also as an advertisement for his automotive shop, The Midwest Four Wheel Drive Center, which specialized in working on trucks to make them off-road capable. An innovative man, Chandler was looking to take his hobbies and make a living off of them. Over time, the truck became known as Bigfoot, named after Chandler's tendency to drive too fast (a big foot on the gas pedal). However, the name also seems fitting for this very first monster truck, characterized by its oversized tires, which are sometimes referred to as a car's shoes. Chandler tested Bigfoot's capabilities on a variety of off-road obstacles, which led to several broken automotive components. Being a mechanical genius, Chandler was able to develop stronger replacements thereby further altering this original monster truck. Eventually, one Bigfoot led to another, and there are as many as seventeen in existence today.

Although Chandler has proven himself to be an innovative individual, he is following a long-standing tradition of vehicle modification in American culture. Kathleen Franz describes how and why individuals came to 'tinker' with, or modify, automobiles, mostly in the time between the two World Wars. Encouragement to tinker came from many different sources, such as the publications *Scientific American* and *Popular Mechanics*, which drove innovators to seek patents on their discoveries thereby granting them prestige and money. Besides gaining patents, money, and prestige for being innovative, it has also been said that consumers of mass-produced cultural objects, like automobiles, use that as, 'one of the sites where average folks can negotiate the power of social and technological hierarchies based on gender, race, class, and education, and… can explain the ways in which consumers engaged, on their own terms, new technologies, invention, and corporate capitalism in the 20th century.'[3] Chandler was therefore modifying corporate products to better suit his needs as an individual member of American society, and through that was expressing himself as a working class, rural, American man. His innovations not only served him in his hobbies, but also in his rural lifestyle and entrepreneurial spirit.

Another way in which Chandler was identifying himself in American society was by relating his hobbies and interests to foundational concepts in the field of American Studies. His desire to enter into nature, yet also dominate it, echoes early works in the field such as Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* and Leo Marx's *Machine in the Garden*. His rogue and rebellious modifications also align him with outlaw heroes so prominent in American popular culture. It is the people like Chandler, who, according to Wik, '[identify] and [cooperate] with the automobile manufacturers [helping] to extend the car culture even deeper into rural and wilderness America'[4] that has led to many alarming and impressive trends in off-road vehicles, including the development of the modern day monster truck.

The modification and co-optation of mass-produced cultural objects has also been thoroughly examined on the individual level in the field of Folklore. When it comes to vehicles, this expression of individual identity is most frequently exhibited in an individual's driving patterns and the ways in which those patterns alter the object.[5] The vehicle then tells not only a story about the corporate creation of the object, but also a story about how the object has been influenced by the individual consumer, revealing his or her personality. Beyond the story that driving tells, the purposeful modification of a vehicle can also reveal something about the individual creator. An individual's act of taking cultural products and rearranging them or combining them is still an action of creation and is referred to as 'creation out of culture.'[6] Often times, these types of transformations consist of combining several different objects together, by taking things that do not traditionally go together and putting them together in such a way that tells a different story. Chandler's repeated combination of standard pick-up with large tires from farm equipment to create a series of Bigfoot trucks is an example of this modifying act. A version that stands out is Bigfoot 5, which added 10 foot-tall tires from an old military vehicle called the Snow Train, found in a junkyard, to a standard pick-up. By combining these two not completely unrelated, but still quite different, objects into one, Chandler communicated his innovation, interests, and resourcefulness. This act could also be read as a representation of American culture, a society where bigger traditionally means better. The ridiculously large tires, which once served a useful function, now only speak to the absurdity of this fascination with size, especially since Bigfoot 5 is not legal to drive on the road, and, even if it were, it is nearly impossible because of the driver's inability to see where she or he is going. Never let practicality get in the way of development!

While Chandler may have begun his monster truck endeavour to serve his personal needs and desires, this phenomenon quickly grew and far surpassed the intentions and expectations of the creator. At first, interested promoters encouraged Chandler to bring Bigfoot to motor-sport events such as truck-pulls, tractor shows, and demolition derbies. In 1981, perhaps influenced by the demolition derbies, Chandler decided to test Bigfoot's capabilities in an empty Missouri field by driving over two junk cars, thereby changing the nature of monster truck demonstrations.

Unfortunately for automobiles, Americans seem nearly as interested in destroying them as we are in driving them. As long as there have been vehicles, there have been people modifying them and pushing them to their limits. At first, this led to the sport of car racing. A common quip about why people watch this sport is for the wrecks. A possible reason for our fascination with the freedom that comes from driving fast and crashing is that our daily driving is extremely regulated: we must be licensed, insured, registered, avoid traffic violations for fear of fines, and avoid accidents for fear of damage to our cars and bodies. When these machines, that so extensively penetrate our daily lives, are then taken out of their familiar context and put into one so different and dangerous, it is somewhat jarring and even liberating. It allows us to break away from order. The epitome of this freedom is represented in the demolition derby. Although demolition derbies have regulations for what can and cannot be done to the cars and

rules to protect the drivers from harm, they are, for the most part, an arena for drivers to smash into one another and destroy expensive machinery.

The first demolition derbies were held at local county fairs in the 1940's.[7] It has been said that individuals began to notice fans' preoccupation with wrecks at racing events so this new event was designed to cater to that audience. In his book, Richard Huff talked with derby officials, fans, and drivers about the appeal of the sport. Don Schram, a fan in Michigan, said, 'The appeal is in seeing everyday cars being crushed and destroyed. It's in watching the destruction that shouldn't happen in the outside world. It's seeing a giant car accident again and again and nobody gets hurt.'[8] Again, the allure is the reversal of social order and the doing away with of constraints. In our daily lives, we must constantly deal with frustrations such as traffic, money, speed limits, and long traffic lights that impede our progress on the roads and the abandonment of these concerns liberates us as we live vicariously through the demolition derby drivers.

Chandler's driving of Bigfoot over the junk cars fulfils this same function, a fascination with destruction and escape from daily constraints. At first, Chandler and his wife were reluctant to continue on this path because they weren't sure if this was the image they wanted for their company.[9] However, word spread and promoters convinced them of the money-making potential of these monster trucks, thereby revolutionizing the monster truck show by adding this new element of destruction. With this new popularity, Bigfoot got a new pair of shoes, 66 inch tires, and monster truck shows became a more popular form of entertainment, travelling to more cities and even advertising in advance, coining the often-mimicked, 'Sunday! Sunday! Sunday!'

At this point in time, other trucks were beginning to appear, such as King Kong and Dennis Anderson's Grave Digger. Grave Digger, perhaps the most well-known monster truck today, was originally built in 1981 out of a 1957 Chevrolet Wagon[10] and has evolved over the years to include the signature haunted scene painted onto its side, the red headlights, and the skull and cross bones flag. Like Bigfoot, there is more than one Grave Digger, with seven different drivers, making it possible for Grave Digger to appear at every Monster Jam show. However, the monster trucks of today are very different from the originals.

Today's monster trucks are very intricate machines involving much more work than the simple act of adding bigger tires to a mass-produced cultural object. According to Bob Chandler in his interview with Modern Marvels, this was Stage 1 of monster trucks, raising regular pick-up trucks to accommodate larger tires. Stage 2 evolved from there and introduced heavier frames, axles, and wheels. This made the trucks much stronger and heavier, but that also made it so that the suspension could no longer handle the weight and capabilities of the truck and often broke. The jarring suspension also led to seriously injured drivers. Chandler intervened again and headed into Stage 3, which made the trucks much lighter and safer. This included a much better suspension system, which uses nitrogen shocks, and the addition of a fiberglass shell to replace the metal body. Attached to the frame is a roll cage made of hollow metal tubing, which protects the driver from being crushed if the truck rolls over.[11]

Each stage represents a growth in the monster truck industry and over the years the traditional exhibition shows have transformed into more competitive races. The United States Hot Rod Association (USHRA) has developed rules and requirements for the vehicles, their modifications, and how the races should be conducted. There are also regulations for obtaining both a Commercial Driver's License as well as a Class A Monster Truck Racing Association certification, an organization founded in 1988 by Chandler to ensure safety in the drivers.[12] At one time, there were many different monster truck competitions sanctioned by the USHRA along with many independent monster truck owners,[13] but currently Monster Jam seems to have a monopoly on monster truck shows pushing other organizations to the background or running

them out of certain cities. Some independent monster trucks are included in Monster Jam competitions but rarely succeed. In fact, Monster Jam hosts their own huge championship series, held in Las Vegas at the end of every March, called the 'World Finals' in which any trucks that are not part of the Monster Jam series of races have no chance of winning. Which trucks make it to the finals depends on their performances throughout the season at monster truck shows in different cities, primarily in the United States but also in other parts of the world.

The quality of the show that each set of fans sees depends on many different factors such as the size of the arena and the day of the week. In cities such as Cincinnati and Toledo, the arenas are quite small – the size used for events such as concerts and hockey games. Other cities, like Minneapolis and Indianapolis, which have enclosed football stadiums and baseball fields, allows for much bigger and thrilling monster truck shows because they provide the space for the trucks to jump higher, race faster, and perform more difficult, action-packed stunts. The day of the week matters as well because if the trucks have more than one show to do in a day or single weekend, the drivers will be more careful and only perform stunts that will result in minimal, if any, damage. This ensures that the truck will be in working order for its next show. The last show in any city is sure to be the best and most exciting because the concern for keeping the truck in pristine condition is gone. Drivers are more likely to give their audiences the types of shows that they want to see with bigger and more dangerous tricks, which also result in more damage to the trucks; they lose wheels, destroy the body, and even catch on fire. The time between cities and shows allows the crews of mechanics to work on the trucks and fix anything that may have been broken.

The standard monster truck show today consists of a few crucial elements. Because this is a 'sport', friendly competition is still at the heart of the shows. The first, in the small arena shows, is the wheelie competition, which is scored by 'judges' in the audience who hold up score cards from 1 to 10. The scores each driver receives are added to the season-long total, which determines whether or not they will compete in the World Finals. Each driver has two chances to drive on their back tires with the front end of the truck high in the air to impress the judges.

The second competition is a race. The nature of the race is dependent on the size of the venue. In smaller venues, the race consists of a straight line the length of the arena with a jump over brightly painted junk cars. In larger arenas, the race is a lap around the arena, also including a jump over cars. All races take place in a series of two-truck heats. The winner of each heat moves on to the next bracket (resembling the NCAA basketball brackets) and this continues until only two trucks remain. Each finishing position correlates to a set number of points, which are also added to the season-long running total.

The third and last standard competition is the freestyle. This is the most exciting portion of the monster truck show because it gives the drivers an opportunity to perform the more dangerous, exciting, and crowd-pleasing stunts. Drivers make the highest and longest jumps over obstacles, crush the junked cars in the arena, do doughnuts, and wheelies. All of these lead to the wrecks and destruction that is what really draws the audience, as it would to car races and demolition derbies. The judges in the audience score this round and the points earned, like the points from the other competitions, are added to the season total.

Because random fans and audience members are the judges, the winning seems quite arbitrary. All crew members and drivers are employed by Feld Entertainment therefore doing away with the purse (winnings in a race or competition) system of payment. However, because the drivers are working for the goal of the World Finals, they are driven to perform to the best of their ability. When they become better drivers, they get to drive more popular trucks and gain prestige. There is some resentment when fans and critics compare monster truck shows to

the notoriously staged storylines of professional wrestling. Yet it is somewhat difficult to take Monster Jam as seriously as other sports because of the inconsistent judging which allows for a huge range of error from show to show. It is also clear that the sport is secondary to the advertising and money-making potential of monster trucks. Yes, other sports have corporate sponsors and sell merchandise but at no other sporting event I have ever been to has there been more advertising between activities. This is primarily a business and has come a long way from the innocent Chandler being convinced by promoters of the mainstream appeal of his recreational vehicle.

The growth of the industry requires new trucks to be introduced every year. The fiberglass shells on each truck features the name of the truck accompanied by an intimidating image. Some of the shells are not even the standard truck shape but rather resemble the shape of a particular animal or character from popular culture. Some of these intimidating names call on the theme of destruction such as Maximum Destruction, Grinder, Destroyer, King Krunch, Stone Crusher, Eradicator, Thrasher, and Wrecking Crew. Another category of names is based on animals, usually animals typically considered violent such as bulls, dogs or dog-like creatures, and wild cats. Some of the animal shapes are cartoonish and even representations of iconic television or video game characters. Names from this category include Brutus, El Toro Loco, Monster Mutt, Monster Mutt Dalmatian, Taz, Donkey Kong, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle, Bulldozer, Predator, Jurassic Attack, Pouncer, Prowler, and Spike Unleashed. There are also trucks like Batman, Superman, Ironman, and Spiderman from the superhero genre, which take the shape of an iconic characteristic of that superhero (ie: Superman's cape and Spiderman's webs). A fourth category of trucks is based on our American heroes in the form of police officers, firemen, and servicemen with truck names such as Airborne Ranger, Backdraft, U.S. Air Force Afterburner, Captain USA, McGruff (the Crime Dog), and The Patriot (to be discussed later). The final category of trucks is somewhat a catchall yet all the names evoke a sense of power, force, strength, and domination: Avenger, Blue Thunder, Madusa, After Shock, Black Stallion, El Matador, Excaliber, Iron Warrior, Lil' Miss Dangerous, Maniac, Screamin' Demon, Shock Therapy, and more.

The naming of these vehicles follows two different automotive traditions. The first is the model name that car companies give to the vehicles that they mass-produce. A close examination of truck models (of all makes) reveals categories such as the American West (with the Dakota, Tacoma, and Sequoia), cowboys (Wrangler and Rodeo), Native Americans (Cherokee and Aztec), humans in touch with nature (Tracker, Scout, Ranger, Mountaineer, Forester, Explorer, Navigator, Blazer, Pathfinder, and Trail Blazer), and journeys through the wilderness (Escape, Excursion, and Expedition).[14] All of these categories speak to the Frontier Myth discussed in early American Studies works (such as Marx and Smith) where man, either alone or through his creation of machines, exerts his dominance over nature. There is simultaneously a reverence for nature and a desire to conquer it. With these names, the trucks, presumably capable of 4-wheel-drive off-road activities, are evoking a foundational American myth and system of values, even to the detriment of the natural environment. According to Peter Steinhart, 'it is hard to convince the off-roader that what he's doing is destructive. He is too busy trying to express urban discontent in Old West idioms'[15] as represented by the truck name and the Frontier Myth. Monster trucks are not carrying on with any relationships to nature but have held onto destruction, thus telling a different story of America.

The second tradition of naming vehicles happens on a more innocent and individual level: giving a car a name as if it were a beloved family member, friend, or pet. These names are often ironic, sentimental, or even sexist but rarely do vehicles driven on a daily basis evoke such strong imagery of power and destruction. For the most part the names are feminizing. This contrasts a great deal to the names given to the monster trucks which all deal with commonly

attributed characteristics of American masculinity, such as 'aggressiveness, sexual prowess, muscular strength, social dominance, and competition.'[16] Throughout the Introduction and first chapter of his book *Many Traditions*, Simon Bronner repeatedly references trucks as distinctly masculine objects. The act of taking this already masculine object and making it bigger, stronger, louder, and giving it a powerful name therefore makes the monster truck hyper-masculine. These masculine characteristics are also most commonly attributed to the outlaw characters in American popular culture, such as cowboys, bikers, and even truckers. Now, because they are the representative human for the trucks, monster truck drivers are attributed with this outlaw hero status – independent, aggressive, competitive, and physically dominant (with the aid of the truck).[17]

These trucks are masculine, but they are also distinctly American. Besides the obvious connections that America has to cars and how they symbolize dominant American values such as freedom and progress, which could in itself be a paper, if not a much longer series of books, Monster Jam takes extra steps to ensure the recognition of this powerful and important correlation. First is the emphasis on the make of each vehicle. In the Yearbook and at the show when the MC introduces the trucks and drivers, the 'make' and 'model' of each truck is emphasized. Now remember, the body of the truck is not even metal, but a one-piece fiberglass shell that no car on the road would have. Also, the engines are more powerful than any standard car engine. At this point in time, not a single part of a Monster Jam monster truck is the same as any part on any mass-produced, stock automobile driven off the lot. It therefore seems somewhat ridiculous for a monster truck to be described as something like a 2007 Ford F-150 or a 2006 Chevy Silverado, except for the purpose of advertising these brands and promoting these vehicles as American-made. Besides the Custom Concept trucks, like Batman and Donkey Kong, and one Toyota truck (which was still made in the United States), all of the monster trucks are labelled as either a Ford, Chevy, Dodge, Mercury, GMC, or Willys (an early American car company that made coupes and the first Jeep). It is important for these trucks to be recognized as American made to further keep them aligned with the idea that America produces the most powerful vehicles, especially with the continued growth of international car manufacturers.

Not only are the makes stressed to align the monster trucks with America, but, as mentioned above, some of the trucks are named after civil service braches such as McGruff (the Crime Dog) truck representing law enforcement, Backdraft representing firemen, Airborne Ranger representing the Army, and Afterburner representing the Air Force. Other trucks such as Captain USA and Madusa are painted like the America Flag therefore representative of the entire nation. This emphasizes not just the physical power of the United States, but also the political and military power as well. After several years of declining international popularity, it seems as important as ever to boast patriotism and honour our servicemen. As exemplified in the monster trucks, America still appears to be dominant, in control, and powerful, especially when seen crushing much smaller Japanese-made cars.

One of the key elements of the monster truck show that cannot be ignored is the great detail and time that is paid to honouring the United States of America. At the show in Toledo, during that liminal stage between the Party in the Pits and when the action really began, the lights went down and the digital banner running the entire circumference of the arena switched from advertisements to red, white, and blue pixels forming a close up image of the Stars and Stripes, waving in a digital breeze. 'God Bless the USA' (also referred to as 'I'm Proud to Be an American') began to play over the loud speakers and the MC asked members of the police force, military (with each branch–Coastguard, Navy, Air Force, Marines–mentioned specifically), families of individuals overseas fighting for our country, families of individuals who have lost their lives for our country, and veterans to please stand and receive

acknowledgement for the sacrifices they have made for our great nation. After we applauded these individuals, the MC asked all of us to stand as he proceeded to sing the National Anthem. The men who were scheduled to race 4-wheelers for our enjoyment between monster truck action then carried a very large American flag into the centre of the arena and slowly waved it up and down, like the parachute activity in elementary school gym class. As any other sporting event, this series of acts marked the true beginning of the show.

These acts of reverence for our country then faded into Toby Keith's 'The Angry American.' This song was written and recorded after September 11th and begins by demonstrating appreciation for the veterans but soon turns into chest pounding pride in America's destruction with lyrics like, 'we lit up your world like the 4th of July,' and, 'we'll put a boot in your ass, it's the American way.' My experience with this song stems mostly from karaoke nights in small bars in rural Kentucky, and although the entire song and the more explicit lyrics were not played over the sound system, most of the audience members were familiar with the song, some of them singing along with the portions that were played. On some level then, those responsible for running the Monster Jam show are aligning the experience, whether intentionally or not, with a very specific American identity. Referring back to the discussion of masculinity above, (as aggressive, competitive, physically dominant, and powerful) this song and this industry are therefore promoting a very masculine and violent sense of what it means to be American often credited to rural, white, working-class Americans.

This explicit alignment of these amazingly powerful machines with American-made products and the American flag is consciously reflecting a sense of American patriotism that appeals to the monster truck fan demographic. Cynical Bill Geist, from CBS, has described this audience as:

> Middle American, I suppose, somewhat on the country-and-western side, somewhere between a Daytona 500 crowd and a World Wrestling Federation audience. Demographic studies show 81 per cent drink beer (probably *were drinking* at the moment they were surveyed), and 52 per cent 'use tobacco' (in a variety of disgusting ways). Some are middle-class suburbanites, others – well, it frightens you to think that they, too, have the right to vote, although it does explain a lot.[18]

His 'sense of humour' comes off as offensive in this description. I assume what he means by this is white, rural, working class males. Although I do not support what Geist claims, I can also say from personal experience that my politics don't always align with members of this demographic and that their version of patriotism sometimes includes blind loyalty to the nation and blind hatred of our national 'enemies.' In order to more fully understand what version of American patriotism is reflected by monster trucks, research and interviews would need to be conducted with fans and monster truck employees.

This clear correlation between monster trucks and America, particularly American masculinity, is fascinating on its own. However, the exportation of Monster Jam internationally is where the future of this study lies. In 2007, Clear Channel's branch of motorsports sold Monster Jam to Feld Entertainment's branch Feld Motorsports. Feld Entertainment also owns Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus along with Disney Live! and Disney on Ice. Although the Monster Jam monster trucks have been travelling around the world for several years to mostly European countries, Feld Entertainment's reputation and connections in other countries have opened the doors for the industry to enter several South American countries, Panama, Costa Rica, and Mexico. It is not that other countries don't have the desire or fascination for trucks that the United States has that makes this so complex. Rather it is the

exportation of destruction and a very conservative and arrogant form of patriotism that accompanies the monster trucks that complicates it. We have reached a point in the study of monster trucks that the foundational American Studies concepts, calling upon the fascination with western expansion and American exceptionalism to make sense of the popularity of off-road and 4x4 trucks, cannot fully explain this phenomenon. It must now be considered within the larger global context.

American Studies has been thrusting itself forward and examining the global context and cultural exchange between nations in an effort to reconceptualise the boundaries of the discipline. Recent works in American Studies like that of Caroline Levander and Robert Levine have acknowledged the need for scholars to set their sights beyond the borders of the United States, focusing primarily on the American hemisphere. They see the focus on the nation and national boundaries as problematic and instead want to move beyond the nation, 'not to abandon the concept of the nation but rather to adopt new perspectives that allow us to view the nation beyond the terms of its own exceptionalist self-imaginings.'[19] They are clear to explain though that, 'moving beyond the nation does not mean abandoning the idea of nation but rather recognizing its dynamic elements and fluid, ever-changing, essentially contingent nature.'[20] For the contributors of this book, the ever-changing international connections are an invaluable source of study, focusing on the north/south hemisphere. However, what they are suggesting can just as easily be applied to the east/west.

With monster trucks traveling further and further south and further and further east, they should also be evaluated in this ever-expanding context. The implications of the exportation of this industry, and with it a very particular image of a dominant and masculine United States, are sure to be quite extensive. However, I am reluctant to claim anything as definitive because I have not had the opportunity to experience Monster Jam in any country other than the United States. The extent of my knowledge is on this topic is the Monster Jam website. On the website, a visitor can click on international dates which then link to the Monster Jam page designed for that country. Besides the United States, the only upcoming shows are in Europe, specifically Denmark, Sweden, Holland, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. Naturally the websites about the Monster Jam shows are in each country's official language, making most of them incomprehensible to me. However, the imagery is the same on each page, showing a truck in mid-flight or bounding over junk cars. This demonstrates that the international monster truck shows exhibit the same sorts of stunts and competitions as well as emphasize the power and destruction of which these American trucks are capable. However, the lists of trucks to appear in Europe include Monster Jam favourites or iconic characters such as Grave Digger, Monster Mutt Dalmatian, Ironman, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle, and Taz, but none of the particularly American themed trucks. I also imagine that none of the international shows have the same reverence for the United States as exhibited by the flag waving and performance of the National Anthem. Ultimately then, monster trucks are not overtly exporting American culture and themes with the use of patriotic trucks or songs, but rather with more subtle messages. The trucks themselves, no matter what they are called or how they are painted, are still representations of a purely American form of masculinity and fascination with destruction. The meaning and the performance of these trucks will remain the same regardless of the extent to which they are stripped of their national identity.

In order to fully understand monster trucks and how their meaning may or may not change in different national, or international, contexts, more extensive studies will need to be conducted. The reception of this form of entertainment by audience members in each individual country must also be thoroughly addressed, even with audiences in the United States. A comparison of the demographic of fans in the United States with international audiences could also be quite revealing, raising questions of socio-economic status and differing values. Not

only will such a study further the understanding of monster trucks, but also give insight into how this distinct form of American patriotism and these particular American values are presented and received internationally. It could suggest some important characteristics of the relationship of the United States with the rest of the world, for the good or bad.

Although monster trucks shows are by no means seen as the most representative sport of American culture, it is growing and expanding on the world stage. It is important that we consider exactly what is being said about the United States as this form of entertainment travels abroad and whether or not this is truly an accurate image of our nation. This brief history and analysis of this phenomenon in the American context only raises more questions about what exactly the draw to these trucks is for large audiences all over the world, especially to the extent that each year they are entering more countries. In order to fully understand this phenomenon, it must be more closely examined on the world stage and engage with the fans and employees of monster truck shows.

Notes

[1] Feld Motor Sports, *2010 Monster Jam Official Souvenir Yearbook* (Brimfield, OH: Hess Press Solutions, 2010), 2.

[2] This historical information, and subsequent information treated as general knowledge, is derived from a number of children's books, as well as popular books and video, which all contain the same facts about monster trucks. See Scott D. Johnston, *Monster Truck Racing* (Minneapolis: Capstone Press, 1994); Tracy Nelson Maurer, *Roaring Rides: Monster* Trucks (Vero Beach, FL: Rourke Publishing LLC, 2004); Sue Mead, *Monster Trucks and Tractors* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2006); Michael O'Hearn, *The Kids' Guide to Monster Trucks* (Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2010); Lee-Anne T. Spalding, *Monster Truck Racing: The Thrill of Racing* (Vero Beach, FL: Rourke Publishing LLC, 2009) for examples of this information directed towards children. See Bill Geist, 'Monster Trucks' in *Monster Trucks and Hair-In-A-Can: Who Says America Doesn't Make Anything Anymore* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1994) and 'Monster Trucks,' *Modern Marvels: Technology Collection* (A&E Home Video, 2007) for more in-depth information about Bill Chandler.

[3] Kathleen Franz, *Tinkering: Consumers Reinvent the Early Automobile* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 66.

[4] Reynold M. Wik, 'The Early Automobile and the American Farmer', in *The Automobile and American Culture*, ed. by David L. Lewis and Laurence Goldstein (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1986), 44.

[5] Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 78-82.

[6] For specific examples of creation out of culture see Glassie, *Material Culture* and Pravina Shukla, *The Grace of Four Moons: Dress, Adornment, and the Art of the Body in Modern India* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), the latter of which explores how daily dress is a form of creation out of culture.

[7] Like the published works on monster trucks, most works on demolition derbies are written for children. The factual information presented here was taken from Nicki Clausen-Grace, *Demolition Derbies: The Thrill of Racing* (Vero Beach, FL: Rourke Publishing LLC, 2009) and Richard Huff, *Demolition Derby* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2000).

[8] Huff, *Demolition Derby*, 37.

[9] 'Monster Trucks,' *Modern Marvels: Technology Collection.*

[10] 'Monster Jam', accessed 25 April 2010, <http://www.monsterjam.com/>.

[11] 'Monster Trucks,' *Modern Marvels: Technology Collection.*

[12] Spalding, *Monster Truck Racing*, 10.
[13] 'Monster Trucks,' *Modern Marvels: Technology Collection.*
[14] David Goewey's article 'Careful You May Run out of Planet' was this inspiration for this idea. Though he doesn't categorize truck names in the same way, he makes the connection between the trucks and the American Myth. David Goewey, 'Careful, You May Run Out of Planet: SUVs and the Exploitation of the American Myth,' in *Signs of Life in the USA: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*, ed. Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon, 5th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006), 119-129.
[15] Peter Steinhart, 'Our Off-Road Fantasy,' in *The Automobile and American Culture*, ed. David L. Lewis and Laurence Goldstein (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1986), 350.
[16] Simon J. Bronner, *Manly Traditions: The Folk Roots of American Masculinities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), xi.
[17] It should be noted that while the conflation with the truck and masculinity is often seen as an American phenomenon, it does exist in other countries. Ralph Bolton, for example, discusses masculinity among Peruvian truckers as exemplified by the mottoes written on the side of their trucks (falling under categories which express power and independence, bragging and self-praise, aggression/insults/challenges, and sexuality) in his article 'Machismo in Motion.' Ralph Bolton, 'Machismo in Motion: The Ethos of Peruvian Truckers' in *Ethos* 7.4 (1979): 312-342.
[18] Geist, 'Monster Trucks,' 54.
[19] Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, eds., *Hemispheric American Studies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 7.
[20] Ibid., 9.

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Monstrous Literature: The Case of Dacre Stoker's *Dracula the Undead*

Hannah Priest

Abstract

Dracula the Undead describes itself as the 'official' sequel to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. This authorisation comes from the fact that the book was written by Stoker's great-grandnephew, Dacre Stoker (with screenwriter Ian Holt), apparently with the blessing of the 'Stoker family'. The book has received a lot of negative criticism, with readers describing it as an 'outrage' and an 'abomination'. Indeed, by most accepted literary standards, the book is not good. Simplistic sentence structure and paragraphing; inconsistent characterisation and character development; and gratuitous sex and violence fill the pages. Moreover, the book's (both implicit and overt) revision of Bram Stoker's original novel, and the adherence to plot elements found in Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 film, have left some Dracula 'purists' less than satisfied. This article will discuss *Dracula the Undead* as a piece of 'monstrous' fiction. However, the monstrosity of this book does not lie simply in its (subjective) quality. I will examine both the text itself and its lengthy peritexts to explore the ways in which the novel functions as a 'monster' – resisting categorisation, blurring boundaries, revealing something about the readers who approach it. What is at stake (no pun intended) when we identify ourselves as 'Dracula purists'? Can *Dracula* (or indeed any novel) be said to exist in a 'pure' form? This article will argue that *Dracula the Undead* serves to unsettle the relationships between text, author and reader; furthermore, I will examine the reasons why this book might be considered an 'abomination', and the implications of such a reaction. I argue that this book, like all good monsters, encourages scrutiny of the culture which created it, and of the community which rejected it.

Key Words

Dracula, film, Ian Holt, literature, Bram Stoker, Dacre Stoker, vampire.

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Published in 2009, *Dracula the Undead* describes itself as the 'official' sequel to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). This authorisation comes from the fact that the book was written by Stoker's great-grandnephew, Dacre Stoker (with screenwriter and 'well-known Dracula historian' Ian Holt), apparently with the blessing of the 'Stoker family'.[1] While some reviews have heaped effusive praise on the novel, the book has also received a lot of negative feedback. Readers have described it as an 'abomination' and a 'monstrosity', and as being 'in a class of putrid wretchedness all its own'.[2] This article will explore the ways in which this novel might be said to function like a monster, and the implications this has for our relationship to literature and its authors. As I will show, our response to this work may, in fact, tell us more about ourselves – and our investment in canonical literature - than about Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt's writing.

To begin, I will give a brief overview of the plot of *Dracula the Undead*. Set 25 years after the events of Bram Stoker's novel, *Dracula the Undead* follows the fate of the central characters of *Dracula* as they are faced with a new (though, as it turns out, actually old) enemy. It introduces the character of Quincey Harker, Jonathan and Mina's son, who is determined to become an actor and work with the great Romanian star, Basarab. As Quincey forms a relationship with the mysterious Basarab (and even the less astute reader is able to guess

Basarab's true identity early on), Dr. Seward and Jonathan Harker are gruesomely murdered by the legendary Countess Elizabeth Bathory. Bathory, it seems, was the true villain of *Dracula*; the eponymous antagonist of Bram Stoker's work is presented as a soldier of God, mistaken for the killer by the deluded 'Band of Heroes' – a phrase which appears sparingly in *Dracula*, but is used repeatedly throughout *Dracula the Undead* to describe the Harkers and their friends. Drawing heavily on Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 film, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, this sequel makes much of the love affair between Mina and Dracula, presenting Jonathan and Mina's marriage as both loveless and sexless. Unable to deal with the fact that his wife lost her virginity to the vampiric count, Jonathan drinks heavily and visits prostitutes. Once the truth about Dracula's goodness and Bathory's evil is revealed, Mina is reunited with Dracula, and Quincey discovers that he is, in fact, the vampire's son. The novel ends with Mina and Dracula's apparent deaths in Whitby, but, in a sequel-suggesting twist, two mysterious crates are loaded onto the *Titanic* in the final pages. Additionally, there are several significant subplots, including a staging of *Dracula* directed by 'Bram Stoker' himself, and the investigation of the Jack the Ripper murders, during which it is revealed that Van Helsing was considered to be a prime suspect at the time of the Whitechapel killings.

There are no objective or empirical criteria against which we can measure a book's quality. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify examples of 'bad craftsmanship', cliché and stylistic insecurity throughout the novel. Simplistic sentence structure and paragraphing; inconsistent characterisation and character development; both anachronism *and* heavy-handed historical detail; and gratuitous sex and violence (including lesbian sado-masochism) fill the pages. However, the 'monstrosity' of this book does not lie simply in its (subjective) quality. The criticisms which could be levelled at the writing style and technique of the two authors could equally be applied to the work of many other novelists, and will not form the basis of my argument in this article. Instead, I will explore the implications of reading this book as a monster. What is it about the novel that moves readers to reject it as an 'abomination' and an 'outrage'? Why do reader reviews suggest that we should 'stake and burn' this book?[3]

1. Rewriting the Canon

One of the main problems readers appear to have with *Dracula the Undead* lies in its (both implicit and overt) revision of Bram Stoker's original novel. For example, though the events of Stoker's novel apparently take place in 1893, *Dracula the Undead* resituates them to 1888 in order to associate the vampiric murders with Jack the Ripper (who, it transpires, was Elizabeth Bathory all along). The book itself contains lengthy peritexts – an afterword by Dr. Elizabeth Miller and a co-written Authors' Note by Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt – in which these alterations are laboriously explained. Miller argues that the change in date is 'necessary', and suggests that it is 'without question' that Bram Stoker knew of the Jack the Ripper case.[4] The implication here is that Stoker's novel may well have been informed by the Whitechapel murders, even if he did not realise it himself. Throughout their exegeses, Miller, Stoker and Holt seem to be at great pains to absolve *Dracula the Undead* of any 'cannibalization and bastardization' by recourse to their claim that 'it's what Bram would have wanted'.[5] Indeed, the paperback edition of the novel reprints Bram Stoker's handwritten notes upon which the sequel is ostensibly based.[6]

To argue for the change in antagonist, Miller argues that the name of Elizabeth Bathory has been 'inextricably connected with Stoker and his novel', despite the paradoxical fact that there is 'even less evidence of a connection with Stoker and his book'.[7] In the framework of her argument, Miller's comments seem contradictory. She gives no explanation as to how or why Bathory's name has been connected with Stoker's narrative. If we view Miller's afterword in terms of literary criticism, it reads as a somewhat confused attempt to argue that, had Bram

Stoker known the history of Bathory – and, indeed, had he been able to foresee the extent to which Bathory would become associated with vampire fiction in the twentieth century – he would have made reference to her legend in his novel.

The claim that the authors are somehow writing the sequel that Bram Stoker himself would have penned has been roundly mocked and derided by readers. Customer comments on Amazon regularly refer to Bram Stoker 'spinning in his grave'.[8] One reader refers to it as a 'literary rape'; another as a 'misinterpretation' of Stoker's original novel.[9] These criticisms, however, point more to readers' relationships to *Dracula* than to any shortcomings in the sequel. And it is here, I would argue, that the monstrosity of Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt's book begins to take shape.

To illustrate this, I would draw attention to the ostensible 'change' Dacre Stoker and Holt make to Mina and Dracula's relationship. Though there is no explicit mention of a sexual interaction between Mina and Dracula in Bram Stoker's novel, the passage in which Mina is found drinking Dracula's blood has been noted by a number of scholars and writers as being fraught with ambiguity. Seward, Van Helsing, Arthur Holmwood and Quincey Morris burst into the Harkers' bedroom to find Jonathan unconscious and Mina feeding from Dracula:

> With his [Dracula's] left hand he held both Mrs Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast, which was shown by his torn-open dress.[10]

This scene can be read in a number of ways: it is at once a grotesque inversion of breast-feeding; the climactic 'invasion' of Western civilised modernity by Eastern medieval 'other'; the terrifying revelation of the permeability of body and self. Yet the 'white nightdress', stained with blood, also has connotations of a wedding night defloration of a virgin. As her blood-smeared dress is revealed to the assembled company, Mina realises she is now 'unclean', and that she is inextricably tied to the man who has rendered her thus.[11]

Dacre Stoker and Holt use this episode as the basis for their Mina/Dracula love story, as Coppola had previously done in his 1992 film. Both texts remove any ambiguity from the passage and present it as a straightforward, and, in the case of *Dracula the Undead*, procreative sexual consummation. Yet if the original passage is so ambiguous, how can we safely label *Dracula the Undead* a 'misinterpretation'? How can there be a 'true' interpretation against which this can be measured?

It is interesting that many negative reviews are written by people who define themselves as 'Dracula purists'.[12] This implies that there is a 'pure' reading of *Dracula* from which the authors of *Dracula the Undead* have strayed. But can a novel truly exist in a 'pure' form? Terry Eagleton argues that 'there is no reading of a work which is not also a 're-writing'.[13] In considering the 'status of the text as a dialogical formation', Thomas Docherty asserts:

> [T]he authority ascribed in it [the text] is intrinsically multiple and self-transforming; it is subject to modification or even substantial change depending on the different socio-historical situations in which the text is articulated, enacted, produced or – more simply – understood.[14]

Thus, *all* readers (unconsciously) do what Dacre Stoker and Holt have done – they read, rewrite and reinterpret literature according to their own social and cultural experiences. That this is the case with the Mina/Dracula storyline can be seen by the wealth of vampire literature

and film that has followed Stoker's 1897 novel. With the exception of F.W. Murnau's 1922 *Nosferatu* (and a few, lesser-known, others), cinema has consistently recast Dracula as a romantic or sexually seductive lead. From Hammer's semi-orgasmic victims succumbing to Christopher Lee's dapper vamp, to the comedy horror *Love at First Bite* (1979), 'readers' of Dracula have seen something sexual in the bite of the vampire. Moreover, as Milly Williamson argues in her consideration of *The Lost Boys* (1987), the figure of the romantic or sympathetic vampire is so ingrained in vampire fans' consciousness, 'fans will often read it into texts lacking overtly sympathetic vampires.'[15] It seems that *everyone* thinks that Dracula is sexual – even Bram Stoker leaves a hint to that effect – so why is it so wrong when Dacre Stoker and Holt follow suit?

The answer to this question is twofold. Firstly, while literary theorists have long denied the existence of 'pure' texts or singular readings, our experience of reading fiction does not always agree. As Geoffrey Hartman argues, 'it is hard to conceive of a literary reader who is not immersed in the search for an exemplary text.'[16] We read novels as complete products; imagine that we know what the author meant to say; argue against alternate readings; feel a shiver of distaste when we see an 'inaccurate' or 'inauthentic' adaptation. We lose ourselves in this fiction of completeness and temporarily deny the instability of literature. Dacre Stoker and Holt's lengthy Authors' Note rips away this fiction and reveals – like a magician explaining a trick – that all readings are, in fact, rewritings.

2. Literature and Authorship

As is quite often the case in a consideration of the monstrous, I must refer back to the etymological root of *monster* – the Latin *monere* or *monstrare* (to warn or to show). As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues in his influential article 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', 'monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place'.[17] I suggest the monstrosity of *Dracula the Undead* comes from the fact that it shows us something that we would rather not see – it says something we would rather leave unspoken. It shatters the illusion of literature, and leaves us questioning the boundaries we have created.

This becomes starkly apparent in the negative reaction to the authors themselves. Dacre Stoker is a Canadian pentathlete with no previous writing experience; Ian Holt is a former actor and screenwriter. Holt's only other writing credit is for the 2005 film, *Dr. Chopper*, the synopsis of which reads: 'Five young friends head out to the country for a weekend at the family cabin and run afoul of a group of motorcycle riding madwomen led by the sadistic, knife-wielding plastic surgeon Dr. Fielding.'[18] If a pentathelete and straight-to-DVD hack 'n' slash screenwriter can pen a piece of fiction and have it nominated for the Best First Novel category of the Thriller Awards, does that trouble our concept of 'literature'?

More than many debut novelists, Stoker and Holt have had their credentials as 'writers' questioned; they have also been accused of writing 'fan fiction'.[19] Henry Jenkins argues that fan fiction moves us 'towards a world where all of us can participate in the creation and circulation of cultural myths.'[20] Thus, in defining Stoker and Holt's work as 'fan fiction', critics are destabilizing the pre-eminence of the writers, and suggesting that they are simply part of a 'world' in which cultural creation and circulation are open to all. It is somewhat appropriate that, as I work on this article, nearly 200,000 people around the globe are preparing themselves to take part in the National Novel Writing Month (known as NaNoWriMo). This annual event requires individuals to produce a 50,000 word novel in a month. Participants log on to a website, record their daily word count, and are offered support and encouragement by other writers. At the end of the month, anyone who achieves the 50,000 word count is awarded a certificate. The website for NaNoWriMo makes it clear that this is not designed to foster or develop the 'craft' of writing: '[I]t's all about quantity, not quality.'[21] This approach to writing,

where output is measured only by a 'web-based team of robotic word counters', and where entrants produce 'laughably awful yet lengthy prose', nevertheless creates products which are continuously described as 'novels'.[22] Moreover, the fact that participants need have no prior writing credits or experience to take part unsettles our notion of a 'novelist' or 'author' as artisan or creator. As the NaNoWriMo website states of its participants: 'They started the month as auto mechanics, out-of-work actors, and middle school English teachers. They walked away novelists.'[23]

Both NaNoWriMo and *Dracula the Undead* serve to question the categories that, though hard to define, are crucial to our experience of consuming textual products. Though theorists may argue as to what exactly 'literature' is, as readers we base our consumption of text on the premise that there is a distinction between 'novels' and pages of continuous type. Coupled with this assumption is the idea that a 'writer' is a person capable of producing 'literature'. It is over forty years since Roland Barthes argued for the death of the Author, and yet readers still look to this shadowy figure for a reassuring anchor in a sea of prose. What the figures of Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt do, along with the NaNoWriMo competition, is to strip the mystique from the author. A novel writer is not, it seems, a *special* person. They need have no particular talent, training or 'gift' for creation. A novelist could be anyone; a novelist could be me – or you. To return to the definition of the monstrous, Cohen argues that 'the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions.'[24] *Dracula the Undead* functions in much this way. It offers us the unsettling – and potentially dangerous – indication that there may be no distinction between novelists and 'ordinary' people. Maybe there is no distinction between fan fiction and literature.

As I noted above, Elizabeth Miller attempts to qualify Dacre Stoker and Holt's inclusion of Elizabeth Bathory in their novel by recourse to the popular association of Bathory with Dracula. While Miller's argument may seem an unconvincing and over-stretched *literary* argument, it can be clarified through recourse to the language of fandom. The story of Elizabeth Bathory does not appear in the Dracula 'canon' (i.e. the novel as written by Bram Stoker), yet it is an accepted part of Dracula 'fanon'. The term fanon refers to interpretations and theories posited (and wholly accepted) by fans, but which do not appear in the canonical text. Examples of fanon can include the ascribing of names to nameless characters, developments of ambiguous relationships, and character backstories that are absent from the 'authoritative' text. Key examples of Dracula fanon include the family relationship between Dracula and Elizabeth Bathory, the sexual/romantic relationship between Dracula and Mina, and the expansion of Renfield's character to have him as the solicitor who visited Transylvania before Jonathan Harker. Thus, Dacre Stoker and Holt's novel adheres to the fanon of *Dracula*, even in places where it deviates from canon.

Nonetheless, it should be remembered that, in many significant respects, *Dracula the Undead* is not a piece of fan fiction. It is a published book, available only by exchanging money with a bookseller. It is not an open source text; it is not available freely to all. Furthermore, Dacre Stoker and Holt assert their identities as 'Authors' throughout the peritexts, and they often do this through the invocation of the 'Author-supreme' of their source material. Considering the relationship between authorship and authority, Maurice Biriotti has argued that although academic discourse has attacked the 'unquestioning acceptance of the authority of the canonical Author':

> [I]n schools and universities, in the media and even among some of the various branches of literary theory, the canon persists, and the names of authors […] continue to exercise great authority. To conjure up these names is to authorise and legitimise one's own discourse.[25]

The Author – and his concomitant Authority – is continually conjured in *Dracula the Undead* and its peritexts. The front cover of the UK paperback edition proclaims that this 'official' sequel is written by Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt. Stoker's name is written in bold white type across the dark background, with the surname in a slightly larger typeface. Holt's name is underneath, in smaller and darker type, and does not appear at all on the book's spine. The back page blurb describes the book as the 'authorized' sequel.[26] Inside, the book is dedicated to 'Bram' in gratitude for his 'inspiration' and 'guidance', despite the fact that neither author was alive to meet with, or be guided by, Bram Stoker before his death.[27] This conjuration of the Author continues in the novel's after-words. Elizabeth Miller begins her comments with a potted biography of Bram Stoker; Dacre Stoker starts his note by affirming 'I am a Stoker'; and Ian Holt explains how, after conceiving the idea of a sequel to *Dracula*, he made contact with 'the Stoker family patriarch'.[28] Throughout the peritexts, the Author is presented as an authoritative, patriarchal figure. While critics may question Dacre Stoker's writing credentials, he presents his own authorisation through patrilineage. His authority is purely patronymic and inherited; he claims that he has 'got a little bit [of my ancestor's skills] in the bloodline'.[29]

Readers also conjure the Author in order to validate their criticisms of the book. Leslie S. Klinger comments that:

> Although it comes billed as 'the authorized sequel,' it's unlikely that Bram Stoker would have ever authorized this work. That's not to say that 'The Un-Dead' (Bram Stoker's first choice of title for his own novel) is a bad book, just that no author would permit a sequel that baldly claims the original got the story wrong.[30]

Note that Klinger here uses the same insistence on Bram Stoker's projected intentions and choices as is found in Dacre Stoker and Holt's notes for *Dracula the Undead*. The questions of Author and Authorisation loom large.

And yet, Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt do attempt to effect the 'death of the Author'. 'Bram Stoker' and his 1897 novel appear as 'characters' in *Dracula the Undead*, and, as Klinger notes, the later novel and its after-words regularly point out places where Bram Stoker 'got the story wrong'. The implication here, then, is that the 'story' transcends an individual Author and can be picked up and clarified by others. This is reminiscent of the current trend for 'monster mash-up' novels, in which a 'classic' text is revisited and revised through the addition of vampires, zombies and other popular monsters. The first of these books was *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, the blurb of which claims that the novel 'transforms a masterpiece of world literature into something you'd actually want to read'.[31] This resonates with Docherty's analysis of contemporary notions of 'understanding' a text, which imply a world 'within which we can either agree or disagree with the 'author' of the text under discussion.'[32] Dacre Stoker and Holt go one step further. In Chapter 42 of *Dracula the Undead*, which begins with the words 'Here lies the body of Bram Stoker…,' the author is literally killed by Dracula and his novel defaced with the scrawled word 'LIES!'[33] Nevertheless, as 'Bram Stoker' – or 'Jane Austen' in the case of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* – dies, a new authoritative voice is born. Both *Dracula the Undead* and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* carry (somewhat ironic) legal disclaimers in their front matter: 'All rights reserved', and 'Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt assert the moral right to be identified as the authors of this work.'[34] The Author is dead; long live the Author.

Obviously, Jane Austen and Bram Stoker are unable to engage in this appropriation of their writing. Living authors, however, are often resistant to a denial of their Authority. Famously (or, one might say, infamously), novelist Anne Rice took advantage of Amazon.com's open review forum to post a lengthy response to critics of her 2003 novel, *Blood Canticle*. In her post, Rice refers to the 'outrageous stupidity' and 'stupid arrogant assumptions'

of readers, suggesting that they 'are interrogating this text from the wrong perspective' and 'aren't even reading it'.[35] She ends by instructing readers who are dissatisfied with her work to return it to her, giving an address and offering a refund. Rice's comments provoked heated discussions between fans, ex-fans and critics on the Amazon review page, with some criticising her as 'juvenile' and 'foolish', and asking if it is 'really so difficult to believe that not everyone who reads this book will like it as much as you do?'[36] Rice eventually had the post removed from Amazon, but many readers, having copied and saved it, continue to repost it at regular intervals, undermining the author's attempts to contain her prose. Rice's efforts to control the *Vampire Chronicles* texts are not limited to her Amazon response. Unlike many authors of speculative fiction, such as J.K. Rowling, who claim to be flattered at the appropriation of their work by fan fiction writers, Rice sent an unequivocal message to fan writers via her own webpage in 2000:

> I do not allow fan fiction.
> The characters are copyrighted. It upsets me terribly to even think about fan fiction with my characters. I advise readers to write your own original stories with your own characters.
> It is absolutely essential that you respect my wishes.[37]

The response to this was that Anne Rice fan fiction was immediately removed from most websites, with unsubstantiated allegations of harassment and threats being made against its authors and their businesses. Anne Rice fan fiction writers went 'into hiding' with various people claiming that they knew such fiction was still being produced, but were unable (or unwilling) to reveal where it could be found. The 'death of the Author' debate here leaves the pages of academic scholarship, and begins to impact on people's activities and 'real life' experiences.[38]

What the Anne Rice debacle and the publication of *Dracula the Undead* and 'monster mash-ups' reveals is that the Author is an intrinsic figure in contemporary fiction, but one which is often invoked in order to be destroyed. David Glover argues that the 'multitude of readings and retellings' of *Dracula* have resulted in 'an extended cultural narrative in which the author has become an indispensable character, to be addressed or dismissed at will.'[39] Authors are 'indispensable' as they allow for a proliferation of text: *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* utterly relies on the figure of Jane Austen for its very existence. Nevertheless, once conjured, this Author is put to the sword. We are left with the unsettling presence of the Undead Author – continually slain by academics, readers, fans and texts – but refusing to remain in the grave.

To further problematise the figure of the individual Author, *Dracula the Undead* also reveals the mechanisms of its own publication and marketing. The spectre of the 'textual community', so often disavowed by the enthusiastic reader, is writ large across the textual product that is Dacre Stoker and Holt's novel. The lengthy acknowledgements following the text, though common to most contemporary fiction, go beyond recognition of specific acts of assistance or co-operation. Holt thanks family and friends, but also academics who have fostered his ambitions. That these people are to be understood as integral to the book's production is shown by Holt's incorporation of dead individuals into his Author persona: 'Through me you all live on, for I will carry you with me the rest of my days.'[40] He goes on to acknowledge agents, editors, business partners and researchers, all of whom are presented as necessary to the creation of a final product. Stoker's acknowledgements are equally expansive. He begins by dedicating the work to 'all who carry the Stoker blood', referring to the patrilineal bloodline Stoker claims as the source of his creative output.[41] Although he stops short of thanking a roll call of screen actors and directors involved with productions of *Dracula* (as Holt

does), Stoker lists a genealogist, a literary society and assorted archivists and historians who have contributed (in unspecified ways) to the production of the book. The involvement of many of these individuals is expanded on in the Authors' Note.

Perhaps the most striking example of textual collusion, however, is on the part of the publishers – HarperCollins – and their marketing department. As I have outlined above, *Dracula the Undead* goes some way to 'rewriting' Bram Stoker's original novel. The introduction of the character of Elizabeth Bathory is written backwards into the events of *Dracula*. Van Helsing explains:

> After learning of her horrible killings, the Ripper murders, Dracula came to England in 1888 for one purpose – to destroy Bathory. He did not flee back to his castle in fear of us. It was Bathory who fled in fear of Dracula. […] She tricked us all. The wounds we inflicted on Dracula weakened him and made it possible for Bathory to deliver what she thought was the final blow.[42]

This exposition is, of course, as much for the benefit of the readers as the assembled characters. It explains to us how we must now read *Dracula*; it inserts a new character into Bram Stoker's work that was not there before.

Complicit in this overt rewriting of *Dracula* is the publishing house. The front cover of the UK edition of *Dracula the Undead* depicts a featureless, nondescript Victorian street framed by a dark Gothic archway. In the centre of this is a figure, facing away from the reader and cloaked in a full-length red hooded gown. The narrow shoulders and the cut of the garment suggest that the figure is female, and as Bathory is associated with the colour red throughout *Dracula the Undead*, the implication is that the cloaked figure is the Countess.[43] On the inside front and back covers of the UK paperback are adverts for a repackaged HarperCollins edition of *Dracula* – 'the Gothic masterpiece'.[44] On the cover of this advertised book is exactly the same red cloaked figure, this time framed by a featureless graveyard and leafless trees. The publishers have completed the work begun by Dacre Stoker and Holt. Elizabeth Bathory is now present in Bram Stoker's novel – though on its covers, rather than between them.

This clear indication of the role of the publisher reminds us that novels are products of print capitalism. The novel form does not exist prior to either the invention of the printing press or the development of capitalist societal structures. However, in late capitalism – with continual supply replacing supply and demand – the novel comes to be understood as a product of market, rather than of culture. As such, the increasingly visible activities of agents, editors, publishers and marketing staff threaten to disrupt (and even destroy) our conceptions of Author and Text. Consider, for example, the recent publication of the *House of Night* series of young adult vampire novels. At the beginning of *Betrayed* (the second in the series), author P.C. Cast thanks her agent 'who came up with the fabulous idea that began this series'.[45] Any romantic notion of the creative genius is roundly dispelled here. Coupled with this, and with the rise in an 'anyone can write a novel' mentality epitomized by NaNoWriMo, is an anxiety that aspiring writers will never be able to *sell* their finished work. Though there are, undoubtedly, many websites and books still devoted to the craft of writing, or to characterisation and plotting, recent years have seen an explosion of instructive texts detailing how to approach agents, how to begin marketing work, how to create a 'platform' for a novel, and how to use social media to build a market. Many agents and publishers now ask for a marketing plan as well as a synopsis of an unpublished work.

If this late capitalist approach to the novel transforms the relationship between Author and Text, it also problematises our concept of the Reader. Readers are no longer seen as individuals forming independent relationships with Text (and Author), but as consumers to be

fought over in an increasingly competitive market place. Again, this process is made abundantly clear in the case of *Dracula the Undead*. The novel's website offers information about the book, but also gives consumers the opportunity to purchase further merchandise, such as clothing, and to expand their consumption of the novel. In, perhaps, the ultimate acknowledgement of the novel as late capitalist product, the website offers a link for consumers wishing to take out a *Dracula the Undead* Visa card.[46] The novel breaks free of its assumed boundaries and proliferates across multiple forms of consumerism. Like a monster, 'its very existence is a rebuke to boundary and enclosure'.[47]

3. Chronology

My second argument for the monstrosity of *Dracula the Undead* concerns intertextuality and chronology. Monsters frequently trouble temporal categories. The very idea of being 'undead' defies the human life cycle; moreover, monsters burst anachronistically into 'our' time (from prehistory, from previous centuries, from the future). *Dracula the Undead* also troubles our notion of the progression of time. As a 'sequel' to *Dracula*, one expects the novel to follow on from the events of its predecessor. While this is undoubtedly the case, the novel also makes explicit and implicit reference to texts written after Bram Stoker's novel. Thus, we have Sergeant Lee, Lieutenant Jourdan, Dr. Langella and Inspector Huntley – all named for actors who portrayed Dracula in the late twentieth-century.

Even more striking is obvious influence of film and television, as seen in this example where Mina kills one of Bathory's henchwomen:

> In the second that it took for the Woman in White to reach her, Mina lost control of her body. [...] Mina watched her own hand grab Holmwood's broken walking stick and hold it in front of her like a spearman meeting a cavalry charge. The vampire was moving too fast to check her momentum: She impaled herself through the heart on the sharp, broken end of the walking stick.[48]

The sudden rush of defence, the improvised weapon, the self-impaled vampire: this scene seems to owe more to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) than to Bram Stoker's novel. Mina even offers a Buffy-like sardonic quip as the Woman in White dies: 'Didn't your mistress warn you? I'm Dracula's adulterous whore!'[49] Elsewhere, fight scenes take on a 'bullet time' quality inspired by *The Matrix* trilogy (1999-2003), and Inspector Cotford examines a crime scene with the meticulous detail one would expect from *CSI: Victorian London*.[50] In a flashback to Jonathan and Mina's first meeting, Mina quotes a Hebrew proverb – 'He who saves one soul, saves the world entire' – which is likely to be familiar to many readers from Steven Spielberg's 1993 film, *Schindler's List* (or, possibly, from Thomas Keneally's 1992 novel, *Schindler's Ark*, on which Spielberg's film was based); later in the novel, the protagonists receive a cryptic encoded note and must decipher its meaning with reference to religious and geographical history, recalling *The Da Vinci Code* (2006).[51] And it is impossible to read the final confrontation between Quincey and Dracula, as the young hero attempts to kill the dark lord, only to discover in the final seconds that he is, in fact, his father, without thinking of Luke Skywalker and Darth Vadar in *Return of the Jedi* (1983) – indeed, a number of Amazon reviewers have referred to this as the book's 'Star Wars moment'.[52]

These borrowings – and there are many others – from 'later' texts jar with the reader. Even though we know that *Dracula the Undead* was written in 2009, a novel set in 1912 should not make intertextual reference to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. It unsettles the relationship between *Dracula the Undead* and Bram Stoker's novel, by calling attention to cultural productions of the intervening years. However, though we may dismiss this intertextuality as

clunky anachronism, I would also argue that it forces us to question what would comprise 'correct' chronology.

This apparent anachronism on the part of *Dracula the Undead* appears to contrast sharply with the linear chronology of *Dracula*. In Stoker's novel, time is ever-present, highlighted by the dating of documentation such as diaries and newspaper articles, but also underlined by the repetitious reliance on railway schedules as a marker of modernity. However, Glover suggests the *Dracula* can, in fact, be characterised as a 'confusion of temporalities', arguing that 'ancient folktales, medieval legends, and modern obsessions may all be instantaneously present, coalescing with horrifying effect'.[53] This 'confusion' denies a fully linear temporality, as do the echoes of 'future' texts that resound throughout *Dracula the Undead*. Glover argues that *Dracula*, like all of Stoker's novels, is 'the work of a transitional figure, an author nervously glancing back at the past as he strides out into the future'.[54] Thus, the idea of past and future exist simultaneously, and in a problematic relationship, in both *Dracula* and its 'official' sequel.

In an essay on monstrosity and *Beowulf*, Ruth Waterhouse writes:

> Although intertextuality assumes relationships between one text and others, it does not presuppose that those relationships are only linear and chronological. If for an individual a more recent text is a starting point for the exploration of older texts, that intertextuality is as relevant as any other.[55]

To only allow *Dracula the Undead* relationships with *Dracula*, or older texts, would be to impose a 'linear and chronological' intertextuality that is at odds with the ways in which readers are likely to encounter the text. For instance, it is doubtful that a reader of *Dracula the Undead* will be familiar with Stoker's novel, but not with *The Matrix*, *Buffy* or *Star Wars*. As Dacre Stoker and Holt argue themselves: 'We know there is a *large* segment of Dracula fans that have only seen the movies and have never read the book[.]'[56] This is highlighted by the fact that both Amazon.com and Amazon.co.uk list *Dracula the Undead* as 'frequently bought together' with Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and encourage shoppers to buy the books as a pair.[57] This implies that many prospective owners of *Dracula the Undead* are not expected to own a copy of *Dracula*, further suggesting that readers of Dacre Stoker and Holt's novel will not necessarily be familiar with the older text. Thus, the non-linear intertextuality of *Dracula the Undead* mirrors and reveals the experience of readers, uncomfortably suggesting that its relationship with late twentieth-century culture is 'as relevant' as its relationship to Bram Stoker's nineteenth-century novel.

Both *Dracula* and *Dracula the Undead* situate their authors in, or approaching, the future, while looking back at the past with a critical eye. There is, however, an important difference between the chronologies of the two novels. While Bram Stoker set his novel in the present, Dacre Stoker and Holt set theirs in a version of the past. This has implications for their novel's relationship to its source text. Glover argues:

> *Dracula*'s continuing circulation in contemporary popular culture depends upon and sustains a powerful representation of the past as a domain of scandal and error, awaiting exposure by a franker, more enlightened gaze.[58]

As has been argued by many critics, Stoker's own novel makes constant use of an image of the past as a 'domain of scandal and error', but for the authors of *Dracula the Undead*, the error lies on the part of Stoker himself. This further complicates the novel's problematic relationship to Stoker as Author.

By referring, ostensibly anachronistically, to post-*Dracula* texts, the writers posit the idea that Stoker's novel benefits from the clarification and correction of 'future' texts – those which can offer a 'franker, more enlightened gaze'. For example, the inconsistencies in *Dracula* regarding vampiric aversion to religious iconography, garlic and sunlight is explained through recourse to a pseudo-medical discourse of virus, blood disease and allergic reaction. Contemporary readers are likely to be familiar with this discourse, as it is a key part of the *Blade* films (1998-2004). Thus, the 'future' references serve to highlight the 'shortcomings' in Stoker's writing. In this respect, it is significant that the *Dracula the Undead* website describes *Dracula* as the 'prototypical horror novel'.[59] While 'prototype' can mean '[t]he first or primary type of a person or thing; an original on which something is modelled or from which it is derived; an exemplar, an archetype', it can also denote 'a preliminary version made in small numbers for evaluation, or from which improved or modified versions may be developed'.[60] Derrida asserts that a 'future that would not be monstrous would not be a future'.[61] But while the future may be 'uncanny' (in the Freudian sense), *Dracula the Undead* suggests that it is also 'canny' (in the Scottish sense), situating its readers and authors as both anachronistic interlopers and clued-up commentators. I would argue that, through its temporality, the novel reveals itself as utterly vampiric – killing off the source from which it fed, only to reanimate it with an infusion of its own blood.

4. Conclusion

When I propose that *Dracula the Undead* is a piece of monstrous literature, it is not a comment on its merits, quality or 'accuracy'. Rather, the book functions as a monster, revealing (often in a somewhat heavy-handed way) our own preconceptions, prejudices and fears. It troubles our conception of the Author, contributing to a contemporary reliance on the Undead Author as a spectral authority figure who is repeatedly conjured in order to be destroyed. The book's revelation of its own production unsettles any dependence on a romantic ideal of 'creative genius', throwing the novel's relationship to late capitalist structures into uncomfortable relief. It unsettles the relationships between author, text and reader, and encourages scrutiny of the culture which created it, and of the community which rejected it.

Dissatisfied readers have suggested that this monster be at best ignored, at worst destroyed.[62] But, as Cohen warns us, the monster will always return: 'Each time the grave opens and the unquiet slumberer strides forth [...], the message proclaimed is transformed by the air that gives its speaker new life.'[63] Though Cohen is referring here to *all* vampiric monsters, the connection to *Dracula the Undead* and its reception should be apparent. Speaking specifically about Bram Stoker's original novel, Glover suggests that part of its appeal 'lies not only in its spectacular depiction of the return from the dead, but also in its deathlessness *as* narrative, a story that never seems to come to an end, that never quite drops out of circulation.'[64] I suggest that with this deathlessness comes other monstrosity – mutation, appropriation, invasion, permeability. To disavow *Dracula the Undead* would be to deny the deathlessness of *Dracula.* It would be to deny the very monstrousness that has ensured the continuing survival and popularity of Bram Stoker's novel. In fact, it would be to deny the necessary monstrousness that defines literature itself.

Notes

[1] Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt, *Dracula the Undead* (London: HarperCollins, 2009), back cover and 401.

[2] See various product reviews for *Dracula the Undead* on Amazon.com, viewed on 12 August 2010, <http://www.amazon.com/Dracula-Undead-Dacre-Stoker/product-reviews/>.
[3] See various product reviews for *Dracula the Undead* on Amazon.co.uk, viewed on 12 August 2010, <http://www.amazon.co.uk/product-reviews/000731034X/>.
[4] Elizabeth Miller, 'Afterword', in Stoker and Holt, *Dracula the Undead*, 391-98, here 394.
[5] Stoker and Holt, *Dracula the Undead*, 407.
[6] Ibid., 418-419.
[7] Ibid., 396.
[8] See various products reviews on Amazon.co.uk and Amazon.com.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Chatham: BCA, 1993 (1897)), 307.
[11] Ibid., 309.
[12] See various products reviews on Amazon.co.uk and Amazon.com.
[13] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Malden, MA, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Anniversary edition, 2008), 11.
[14] Thomas Docherty, 'Authority, History and the Question of Postmodernism', in *What is an Author?* ed. Maurica Biriotti and Nicola Miller (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 57.
[15] Milly Williamson, *The Lure of the Vampire: Gender, Fiction and Fandom From Bram Stoker to Buffy* (London, New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), 66.
[16] Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Fate of Reading* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1975), 255.
[17] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 20.
[18] Synopsis of *Dr. Chopper* (2005), on *The Internet Movie Database*, viewed on 12 August 2010, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0469899/>.
[19] See, for example, reader comments for Lauren Davis, 'Bram Stoker's Descendent Pens 'Official' Dracula Sequel', *io9*, 17 September 2009, viewed on 19 October 2010, <http://io9.com/5361879/bram-stokers-descendant-pens-official-dracula-sequel>.
[20] Henry Jenkins, 'The Poachers and the Stormtroopers', transcript of a talk presented at the University of Michigan, cited in Williamson, *The Lure of the Vampire*, 98.
[21] 'What is NaNoWriMo', viewed on 20 October 2010, <http://www.nanowrimo.org/whatisnano>.
[22] 'NaNo in a Nutshell', viewed on 20 October 2010, <http://www.nanowrimo.org/eng/node/3699214>.
[23] 'What is NaNoWriMo'.
[24] Cohen, 'Monster Culture', 6.
[25] Maurice Biriotti, 'Introduction: Authorship, Authority, Authorisation', in *What is an Author?*, ed. by Maurica Biriotti and Nicola Miller (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 11.
[26] Stoker and Holt, *Dracula the Undead*, front cover; back cover.
[27] Ibid., dedication.
[28] Ibid., 391, 399, and 403.
[29] Alison Flood, 'Stoker's Blood Relation Resurrects Dracula', *The Guardian*, 6 October 2008, viewed on 10 August 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/oct/06/dracula.dacre.stoker.undead>.

[30] Leslie S. Klinger, '*Dracula the Undead* by Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt', *Los Angeles Times*, 25 October 2009, viewed on 10 August 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/oct/25/entertainment/ca-dacre-stoker25>.
[31] Jane Austen and Seth Graeme-Smith, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (San Francisco: Quirk Productions, 2009), back cover.
[32] Docherty, 'Authority, History and the Question of Postmodernism', 62.
[33] Stoker and Holt, *Dracula the Undead*, 287 and 289.
[34] Ibid., front matter.
[35] Anne Rice, 'From the Author to the Some of the Negative Voices Here [*sic*],' 6 September 2004, viewed on 10 October 2006, <http://www.amazon.com/Blood-Canticle/dp/B0000X8RAM/>. Although Rice's original post has now been removed, it is reposted with regularity by other readers.
[36] See various product reviews on Amazon.com.
[37] Message posted on www.annerice.com, 7 April 2000, viewed on 2 September 2010, archived on <http://web.archive.org/web/20000510114743/http://www/annerice.com/>.
[38] For an overview of the harassment allegations made by fan fiction writers, see <http://www.angelfire.com/rant/croatsan/>. It should be noted again that these allegations are anonymous, unspecific and utterly unsubstantiated.
[39] David Glover, *Vampires, Mummies, and Liberals: Bram Stoker and the Politics of Popular Fiction* (Durham, NC, London: Duke University Press, 1996), 1.
[40] Stoker and Holt, *Dracula the Undead*, 421.
[41] Ibid., 423.
[42] Ibid., 307-308.
[43] Ibid., front cover.
[44] Ibid., inside front cover; inside back cover.
[45] P. C. and Kristin Cast, *Betrayed* (London: Atom Books, 2010 (2007)), Acknowledgements.
[46] See <http://modaentertainment.com/dracula/index.html>.
[47] Cohen, 'Monster Culture', 7.
[48] Stoker and Holt, *Dracula the Undead*, 272.
[49] Ibid.
[50] See, for example, Ibid., 314 or 115.
[51] Ibid., 60 and 284.
[52] See various product reviews on Amazon.co.uk.
[53] Glover, *Vampires, Mummies, and Liberals*, 139.
[54] Ibid., 9.
[55] Ruth Waterhouse, '*Beowulf* as Palimpsest', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 27.
[56] Stoker and Holt, *Dracula the Undead*, 408.
[57] See <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Dracula-Dead-Dacre-Stoker/dp/000731034X/> and <http://www.amazon.com/Dracula-Dead-Dacre-Stoker/dp/0451230515/>.
[58] Glover, *Vampires, Mummies, and Liberals*, 2.
[59] *Dracula the Undead* Official Website, viewed on 19 September 2010, <http://www.draculatheun-dead.com/stoker-book-overview.htm>.
[60] Definitions taken from 'prototype', *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., viewed on 19 September 2010, <http://www.oed.com>.
[61] Jacques Derrida, 'Passages – From Traumatism to Promise', in *Points…: Interviews, 1974-1994*, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al., ed. Elizabeth Weber, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1992, 386.

[62] See various product reviews on Amazon.co.uk and Amazon.com.
[63] Cohen, 'Monster Culture', 5.
[64] Glover, *Vampires, Mummies, and Liberals*, 139.

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Film Reviews

The Dreamers of Dreams: *Inception*

Inception
Christopher Nolan
Warner Brothers Pictures – DVD
2010

The latest offering from Christopher Nolan lends itself easily to comparison to the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix* or Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. Like both of these precedent films, Nolan's *Inception* is philosophically-minded science fiction that asks the viewer to consider, 'how do you *know* what you know?' *Inception* is a dense, fast-paced, and visually stunning exploration of the nature of dreams. It's not James Joyce's mammoth (and, to most, unreadable) meditation on the human subconscious, 'Finnegan's Wake.' Niether is it Alain Resnais's brilliant and haunting film *L'année Dernier à Marienbad*, which, quite oppositely, concerns the irreparable isolation of the human psyche, though there are some similarities, particularly in the use of repetition. What Nolan offers with his fantasy of shared dreaming is infinitely more enjoyable. Like a dream, the film drops us right in the center of the action, and frequently shifts from one place to another without illustrating the transition. This is not uncommon for a film, but one of the strengths of the movie is that as much as it concerns dreams, it explores the art of cinema, and their similarity to each other.

The plot concerns Dom Cobb (Leo DiCaprio) as a man who ostensibly makes a living stealing ideas from people while they are dreaming—a process called 'extraction.' Hunted by his former employer, a shadowy cabal called Cobal Industries, and on the run from the law, Cobb cannot return to the U.S., where his children live with their grandmother. Desperate to clear his name of criminal charges and earn the freedom to return home, he agrees to take a job involving not extraction but 'inception,' the planting of a thought in the subconscious of a dreamer. The rest of the plot is a joyride through three-levels of dreamscapes (a dream within a dream within a dream) designed by the aptly named architect Ariadne (Ellen Page), whose job it is to construct a labyrinthine space in which the target of the inception, Robert Fischer (Cillian Murphy), the son of a late media mogul, is led astray while Cobb's team collectively inhabit the dream space and try to plant the idea that Fischer should break up and sell his father's company, thus preventing a worldwide monopoly from taking hold.

The supporting cast is one of the film's greatest strengths. Solid performances are delivered by notables such as Ken Wantanabe, who plays Saito, Cobb's employer; Pete Postelwaite, as the late Maurice Fischer; and Michael Caine, in a brief cameo: Viewers can debate whether 'Miles' is Cobb's father, or his father-in-law. Lesser known actors like Lukas Haas, who plays Nash, Cobb's first architect, and Dileep Rao, as Yusef, the chemist, seem to make the most of every second of their screen-time. Cobb's crew is headed by his presumably long-time business associate, Arthur: a dapper, dashing, and agile member of the team, played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt. This character is little more than a handsome straight man, and it is unclear exactly what skill he brings to the dream-crashers, but his scenes are arguably some of the most beautiful. There is an extended sequence in the film in which Arthur struggles through the hallways of a hotel in zero-gravity, battling the projections that would weed the intruders out of the dreamer's subconscious, like white blood cells attacking an infection, Cobb explains

at one point in the film. Tom Berenger plays Fischer's confidant, Peter, but he also plays the hollow 'projection' of Peter that exists in Fischer's dreams, as well as a projection manipulated by Cobb's forger, who can impersonate anyone in the dream-world. Tom Hardy, steals the show in his subtly comedic role as the forger, Eames, tossing out cheeky one-liners in a deadpan tone. Marine Cotillard delivers a chilling performance as 'Mal,' the dreamed incarnation of Cobb's deceased wife. As usual, Cillian Murphy's delivery is intense and appropriately discomforting. Page holds her own, and DiCaprio delivers a fair performance. Some have noted that this seems a weak casting choice, owing less to DiCaprio's abilities than to the vague similarity to his recent portrayal in Martin Scorsese's *Shutter Island* of a protagonist who, like Dom Cobb, cannot tell reality from fantasy, and who has suffered a major family trauma in his recent past.

I would like to read the cinematic déjà-vu that is produced by this casting similarity as another instance of the film's disorientating repetition, which comes from the incessant echoing of several key phrases, a recurrence of images, and the motif of Edith Piaf's song 'Non, je ne regrette rien,' but this might be a stretch, even for Nolan. Still, though the film is not quite metaleptic, one gets the sense that, in subtle ways, it admits it is a film, just as the dream, if one looks closely, admits it is a dream. In one scene in the film, Cobb has convinced Fischer that his name is Mr. Charles, and that he is a fixture of Fischer's own subconscious that is trying to protect itself from a group of would-be extractors. He tells Fischer to 'notice the strangeness of the dream,' drawing his attention to the weather, the unrealistic shifts in gravity that defy natural law.

This summer blockbuster has already provoked a flurry of posts in the blog-o-sphere, and though the intricate maze that is Nolan's own dream-world is not devoid of dead-ends, the fact that much of its musing lies below the surface will ensure that interest in the film does not quickly fade. Much time has already been devoted by fans and film-viewers to debating whether the whole film is meant to be read as dream: whether we aren't, from the beginning, embedded within a strange dream. Consider the heavy-handed symbolism in the choice of some character names; the similarity, as Mal herself points out to Cobb, between his persecution by Cobol industries and the dreamers' own propensity to be attacked by projections when they invade another's dream; the startling ability of the characters to be in Paris one second, and Australia the next. However one chooses to ultimately regard the uppermost plot-line of the film, in its sum, the movie is like the Penrose staircase which Arthur shows to Ariadne, to illustrate that things can be constructed in a dream which could never be accomplished in real life.

Like the enclosed staircase or the circular maze which Ariadne draws as her audition for the job, the film's genius is that it operates as a closed circuit: all of its failings can be explained away by the simple explanation that the plot is meant to be understood as someone's dream. If there is a weak plot point (like corporate intrigue being the motive for the inception), or if one feels no emotional attachment to the characters, this is easily refuted: what you were seeing was a veneer as thin and nonsensical as a dream-world, the characters merely blank stand-ins for larger concepts. All of the film's strengths, in contrast, must be attributed to a genius architect, who down to the details of the musical score, manipulates the viewer into literally inhabiting the same space of the characters: The musical score to *Inception* is a essentially a slowed version of Piaf's anthem, which Cobb's team uses to synchronize their escape from various levels of the dream, thus the viewer is included in the characters' experience of the delayed dream time, without his or her conscious knowledge. This came to light in a viral video, and was later admitted by the score's composer, Hans Zimmer.

The film also reproduces for the viewer the same quality of confusion experienced by those unfortunate characters who become 'lost in limbo,' who can no longer tell the dream from

reality, by making it indiscernible where the dream ends, if it ever does. I think, in particular, of a shot in which DiCaprio's character is being chased through the streets of Mombasa by the anonymous men of Cobol Industries. He ducks into a small passageway between two buildings, but as he runs towards the open plaza at the other side, the walls narrow so that they squeeze in on him until, at the mouth of the opening, he has to wedge himself free from the terracotta walls that pin him at the shoulders. That this kind of symbolism is usually the stuff of dreams is not enough to determine whether what we are watching is meant to signify that Cobb is dreaming, or whether this is just a symbolic expression of the character's current state, inserted into the fiction by the direction/author, Nolan.

If a dream is a symbolic transcription of the way one feels about real-life events, then this is a movie of a dream (and also a dream of a movie!) Who's dream is it, this film about a man whose job it is to create fictional worlds wherein people share the same dream-space, and in which he manipulates the minds of the dreamers? Well, some things *are* what they seem.

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The Status is Not Quo: Reflections on Villains as Heroes in *Despicable Me* (2010), *Megamind* (2010) and *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (2008)

Despicable Me
Pierre Coffin & Chris Renaud
Universal Pictures
2010

Megamind
Tom McGrath
DreamWorks Animation
2010

Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog
Joss Whedon,
Timescience Bloodclub
2008

The villain-as-hero is not a new trope in film and television, and not at all in animation, where recurring antagonists like Wile E. Coyote take on a certain heroic quality in their unending quest to overcome the nominal protagonist. The very persistence of a villain, though

arguably a sign of mania or psychosis, is nonetheless undoubtedly admirable: we love them for fighting the bad fight. Villains make things interesting. Villains are proactive and decisive, forcing heroes to become heroic by defensive reaction. Without the constant intervention of the classic cartoon villain, what would the heroes even do all day? Would the adventures of Bruce Wayne, billionaire industrialist and society playboy, really be all that interesting in a perfect capitalist utopia free of the anarchistic imagination of The Joker?

This trope has taken on a new complexion, or at least some new shading, in two major theatrical animations: DreamWorks's *Megamind* and Universal's *Despicable Me*. In *Despicable Me* a super-villain named Gru (voiced by Steve Carell), depicted as a kind of 1960s Blofeld/Dr. Evil type of schemer, is frustrated in his rather whimsical attempt to steal the moon by the rise of a younger super-villain named Vector (voiced by Jason Segel), who looks like a pudgy Bill Gates in a track suit and has access to funds provided by the Bank of Evil (formerly Lehman Brothers, according to one sight gag). In order to exploit Vector's weakness for cookies, Gru adopts three orphan girls that sell them for charity. In the process of using them to infiltrate Vector's lair, he comes to care for the girls, revealing the good man inside the bad. In *Megamind*, a blue-skinned, large-headed alien genius (voiced by Will Ferrell) raised from infancy in an Earth prison when his spaceship crash-lands there does constant battle with his nemesis, Metroman (voiced by Brad Pitt), another alien whose ship crash-landed in the home of well-to-do Earth folk who have raised him to be a Superman-like paragon of whiteness and privilege. Complications set in when Megamind unexpectedly wins a showdown and kills Metroman. He then finds himself existentially adrift, until he genetically engineers a new nemesis, Titan (voiced by Jonah Hill). Titan, previously news cameraman Hal Stewart, is jealous and selfish though, and when his newfound powers fail to impress Lois Lane-style reporter heroine Roxanne Ritchie (voiced by Tina Fey), with whom he was previously obsessed, he refuses to play his assigned role of 'good' and goes on a violent rampage. This forces Megamind to become the classic hero and save the city in spite of himself.

Despicable Me and *Megamind* are both mainstream studio releases, citing heritage from 'the executive producer of Ice Age' and the home of Shrek, respectively. Though *Megamind* originated as a live-action project with Ben Stiller attached (shades of Zoolander and *Mystery Men*, perhaps?), its 'cartoony' nature is appropriately intertextual with classic superhero comics, television serials, and movies. Its aesthetic is clean-lined, faintly futuristic, and graphically slick, casting its world in a comparatively comic-realistic frame, certainly a geometrically proportional one (apart, of course, from Megamind's 'big blue head': a marker of his otherness). *Despicable Me* posits itself more as a quirky children's storybook fable, marked by a consciously incongruous design strategy around Gru and his world-within-our-world. His house is an exaggerated, expressionistic amplification of the suburban norm (rather like the grotesque metallic façade deployed by Invader ZIM to shield his underground lair from humans in Jhonen Vasquez' short-lived Nikelodeon series (2001-02)). His 'car' is an oversized rocket vehicle put-putting along the suburban streets until needed to go into a destructive overdrive. His old-world, hard-industrial lair is manned by hordes of small, green minions whose comic-mime antics are clearly designed to appeal to children, but whose presence suggests a kind of lumpenproletariat that contrasts with Vector's automated, computer-driven, ultra-futuristic man-cave, where he plays video games, sucks milkshakes and eats cookies.

That's the interesting thing about both of these films: under the surface they are not even particularly thinly-veiled critiques of recession-era capitalism and the fascist ethics of management culture. Gru is manipulated by the Bank of Evil because its manager, Mr. Perkins (voiced by Will Arnett), a Dilbert-style pointy-haired boss whose cranial protuberances resemble devil horns, is Vector's father. He uses Gru's own plan to steal the moon to provide his son with insider information, then loans the money to Vector in preference to Gru. In

Megamind when Titan defeats Megamind in an initial skirmish, the citizens applaud that he has saved them, to which Titan says, skies reddening and darkening behind him 'I wouldn't say saved. I'd say under new management,' before proceeding to wreak havoc for his own gratification.

A similar but much more sophisticated vein of satirical role reversal is explored in Joss Whedon's web series *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, a work that is, by contrast with *Despicable Me* and *Megamind*, defiantly non-studio in origin. Written specifically for the web during the Hollywood Writer's Strike of 2007-08, it debuted online on July 15th, 2008, featuring Neil Patrick Harris as an aspiring villain keeping a video log of his attempts to gain entry to the Evil League of Evil and, as his real-life alter-ego Billy to strike up a conversation with the girl of his dreams, Penny (Felicia Day). The narrative trajectory is roughly similar to the animated villain-as-hero films, but takes on a considerably darker hue in resolution. Where Gru and Megamind are essentially good at heart and are shown to be redeemed by taking on the role of heroism thrust upon them by the presence of an even more villainous villain, Dr. Horrible achieves his ambition a the cost of his heart when he accidentally causes Penny's death in a showdown with his nemesis, Captain Hammer (Nathan Fillion). Because the conceited, bemuscled Hammer had taken Penny as his girlfriend (as much to antagonise Dr. Horrible as to satisfy his sexual appetites), the press believes Dr. Horrible has killed the hero's girlfriend deliberately, and so he is feared and lauded as the worst villain ever. But in the closing montage, which, like much of the rest of the film, is performed in song, Dr. Horrible is finally shown to have become genuinely heartless and amoral because his sense of loss is so acute as to have cut him off entirely from human sympathy. Though he begins his blog with the goofily subversive assertion that he commits crimes to undermine the status quo because 'the status is not quo. The world is a mess and I just need to rule it,' he concludes this final song with the lyrics 'Now the nightmare is real/Now Dr. Horrible is here/To make you quake with fear/To make the world kneel/And I won't feel/A thing.' On the last line the image cuts from the celebratory slow-motion montage of Horrible's entry to the Evil League of Evil, cast like a fashionable night club, to him sitting alone in front of his web cam staring at the screen with empty eyes, not even in costume: simply human, simply lost.

Gru and Megamind are also given emotional trauma and backstory baggage with which to motivate them, but again unlike Dr. Horrible, the ultimate trajectory of their narratives is towards redemption. Gru is shown in flashback to have been a 1960s child obsessed with the moon race and eager to impress his unflappable, cantankerous mother (voiced by Julie Andrews). As child-Gru makes space helmets out of cereal boxes and concocts ever-more-elaborate rockets to show his mother how he will achieve his dream of being an astronaut, Mother Gru is singularly unimpressed. By the end of the film though, Gru has sacrificed his prize, the stolen moon, to Vector, in order to save the three orphan girls. The girls have become part of his life and his family, and his mother loves them. In the final scene Mother Gru says 'I'm so proud of you, son. You turned out to be a great parent, just like me: maybe even better.' It's a gag, but the underlying theme of childhood disappointment, parental responsibility, and a narrative arc of growth and maturation via family instead of the pursuit of capital, is charmingly protective of the status quo.

Megamind likewise firmly roots itself in a Dickensian/Darwinian backstory of intertwined but separate destinies where the Prison-reared child learns that being bad is what he's best at while Metroman achieves rock-star like status as the hero. Having been socially conditioned for the role, Megamind is genuinely startled and confused when Metroman is defeated, because this dance of destiny is, to him, part of a grand performance, an eternal struggle of good and evil in which the role you are born to is the one you must play. The theme is further reinforced by the revelation that Metroman is not, in fact, dead, but has faked his

death and gone into reclusion for precisely the same reason. He had always wanted to be a musician, he explains to the dumbfounded Megamind and Roxanne when they find him, and was equally tired of the same old routine and the same old role of heroism and leadership thrust upon him.

These are conscious thematic articulations of the frustrations of social limitation in the recessionary age. The political references are frequently explicit (following his victory, Megamind plasters the city with posters modeled on the famous Obama campaign image but emblazoned with the phrase 'No, you can't.'), the agenda unambiguously escapist and restorative (in the case of the two films anyway), and the core subject surprisingly grounded in economics. *Despicable Me* is centrally concerned with the financing of both Gru's evil schemes and the orphanage where the girls live before he adopts them. When he brings them home but initially more or less ignores them one girl, Edith (voiced by Dana Gier) comments 'When we got adopted by a bald guy, I thought this'd be more like Annie', linking Gru's appearance to the classic fantasy capitalist, Daddy Warbucks, and the absence of that fantasy in this reality. When Gru is denied financing by the Bank of Evil, he informs his minions 'now would probably be a good time to look for other employment' – a line of the moment if ever there was one. Poverty and homelessness are a significant element in Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog, as Penny works for a homeless charity, prompting Captain Hammer to make a self-serving public presentation at the charity benefit where Penny dies. In a song entitled 'Everyone's a Hero', the false humility of the privileged überclass is expressed in lyrics like 'I'm poverty's new sheriff/And I'm bashing in the slums/A hero doesn't care/If you're a bunch of scary alcoholic bums/Everyone's a hero in their own way/Everyone can blaze a hero's trail/Don't worry if it's hard/If you're not a friggin' 'tard you will prevail.' The ideology of industry and benevolent capitalist patrimony is shown to be hollow rhetoric. The song becomes a duet as Dr. Horrible uses his freeze ray on Captain Hammer then sings to the audience 'Now that your saviour is still as the grave you're/Beginning to fear me/Like cavemen fear thunder – I still have to wonder/Can you really hear me? I bring you pain, the kind you can't suffer quietly/Fire up your brain, remind you inside you're rioting/Society is slipping/Everything's slipping away.'

At the heart of all three of these texts is a question of cost and value, and this is linked to the socio-political dynamic of the world in which the story is set that frames the villain as the anti-social outsider. All three stories suggest a kind of revolution, configured as revelation (and in the animated films thereby contained). What each of these villains 'want' in their quest for world domination is what's at heart. What will they do with the world once they have it? Gru, as we have seen, gives it up (well, the moon, anyway), and thereby gains his heart. Megamind wants to rule Metro City, but when he does, he does little more than change the architecture a bit, occupy city hall and hoard the city's art treasures in his office. He eventually puts them all back in anticipation of battling Titan, because it turns out that ruling is not what he wanted at all. Ultimately, Megamind's success is measured by social acceptance, an understanding of his skills and his showmanship, deployed, ultimately, to defeat Titan. His capacity to play any role is what's at issue, and represented in terms of an actor's motivation. He tries to explain to Titan how the villain/hero thing works, and during their first battle says 'Now it's time for some witty back and forth banter', to which Titan's only response is an inarticulate roar of rage. Megamind responds 'Okay, I'm not sure where to go with that,' like an actor doing improv, only to find himself being pounded into submission. But when he tells Titan he can take him to jail now, Titan responds 'I was thinking more like the morgue – you're dead.' Which was never what this was supposed to be about, right? Villainy isn't about murder in this universe, and certainly not heroism. Yet this is precisely where *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* takes almost exactly the same type of archetypal dichotomy, and when the battle with Captain Hammer results in Penny's death, Dr. Horrible is granted membership of the Evil League of Evil, which was

seemingly all he ever wanted. In achieving it, he is left hollow, but his response is not so much existential doubt like Megamind as sociopathic dissociation that leaves the viewer feeling that perhaps the reign of Dr. Horrible won't be quite as whimsical as it might have first seemed it would.

Apart from their nominal focus on a 'villain', which in both cases is represented in terms of a visual design strategy that signifiers their otherness, neither *Megamind* nor *Despicable Me* are truly subversive of moral and ideological norms. They suggest cracks in the façade of capitalist endeavour, and poke fun at celebrity culture and its falsely propagandistic heart, but they find hope in a discovery of a true self that has a vested interest in the continued survival of humanity pretty much as it is. Gru is very clearly the hero of *Despicable Me*, and his crimes are whimsical to the point of meaningless (using a shrink ray to steal the moon does not bring about gravitational Armageddon – it merely stops a surfer in his tracks as his wave collapses and has a werewolf morph back into human and sneak away in naked embarrassment). Gru's most evident psychological dysfunction, his mother fixation, doesn't result in truly twisted values like Norman Bates', but rather feeds his paternalism as his ersatz family becomes the antidote to his desire for acquisition of material objects. Megamind's collective Prison upbringing has made him appreciate one's 'proper' place in the Universe rather than into a socialist revolutionary, and seemingly it has not affected his sexuality either, which is firmly focused on Roxie Ritchie. His constant use of a holographic disguise device suggests a sense of shame about his abject appearance, especially when he romances Roxie in the guise of Bernard the Librarian (briefly voiced by Ben Stiller), but Megamind is not Eric, Phantom of the Opera, either, and again this signal of difference is ultimately erased rather than addressed because the overarching question is one of roleplay rather than social environment (did Megamind release his prison-family when he became the hero of the city at the end?).

Both films evince a certain scepticism with celebrity culture, as does *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, by portraying the battle for domination in terms of public acceptance or recognition. *Despicable Me* begins with the theft of the Great Pyramid of Giza by Vector, which knocks Gru from his exalted status as the world's greatest villain. Megamind's early battle with Metroman is played out on huge television monitors in front of a crowd assembled to see Metroman perform at the opening of a museum dedicated to him. Dr. Horrible is at the fringes of the elite caste of super-villains led by Bad Horse (the thoroughbred of sin – played by an actual horse), and only by notable public acts of villainy can he prove himself. The ultimate hollowness of celebrity, and the means by which it reinforces the status quo is not really at issue though, certainly not in the animations, which conclude with celebrations of the former villains as heroes by adoring masses. Only Dr. Horrible follows through on the idea that popularity and notoriety are different things, doubly reinforced by the 'blog' conceit, which has a dead-eyed loner staring into a web cam making statements about how the world has no meaning for him. This becomes rather chillingly deconstructive of the medium itself in the age of online suicide videos and revolutionary blogs.

Of course we wouldn't expect mainstream animated features to follow through on their own premise of taking the side of the monster, even when they show us the true monstrosity is something larger than the individual. Ultimately these stories are circumscribed by genre conventions and by their status as 'children's entertainment' in the manner of so many neutered fairy tales from the dark imagination of the folk tales that have inspired so many of their forebears (the Little Mermaid dying of grief, anyone?). This is where the case of *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* becomes interesting when considered in market and industry terms. Produced for the internet in order to work around the ban on working for studios, it was self-financed by director Joss Whedon (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, etc.) and intended for distribution via iTunes. It was eventually available for free, but supported by advertising in the US, before eventually

being distributed by iTunes and on region-free DVD to other territories. Its modest estimated cost of $200,000 must have been comparatively easily recouped by these sales, and also the sales of the song and soundtrack again through online means. There is even a book, which features the complete script and also the sheet music. What this illustrates is both the potential profitability of convergence media presentation and the capacity of this means of production to allow filmmakers to explore edgier content. In spite of being both a comedy and a musical, *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* features some focused ethical and moral anger, and a more particularly articulated perspective on the ideological roots of anti-social villainy. It is still couched in terms of fantastical exaggeration, to be sure, but rather than play its traumatic origin-story as an unknowable (and therefore irrelevant) enigma as that of *The Dark Knight*'s Joker, Dr. Horrible's tale of loss is a perfectly understandable and believable motivation for the assertion 'You people all have to learn/This world is going to burn.' As Alfred (Michael Caine) told Bruce Wayne in *The Dark Knight* that some people just want to watch the world burn, on some level we knew the Joker was just trying to show us some truths about ourselves, much as Megamind and Gru come to learn to the ultimate benefit of society on the whole. But Dr. Horrible? By the end of Whedon's webseries, you are left with the uncomfortable sense that the world really just might burn after all, or that maybe it already is burning, and that no one is coming to save us.

Additional Filmographical References

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (TV 1997-2003, US, Mutant Enemy).
The Dark Knight (Christopher Nolan, 2008, US, Warner Bros.).
Despicable Me (Pierre Coffin, Chris Renaud, 2010, US, Universal).
Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog (Joss Whedon, 2008, US, Timescience Bloodclub).
Ice Age (Chris Wedge, 2002, US, Twentieth Century Fox).
Invader ZIM (TV 2001-02, Nickelodeon).
Megamind (Tom McGrath, 2010, US, DreamWorks Animation).
Mystery Men (Kinka Usher, 1999, US, Universal).
Shrek (Andrew Adamson, Vicky Jenson, 2001, US, DreamWorks).
Zoolander (Ben Stiller, 2001, US, Paramount).

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Thirst

Thirst
Park Chan-wook
South Korea
Palisades Tartan
2009

In *Thirst*, Father Sang-hyeon (Song Kang-ho) is a Catholic Priest who tends to the sick and dying at his local hospital. Struggling with the conflict between his bodily desires and the strict dictates of his faith which demands a total mortification/denunciation of the bodily desires, he volunteers for a medical trial into a new vaccine for the deadly E-V virus that ironically not only attacks Caucasians and Asians, but whose victims are mainly missionaries, that is young single men such as Sang-yeon. Like the other 499 volunteers before him, he dies. However, as a result of a blood transfusion given just before he dies, Sang-hyeon returns to life only to discover that he needs human blood in order to keep the E-V virus from returning. Forced to drink the blood from a comatose patient at the hospital where he works, Sang-yeon's spiritual torment is heightened by his inability to subjugate the needs of the flesh to those of his faith. One day, Mrs Ra (Kim Hae-sook), the mother of an old school friend, Kang-woo (Shin Ha-kyun) who is suffering from cancer, asks Sang-yeon to pray for him. To Sang-yeon's surprise, Kang-woo recovers and Sang-yeon becomes a regular visitor to Kang-woo's home where he lives with his mother and his beautiful but discontented wife, Tae-ju (Kim Ok-bin). From here, the film veers into film noir territory with Tae-ju and Sang-yeon beginning a torrid affair leading to the murder of the cuckolded husband, Kang-woo. Guilt consumes Sang-yeon, especially when he discovers Tae-ju lied about being abused by Kang-woo in order to convince him to murder her husband. The conflict between the lovers ultimately leads to the inevitable tragic ending as Sang-yeon unable to come to terms with his 'humanity' fulfils his original desire for death. Whether through doing so, he becomes a martyr (sacrificing himself for the greater good), or another suicide statistic (an act of individual selfishness) – the two main reasons given for missionaries volunteering for the medical trial during which Sang-yeon becomes infected with the vampiric virus - is left for the viewer to decide.

In a media landscape overpopulated by the paradoxically asexual teenage vampires of the *Twilight* saga at one end and the sexual excesses of the more adult vampires of the HBO drama, *True Blood*, Thirst is a welcome antidote to the commodification of the vampire in contemporary culture in which the figure of the vampire is used as a metaphor for everything from teenage angst to racial intolerance. Propelled by powerful central performances by Song Kang-ho and Kim Ok-bin, and Park Chang-wook's exquisite painterly aesthetics, Thirst is a sensory treat, a cinematic realisation of Burke's notion of the sublime. Scenes of extreme violence, symptomatic of Park Chan-wook's oeuvre, are transfigured by set design, lighting and the overall mise-en-scene, into moments of extraordinary beauty. For example, the stark white walls and exposed lighting of the Ra residence, provide a stark contrast to the brutal scenes of murder that happen there, acting as a blank canvass for the bloody imprint of violence. Like Emile Zola's Thérèse Raquin, on which the film is loosely based, Thirst seeks to expose and detail the [dark] truths behind human behaviour and motivations without the imposition of an overarching moral framework. The guilt suffered by the murderous couple in the aftermath of Kang-woo's murder is expressed as an external rather than internal mechanism. In one scene, Kang-woo lies on the bed shared by the couple, weighed down the stone that Sang-yeon places on the cupboard in which Kang-woo's body is hidden, physically separating the adulators, while in another his body lies between the lovers as they make love. In a similar manner, Mrs Ra, who suffers a stroke which leads her unable to speak or move in the aftermath of her son's

death, acts as a physical impediment to the relationship between Sang-yeon and Tae-ju, her presence a constant reminder of their guilt. At the same time, Mrs Ra- constrained and contained by the chair in which she sits - forced to passively watch events unfold, functions as a diegetic stand-in for the cinematic spectator and critical commentary on discourses of spectatorship based around a simplistic model of [male] sadism. While Thirst refuses to sit neatly within generic boundaries, hybridising the vampire film with the conventions of film noir and literary naturalism, it is a cinematic tour-de-force from Park Chan-wook – a work of art that entices the viewer into repeated viewings, and lends itself to multiple interpretations.

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Book Reviews

Monsters of the Gevaudan: The Making of a Beast

Jay M. Smith
Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA
2011
ISBN 978-0-674-04716-7
392 pages

Between June 1764 and the fall of 1765, the Gévaudan region of France suffered some sixty attacks (many resulting in death) and eleven suspected assaults by what had been labelled as a monster (bête féroce). The ensuing panic and media blitz experience during these events and its aftermath serve as the centre of Smith's book. With clear and accessible prose, meticulous details, and a useful multi-pronged approach, Smith highlights the different forces that turned the problems of wolf overpopulation into a cultural collision of competing interests among the aristocracy, the peasantry, the publishing industry, the emerging Enlightenment figures, and a culture dealing with the loss of a war.

Smith's eight-chapter layout works well by building an increasingly complicated argument throughout each chapter and throughout the book that flows smoothly and utilizes the current trends within cultural studies and historical research. His first chapter provides a brief overview of events and the traditional straightforward discussion that other historians have used to explain the events surrounding Gévaudan. For Chapter 2, Smith moves into discussing the contemporary world of the France in the 1760s with attention to scientific and religious explanations for the appearance and violence of the monster. This helps to explicate the residents of Gévaudan from sounding entirely foolish while also setting up the third chapter, where Smith explains that monster of Gévaudan served numerous purposes for different audiences including publishers and the military who needed a purpose and focus after the end (and loss) of the Seven Years War with England. In particular, he examines the efforts of Jean-Baptiste Duhamel, a dragoon captain, leading hunting parties to capture and kill the monster. In Chapter 4, Smith continues with the media but connects it to a larger network of competing publishers. This opens up a discussion of the national focus on Gévaudan and how King Louis XV and other elites responded to and used Gévaudan for different political purposes. However, Chapter 5 explores the elite's attitude towards the rural peasantry that created tension and strained the relationship between Jean-Charles d'Enneval and locals when he took up the hunt for the monster as Duhamel's campaign floundered. In contrast, Chapter 6 delivers two local heroes who arguably showed the valour and determination that the outsiders supposedly lack: Jacques Portefaix, a 12 year old boy who leads a children's attack against the monster and Jeane Varlet who fights off the monster to protect her children. This chapter also reveals the growing range of sceptics that grow hand in hand with the official failures and the successes of Portefaix and Varlet. Chapter 7 covers the supposed death of the monster by Francois Antoine, the king's gun-bearer, whose hunt and capture of a wolf brings the story—at least to the officials involved—to an end. The final chapter explores how the official end of the monster perpetuated the problems and tensions between the rural folk and elite as later attacks purported to be by the monster were dismissed by the aristocracy. The declarative end of the hunt relieved the elite to respond to further instances beyond derision and infantilizing of the people of Gévaudan, while it continued to inculcate further resentment against the elite for the people. Furthermore, Smith

explains how these opposing views helped to create two different narratives surrounding the monster depending on which group told the story.

Smith's success lies in his ability to weave together the different angles and invested people, which reveals how much this event garnered the attention of France at the time but also decades later. His ability to connect elements of this event to the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the publishing industry, the military, and other such realms may appear to be stretching it, but his argument is sound through extensive research. Equally important, Smith does not claim a clear and direct influence of this event upon other spheres. Rather, he recognizes it as one piece that could be seized upon by the different interests to make an argument or prove a point. The events of Gévaudan were used for multiple purposes and in being used, left some mark upon the culture and those making use of it.

The research on numerous levels should be applauded. It is clear Smith has put ample work into this and covered a variety of fields in order to give the topic a thorough exploration. At different points, Smith delves into historical topics such as the military, the Catholic and Protestant tensions within France, Parisian politics, publishing rivalries, philosophical, religious, and scientific debates about the nature world, and other topics. Additionally, he includes ample reproductions of images and artwork created as a result of the events. These are impressive and useful additions to the book that only reinforce his argument about the role that the media played in Gévaudan.

As a study in monsters, Smith's book stands as a great contribution to the field. The various threads connect the ways that the monster of Gévaudan affected and was affected by the different factions within French culture, including the rural folk, the religious leaders, the royalty, the nobility, the military, and the publishing press. Smith reveals much about how and why cultures may get caught up in the frenzy of a purported monster.

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Monsters or Martyrs? A Review of *Blood That Cries out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism*

James W. Jones
New York: Oxford University Press
2008, xviii + 190 pp.
ISBN 978-0-19-533597-2

What would motivate 19 well-educated Muslims to hijack four commercial aircraft and crash them into selected targets in the United States on a September day in 2001, killing almost

3,000 people? Why would a Japanese religious group known as the Aum Shinrikyo release sarin nerve gas into the subway system of Tokyo, killing 12 people and injuring 3,796 others? How does a Christian book series focused on the apocalyptic, violent, and bloody death of thousands (possibly millions) of non-believing Christians sell more than 65 million copies since 1995? These questions and more are addressed by Dr. James Jones in his book, *Blood That Cries out from the Earth*.

Dr. Jones, a practicing clinical psychologist, as well as a Professor of Religion and Adjunct Professor of Clinical Psychology at Rutgers University has written a thoughtful and brilliant analysis of the political, social, and religious motivations that lead to the use of violence in the promotion of religions whose tenets are associated with peace. He defines religious terrorism as the 'use of violence, often in symbolic but deadly actions, in the service of sacred goals or values.' (p. 27) Using interviews with leading religious scholars, as well as numerous primary and secondary sources, he examines the common factors which seem to be evident in Islamic Jihadism, a Japanese Buddhist group known as the Aum Shinrikyo, and American Apocalyptic Christianity that lead to use of violence, and addresses the question of why some devotees become terrorists and others do not.

The author explains that religious violence is shaped by both cultural and ideological forces that seek to make not a political statement (as was assumed by many in the wake of the events of 9/11), but rather a religious statement about their goals in purifying the world by eliminating what they perceive as corrupt values. There are several common factors which Dr. Jones contends are critical in the decision to use religious violence. The first of these is the cultural and group dynamics associated with humiliation. He cites examples to support this, including the Islamic contention that a focus on the secular world's values has led to the perceived humiliation of sacred tenets corrupted by human ideas. Another major factor is the tendency of many religious devotees to split the world into 'all-good' or 'all-evil' factions. The Aum Shinrikyo Buddhist followers in Japan believed that the enemies of the group were so evil that the only way to purify and save them was to kill them. The author also addresses this demonization of the enemy with examples from American Apocalyptic Christianity.

Another factor the author points out is the authoritarian personalities inherent in those who turn to violence. The belief that their religion is the one true religion and that their deeds are carried out in compliance with the desires of a vengeful God reinforce the validity of their actions. This fascination with violence, exacerbated by rage and frustration, leads some followers to use blood to attain the spiritual transformation of non-believers. Using the example of Christians who vent their fury against contraception and blatant sexual expression by blowing up women's reproductive health centers, Dr. Jones makes the point that such followers believe they are carrying out the will of God. In Islam, actions such as 'suicide bombings' are seen as a ritual sacrifice of both the bomber and the victims for the glory of Allah that allows the bomber to become a martyr and enter eternal paradise. Additionally, as seen in the *Left Behind* series, Christians who follow the path of salvation are spared the fear, panic, confusion and violence associated with the Apocalypse by virtue of being devout followers ready to fight against the Anti-Christ.

Dr. Jones concludes his book by addressing what he calls the 'ambiguity of religion,' in that it appeals to our better selves while also being capable of creating mischief and calamity in society. If we seek to understand how religious violence can be alleviated, we need to understand how religion itself can be used to promote positive approaches and outcomes. He states that a 'realistic humility' that counteracts the feelings of shame needs to be internalized by followers prone to violence. The acknowledgement that we live in a global society of 'human commonality' with diverse religions would also lead to the forgiveness and compassion vital in stemming religious terrorism. This is an outstanding book of well-researched

scholarship and insight that should be essential reading for all those interested in understanding the patterns and behaviors of religious beliefs and practices that lead to violence.

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Umwege in die Vergangenheit: Star Trek und die griechisch-römische Antike [Detours to the Past: Star Trek and the Greek-Roman Antiquity]

Otta Wenskus
Innsbruck-Wien-Bozen
StudienVerlag 2009
266 pp.

What happens when a well-known Austrian classicist and specialist for the Old Greek language gets one beautiful day in contact with the science fiction phenomena par excellence? When she begins to love it? When she finally starts to reflect about the content of classical philosophy and Roman history in that TV show? At least in this very particular case, we can hold the result in our hands because Otta Wenskus wrote and published a book that is as astonishing in the findings she has to discuss as intriguing in the way Gene Rodenberry and some of the authors of Star Trek used classical motives and storylines. Or, shorter, she presents a very unique example for the reception of the antiquity in modern popular culture.

Otta Wenskus defines this reception process as 'bewusste Rezeption der griechisch-römischen Antike, besonders der Literatur, der Ikonographie und der Philosophie' (p. 10; 'deliberate reception of the Greek and Roman antiquity, especially the literature, the iconography and the philosophy'). To follow that reception, she managed to watch all episodes of all five Star Trek TV shows, plus The Animated Series, plus 10 movies (the movie of 2009 was not yet released when she finished the manuscript), and finally to read about 100 novels. She quickly reveals that the movies haven't been that interesting for her research because of the huge amount of non-verbal (action) scenes and the high content of techno babble, in a clear contrast to the more dialogue centred episodes of the TV show. Her personal favourites are Deep Space Nine and Voyager, but she found the Greek and Roman antiquity received in all five TV shows.

As a teenager, Otta Wenskus was revolted by the lack of substantial and interesting female characters in the classical Star Trek show. More than 25 years later, her son brought her in contact with some episodes of Voyager, and step by step, she gained more interest… and was astonished by the sheer number of allusions to antiquity. So she started to search systematically for those allusions, and in the end, this book was written.

The editorial agenda set out by Wenskus is fine structured and shows not only the scientific character of her book, but also the richness of details she follows in order to detect the

reception of antiquity. Following some remarks about her methodology (pp. 8-10), she starts the main part of her research (pp. 11-224) with an introduction into the 'Ancient Near East and Archaeology' (pp. 11-14), where she can track down for the first time some motives dating back to a time even before the rise of the Roman Empire. In TOS 'Return to Tomorrow', three survivors of a defunct civilisation, now existing only as a bodiless energetic life forms, are discovered by Kirk and his landing party. The good ones are named Sargon and Thalassa, a Babylonic and a Greek name, while the bad ghost, Henoch, has a Hebrew one. Wenskus argues that the idea for using such names was to underline the ancient character of this civilisation. Even more visible is 'Elaan of Troyius'. The whole appearance of Elaan, from the very first scene on, provokes the image of Cleopatra, especially that one played by Elizabeth Taylor.

But soon we enter the world of the classical antiquity, and from that moment on, sub- and sub-subchapters determine the rhythm of the book. Just to give an idea – chapter C 'Punktuelle Antikerezeption durch handelnde Personen und/oder Autoren' (pp. 43-87; 'Punctual Reception of Antiquity by Acting Persons and/or Authors') is divided in seven subchapters, which are altogether split into 21 sub-subchapters. Subchapter 3 'Latein als Sprache der Wissenschaft' (pp. 66-71; 'Latin as Language of Science') itself is then divided in four sub-subchapters about the names of stars, Linnéan terminology, termini technici in general, and (pseudo-) acronyms. What seems at a first glance a bit intricate is a very helpful structure to find one's own way through the text.

Wenskus shows not only the reception of Roman armour and weaponry (p. 72: armour of the Gorn captain; p. 219: errors in the combination of Roman weapons), more-or-less Greek-style clothing (pp. 35, 120, 141, 161-162, 198 or 221) or the appearance of well-known Gods (as an example pp. 140-144: discussion of Apoll in the TOS episode 'Who mourns for Adonais?'), but also the influence of antique philosophy – and that not only in the use of citations (so p. 78: 'Inter Arma Enim Silent Leges', title of a Deep Space Nine episode) or isolates scenes (p. 183: the hologram of Socrates in the Voyager episode 'Darkling'), no, she even can track down the whole structure of complete episodes to philosophical thoughts or concepts. Her central example for that is Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave' that can be found in a whole bunch of episodes all over the Star Trek universe (pp. 187-190).

There isn't any specific chapter about monsters but nevertheless the book contains a bunch of interesting stuff about them. The best way to find the opinions and findings of Otta Wenskus about the aliens and monsters of Star Trek is to have a closer look into the index with the titles of all episodes, novels and literature she has used for her research. 'Vox sola', an episode of Star Trek: Enterprise, is mentioned on p. 79, not for the alien life form, but for the Latin title. The title, however, is brought into a connection with that silver string jelly-like life form that has a collective consciousness and feels, trapped in a cargo hold of the Enterprise, alone. Try all the episodes with the Tribbles – you will not be unpleased. But also a look into the index of names is not a bad idea. Doing so, it is possible to find under 'Satyr' (pp. 88-90) a wonderful study about the role of the Ferengi as satyrs in the Star Trek universe. And sometimes the proper name leads to interesting information. Nagilum, this indefinable ghost-like thing from 'Where Silence has Lease', gets on pp. 167 and 181 some remarks about its discussion with Picard about the meaning of human life.

The technical side of the book is fully acceptable. Just one annoying commentary has to be made. The indices at the end of the volume do not always fit well with the book's pages. Several times one has to go one page further – if one wants to read about the connection of the Titans with the horrific Armus in The Next Generation episode 'Skin of Evil', he or she will find the information on p. 140, but not on p. 139 as written in the index. And the 'Smurfs' (yes, those 'monsters' are mentioned as well) appear not on p. 131, but one page later…

Bringing it to a good end, Umwege in die Vergangenheit is not a fan book at all, but a very deep and dense analysis of the influence of high-grade classical educational knowledge on one of the most popular series in the history of TV and cinema. It is not that easy to read because the author expects her readership to be in the picture about what we can call 'classical humanistic education'. But Otta Wenskus shows us again and again that quite a lot of the philosophical background as well as some of the outfits and the details of Star Trek may be tracked down to Rome and Athens. The book is a wonderful amalgam of classical education and American entertainment at its best. It is therefore no surprise that this book got not only the financial backing of the Republic of Austria, but also of the Austrian Ministry for Science and Research and of two of Austria's federal states, Tyrol and Vorarlberg.

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The Victorians & Old Age

Karen Chase
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It is always interesting to witness the interface between the literary and literal. This interface occurs when scholars of history look to literary sources for insight and conversely when literary scholars project fictional and poetic creations into historical contexts as vehicles through which a deeper understanding of human reality can be grasped. It behooves scholars from both disciplinary perspectives to engage in this interdisciplinary exploration for it is at the intersection of multiple modes of expression and knowing that a more nuanced picture of the human experience emerges. Karen Chase has both undertaken such an interdisciplinary approach and achieved the desired explication of one significant human experiential facet in her book *The Victorians & Old Age*. She utilizes a wide range of non-fictional and fictional documentary source material from diaries and statistical data to novels and artistic representations to understand both the physical and psychological constructs of old age in Victorian England.

Like many exemplary forays into the past, Chase's work immediately establishes the distinction between historical and modern conceptualizations. Senescence, as Chase explains, prior to the turn of the twentieth century was not constructed as a life phase distinct from general adulthood. Her intent in this book is to trace, through literary and historical sources, the circumstances that caused, contributed to, and shaped ideologies and realities of old age through

the latter half of the nineteenth century. She adroitly layers discussion and literary analysis of major Victorian writers like Dickens, Trollope, Oliphant, Gaskell, Carroll, and Wilde, who explicitly explore the multivalent vicissitudes of aging in their works, with historic records documenting the relationship of the 'old' to poverty, mental illness, and loss of authority. While it is often assumed that literary and other artistic work reflect the realities of a particular period, Chase asserts that the writings of Dickens and Trollop, which portrayed the horrors of workhouses and asylums, actually created images so credible of such institutions that they were taken literally. The potential inmates of these institutions dreaded the thought of such a fate based upon literary descriptions. This observation poses new questions for all scholars of the historic past about the degree and effect of art and literature on people's framing of reality and their consequential behaviors.

Chase eloquently exposes the underlying Victorian belief that the mind deteriorated in accordance with the body as a natural part of the aging process. This belief justified the incarceration of the elderly in mental asylums, the marginalizing of them from active participation in authoritative matters, and the substandard provision of care and necessities for their comfort. It is ironic that Victorians constructed their own inevitable aging process as a descent into madness and imbecility-in a sense, savagery—when they also believed theirs was the pinnacle of civilized society having progressed through the primitive stages of savagery to their present height. However, rather than focusing exclusively on the chronologically old, Chase also cites numerous examples, both real and fictive, of the notion of attitudinal age. The idea that one could become 'old' at a young age due to some tragic injury, loss, or event, further substantiated the connection between the aging, deteriorating mind and a weakening of the physical body.

This paradox of youthful age, ultimately underscores Chase's work as she explores premature aging, youthful vitality in the elderly versus a reversion to childlike simplicity, and the unnaturalness of either denying or assuming agedness. Her oscillation between fictive texts and historical documents deftly interweave to reveal just how difficult it was for Victorian England to define and address this new and rapidly growing population of citizenry. While providing no pat conclusions, Chase succeeds in adding depth and breadth to the examination of old age in the context of nineteenth century England. She clearly demonstrates the impossibility of demarcating senescence by numerical age, psychological mindset, or physical condition. As a result she has provided the segue way for scholars in other disciplines to expand or rethink their assumptions about not just what it meant to be elderly in past societies, but what the entire process of living expressed about the beliefs, fears, and values of those societies.

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In a Glass Darkly

Sheridan Le Fanu
Robert Tracy, Editor
Oxford University Press

Sheridan Le Fanu's collection of supernatural tales in In a Glass Darkly portrays his masterful skill of leaving narrow loopholes that create an unsettled feeling about what can and cannot be seen by the naked eye. Le Fanu frames the narratives as a group of cases presented by Dr. Martin Hesselius, a precursor to Bram Stoker's Dr. Van Helsing. Although Hesselius can be viewed as a prototype to the modern day psychiatrist, he is not unwilling, like some men of science, to admit that there is more to this world than meets the eye. As an interesting side note, by presenting the narratives as a set of case studies written by a Doctor (a man of authority), Le Fanu provides the reader with an impression that the narratives are 'authentic' tales of ghosts and vampires. The final two novellas, 'The Room in the Dragon Volant' and 'Carmilla,' are written as first person narratives offering another layer of authenticity to the cases collected and printed within the frame narrative.

In 'Green Tea' Mr. Jennings reports to Hesselius that he is tormented and followed by a monkey. It is discovered that Jennings does nothing to precipitate this menacing haunting. During an interview with Jennings, Hesseius notes that Jennings has been reading the works of Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg's idea that once a person's 'inner eye' is opened that he or she is able to see the unknown world of spirits surrounding us flows throughout the subsequent two short stories and, as suggested by Robert Tracy, 'Carmilla.'

Although none of the stories in this collection are about ghosts per se, they are about uncanny hauntings of the mind. Some of the tales portray Hesselius' patients as learned men who are haunted by their consciences, such as Captain Barton in 'The Familiar,' due to past actions. Within the short stories the protagonists are all pursued by various monstrous manifestations that elicit fear, anxiety, and paranoia, which ultimately leads to their deaths. Leaving the reader to question whether these hauntings are mere fabrications of delusional minds or real hauntings. This is the 'narrow loophole' that Le Fanu is so well known for in his writings.

The first three short stories, 'Green Tea,' 'The Familiar,' and 'Mr Justice Harbottle,' all deal with unseen ghosts of various shapes and sizes. In 'The Familiar' Captain Barton is followed by an uncanny likeness of a man he had wronged. Barton is unable to avoid this ghost's presence even when he goes into reclusion. Barton's horrific death remains a mystery to Hesselius, who speculates that Barton perhaps scared himself to death but does not rule out the possibility that a ghost had scared him to death. Like Barton, the tale of 'Mr. Justice Harbottle' is one of hauntings caused by past actions. Justice Harbottle, however, is warned that if he does not change his verdict of execution for a specific prisoner that he will pay for it by 'shortening his days.' Justice Harbottle's story is recounted because not only is Harbottle haunted by his past actions, but he, along with his executioners, haunt the house in which he dies in. It's a ghost story within a ghost story.

'Carmilla' to a degree can also be seen as a 'ghost' story in that Laura 'sees' Carmilla in a dream long before the two physically meet. The presence of this dream haunts Laura for many years after it takes place; however, with the physical manifestation of Carmilla the dream literally turns into a waking nightmare. This story is set in Styria, vampire territory, where Laura and her father live in the remote countryside in a castle. As neighbouring peasants begin to report strange deaths, Carmilla, who is living with Laura as a companion, comes under suspicion. Once it is fully realized that Carmilla is the source of the deaths the small band,

Laura, her father, and Hesselius, go in search of Carmilla's grave. Le Fanu's vampire story is credited with shaping Bram Stoker's Dracula.

'The Room in the Dragon Volant' is very different from the other stories in this collection. A Poesque quality permeates this tale with its secret passages, graveyards, and twist ending. This story takes place in France shortly after the Battle of Waterloo. It is written by a young man, Beckett, who has recently come into a small fortune and is travelling, like many other 'English excursionist,' to the content for the experience of foreign travel. Beckett becomes enamored by a young woman, Countess de St Alyre, who is supposedly married to the jealous old Count. Unbeknownst to Beckett he falls into the hands of a group of criminal conspirators who have targeted him for his money. Unlike Jennings, Barton, and Harbottle, Beckett narrowly escapes his death due to a diligent French Police officer who has been tracking the group's criminal activities. The end of the story is noteworthy as the detectives explain the death-like trance caused by Beckett's ingesting of a potion. There are echoes of C. Auguste Dupin in the details of the criminals' activities and the properties of the potion provided by the French Police.

Le Fanua's fascination with the Gothic tradition, the occult, and Irish folklore is clearly portrayed in the shaping of his stories of terror and inexplicable hauntings. And as Le Fanu's narrator who has collected these stories and framed them within the book states: the stories are compiled and published, 'simply to interest the 'laity' and they do.

Lee Baxter is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Guelph, focusing on Gothic Horror narratives in contemporary American literature and film. Specializing in Trauma Studies, her dissertation investigates how traumatic events are reflected through gothic horror narratives within American culture.

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The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

L. Frank Baum
Susan Wolstenholme,
Oxford University Press

Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* continues to be a renowned tale that captivates both children and adults. Although this tale is well known to all who have watched the MGM film version, not everyone has read the original work. Baum's original intent was to 'please' the children who read his books and this book definitely 'pleases' children and adults alike. This fantastical tale of talking scarecrows and beasts, good and evil witches, and magical shoes and hats all take place in the Land of Oz. Baum's story begins with the harsh realities of life in the dull grayness of Kansas, however, the reader is soon whisked away by a cyclone to the magical Land of Oz that has a vibrant colourful landscape which matches its lively robust characters.

Dorothy's and her little dog Toto's adventures begin with their house landing on top of and killing the wicked Witch of the East. Dorothy is not only entrusted with the Witch of the East's silver shoes, that possess a very strong magic, but the good Witch of the North also gives her a kiss for protection against harm. As Dorothy and Toto walk along the yellow brick road toward the Emerald city, in order to seek help from the Wizard of Oz to return to Kansas, they meet three important friends. First, they encounter the Scarecrow who has recently been stuffed and hung in the cornfield to scare away the crows. Second, they meet the Tin Woodman who has been unable to move due to rusted joints; and finally, they meet the Cowardly lion while walking through a forest. Each of these new friends join Dorothy and Toto in hopes that the Wizard of Oz will grant their various wishes.

The Scarecrow longs for a brain, the Cowardly lion wishes for courage and the Tin Woodman longs for a heart. The Tin Woodman by far is the most interesting character because he was once a man who was in love with and engaged to a munchkin girl. However, the old woman, whom this girl lived with, did not want her to leave therefore she made a deal with the wicked Witch of the East to get rid of the Tin Woodman. The Tin Woodman explains to his party of friends that unknown to him the Witch of the East had put a spell on his ax in order to stop the marriage. As the Tin Woodman began to cut a tree down the ax slipped and cut his leg off. After each piece of his body was severed the local tinsmith (tinner) replaced various body parts with tin counterparts. Inevitably the Tin Woodman's head became severed and was replaced with a tin head. This once vibrant, strong, loving woodcutter was literally piece-by-piece turned into a cold tin replica of his former self because of his love for a munchkin girl. Nonetheless, this replica of his former self continues to long for what he has been so violently denied through his dismemberment – love.

Baum's characters feel a lack within themselves (home, brains, love, courage) yet, as the story clearly portrays during their journey toward the Emerald City, each character already possesses the attribute and/or power that she or he wishes for. The key to the manifestation of their desires is through tangible objects, given by the Great and powerful Oz, rather than their physical actions. The Scarecrow is endowed with a mixture of pins, needles, and bran to prove that he is 'sharp.' The Tin Woodman is provided with a silk heart that is filled with sawdust and put into a cavity in his chest. The Lion is given a liquid (liquid) courage that he drinks from a green-gold dish because after all courage comes from the inside of a person. After Oz has given each of the objects he notes how he is a 'humbug' because the only real power in the trinkets is the desires they project into the object. The one thing that Oz cannot provide is Dorothy's and Toto's return home.

After the bungled attempt to return Dorothy home in the balloon Oz had arrived in the Land of Oz, Dorothy, Toto, and her three companions leave the safety of the Emerald City to go in search of Glinda the Witch of the South. The journey takes them through the forest of attacking trees, Dainty China Country, and the Country of the Quadlings. The Quadlings prove to be difficult to pass for they will not allow the group of travellers to cross over the hill in order to reach Glinda's land in the south. The Quadlings are short and stout, have a big flat head that sit on a very wrinkly neck, and no arms. Thinking that there was nothing to fear from 'so helpless a creature' the Scarecrow attempts to climb over the hill only to be sent tumbling back down by the Quadling's head. Unknown to the travellers the Quadlings have the ability to stretch their necks out very long and use their heads like hammers. However, with the help of the Winged Monkeys the travellers reach Glinda's castle in the south.

It is Glinda who finally tells Dorothy that she has possessed the power to return home all of the time while in the Land of Oz. With the help of the silver shoes, Dorothy runs home to Kansas and into the arms of Aunt Em. As Dorothy answers 'gravely' Aunt Em's question as to where she has come from, 'The Land of Oz,' there is no allusion, like in the film, that the Land

of Oz is a dream, but rather a real place from which Dorothy and Toto have escaped. In the final scene Dorothy is portrayed as happy to have returned to the grayness of Kansas and the loving arms of Aunt Em, which far over shadows the beautiful colourful Land of Oz.

Lee Baxter is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Guelph, focusing on Gothic Horror narratives in contemporary American literature and film. Specializing in Trauma Studies, her dissertation investigates how traumatic events are reflected through gothic horror narratives within American culture.

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Dark Places: The Haunted House in Film

Barry Curtis
Reaktion Books, London
2008

Dark Places is an ambitious project, bringing an architectural perspective to the understanding of the function and meaning of 'haunted spaces' or 'dark places' in film. Using a broad definition of the haunted house (or perhaps space more appropriately), in which the occluded past impedes the present, Curtis's analysis ranges over a wide range of films from the obvious such as *The Shining* (Kubrick, UK/USA: 1980), *Poltergeist* (Hooper, USA: 1980) and *The Haunting*, UK/USA: 1963) to the less obvious, of which Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (USA: 1941) is the most striking example. Spectral phantasms are always implied by the nature of technology and developments in new media, and Curtis traces this from the origin of cinema which gave movement to the still doubles of photography, seen within the work of one of the pioneers of early cinema, George Méliès, through to contemporary cyberspatial and internet technologies in which 'the virtual world is now increasingly 'haunted' by the real' (p. 208). While covering the necessary, but well-worn, relationship between the Gothic mode and the ghost story, Curtis points to the emergence of spiritualism, psychoanalysis and photography during the Victorian era as key influences on the prevalence of ghosts and haunted places in contemporary cinema. With cinema, the psychic screen of the mind becomes externalised, creating an 'uncanny' relation between the passive spectator and his/her diegetic double. Haunted houses, as Curtis points out are lonely places, positioned on the margins, in which the historical past embodied within the vengeful ghost or monster, is brought to bear on the domestic ideals of the present. While Curtis is mainly concerned with Western cinema, he also considers how recent popular ghost films from East and South East Asia including *Ring* (Nakata, Japan: 1998); *Ju-on* (Shimizu, Japan: 2002) and *The Eye* (*Gin gwai*, Oxide and Danny Pang, Hong Kong: 2002) differ from the Gothic tradition of the West. He demonstrates that such adaptations of such films attempt to substitute a generic framework and casual explanation to original texts whose very horror lies within the inability to construct a coherent narrative (p. 208-214). As Curtis argues throughout, the architecture of the haunted house functions to create anxiety through the discontinuous and disembodied use of visual perspective through the

disruption of the temporal-spatial coordinates, which necessitate an exorcism of the 'past' to restore 'order' in the present.

The scope of the project is both its strength and weakness. Some of the theoretical perspectives, drawn from postmodern theory, such as Deleuze's work on the time-image and implicit references to Lacan, could have been better explained while the range of films used as an examples of 'haunted house' cinema, including *Citizen Kane*, *The Servant* (Losey, UK: 1963) and *The Net (*Winkler, USA: 1995*)*, push the very boundaries of generic definition. As Curtis admits in his conclusion 'The 'haunting' metaphor is too ubiquitous to be comprehended in any book.' (p. 206). The brevity of the book also means that analysis of his chosen films is not as detailed as it could be. In the case of *Fragile* (Balagueró, Spain/UK: 2005) Curtis contends that the hospital is haunted by a vengeful child, while in fact it is rather a sadistic Nurse from the past that is the source of the threat, as is made clear in the third act. Similarly while Curtis' discussion of ghosts in Asian cinema is extremely insightful, not only does he mistakenly attributes the country of origin of *The Closet* (*Yi Gui Jing Hun*, Cho: 2007) to Thailand rather Hong Kong but he tends to collapse Kurosawa's *Pulse (Kairo,* Japan: 2001) with Sonzero's remake effectively eliminating the cultural significance of Kurosawa's film in the process. Having said this, Curtis' book is often insightful and illuminating, bringing a welcome new perspective to the understanding of a little written about topic. Thinking about the 'haunted house' film in terms of architectural structure is extremely productive, as demonstrated in Curtis' reading of the television mini-series, *Stephen King's Rose Red* (USA/Canada: 2002) in which the horror is generated through the non-synchronous spaces of the sprawling mansion that seeks to hide its past through the disruption of the rules of both visual and architectural continuity.

Colette Balmain is an independent scholar, writer and film critic as well as a lecturer in film and media studies. Her area of research is horror cinema and gothic studies, with a particular research interest in East Asian Cinema and Cultures. Her first book, Introduction to Japanese Horror Film, was published by Edinburgh University Press in 2008. She is currently working on her second book on Korean Horror Cinema and is also the editor for Intellect's Directory of World Cinema: South Korea.

Call for Submissions

Monsters and the Monstrous is a biannual peer-reviewed global journal that serves to explore the broad concept of 'The Monster' and 'The Monstrous' from a multifaceted interdisciplinary perspective. The journal publishes works that seek to investigate and assess the enduring influence and imagery of monsters and the monstrous on human culture throughout history. In particular, the journal has a dual focus with the intention of examining specific 'monsters' as well as evaluating the role, function and consequences of persons, actions or events identified as 'monstrous'.

Contributions to the journal should be original and not under consideration for other publications at the same time as they are under consideration for this publication. Submissions are to be made electronically wherever possible using either Microsoft® Word or .rtf format.

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