Monsters and the Monstrous

Volume 1 Number 1 March 2011

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Monsters and the Monstrous, Volume 1, pp. 1-19 (2011) Inter-Disciplinary Press
ISSN: 1756-770X

Monstrosity in 17th Century German Theosophy: The Case of Jacob Boehme (1575-1624)

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Abstract

This paper considers how the 17th century German theosopher Jacob Boehme adopts and adapts two major teratological paradigms:

1. The Aristotelian definition of monstrosity as dissimilarity from the parental ancestors.
2. The belief that the (maternal) imagination was a plastic force which had an impact on the formation of the foetus and which was responsible for monstrous births.

In Boehme both paradigms are adopted and both mitigated and exacerbated:

2b. For Boehme, too, the imagination is a plastic force, which creates substances or (de)forms pre-existent substances. However, the misogynist strain to blame exclusively the maternal imagination for monstrous births, is mitigated, since, according to Boehme it is the monstrous subject who is responsible for its own monstrosity by imagining itself to be the child of the wrong mother or father. False and illegitimate imagination has, however, more severe repercussions, affecting not only the particular foetus, but all humankind and non-human animals, since everything good or bad originates from the imagination according to Boehme.

1b. For Boehme, too, monstrosity involves dissimilarity from the parents or the father, in this case from God. According to Boehme, monstrosity is, however, to be attributed to natural and regular shaped human beings. In essence human beings were not supposed to degenerate into animal-like creatures, but remain the image of God. Man imagined into an animal-like, monstrous shape, a sign of his moral decay.

Key Words
Jacob Boehme, imagination, monstrosity, theological anthropology.

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1. Introduction

Monsters are nowadays generally associated with non-humanlike beings which threaten human existence, be it in a metaphorical sense by affecting the humaneness of humanity, e.g. the inhumane acts of cruel tyrants or the cruelness of serial killers, or in a literal sense, e.g. the natural anthropophagous predators or the fictive monsters one encounters in horror stories. Even though an adequate ontological analysis should be made to determinate if those creatures are intrinsically evil, it is clear that monstrosity not only alludes to deviant appearances, but also to malice. The one does not necessarily imply the other. Certain beings with an unusual appearance can be very friendly, as for instance, apparent in Joseph Merrick, known as the elephant man. Underneath the monstrous surface, there was, according to reports, a distinguished gentleman. The opposite is also possible. Charming appearances can be the most evil of creatures. One does not necessarily have to think within this context of the charming, radiant angelic king Lucifer[1] who deteriorated into the greatest monster in Christian tradition. Many a fictive or real monstrous snide is an attractive presence at first glance.

2. What is a Monster?

Since Empedocles (5th century BC) a significant line of thought regarding the definition of monstrosity, which persisted for many centuries and was primarily focused on the appearance of the human offspring, commenced throughout Western philosophy and medical science. Empedocles questioned why there were children born who did not resemble their fathers.[2] Aristotle held that 'anyone who does not take after his parents is really in a way a monstrosity, since in these cases Nature has in a way strayed from the generic type'.[3] The monstrosity is thus defined by Aristotle as dissimilarity from any ancestor. This does, however, not imply that the children who are unlike their parents do not resemble anything natural. Monstrous offspring may for instance resemble certain beasts. According to Aristotle this was due to the relapse of the movements, coming from the male semen, which cannot master the material delivered by the female.[4] Therefore the *hylemorphistic* interdependence of form and matter teleologically fails to bring about humanlike offspring due to a deficient realisation of the

human *eidos* or essence, i.e. 'animal rationale', as a result of which only the most general *genus* remains, i.e. the animal. Of course, many gradations can be discerned. Offspring, which resemble animals and are unlike their parents, may be oligophrenic and incapable of speech just like dumb animals, but may also be rather intelligent and only have the physical appearance of a beast. Aristotle stresses that in no case monstrous offspring 'are what they are alleged to be, but resemblances only.'[5] This not only reveals the deceptive character of the monster which claims to be of a kind which it does not belong to, or to stem from other parents than its legitimate parents, but also suggests that whether there is a child born with the head of an ox or an ox with the head of a child, the ox remains an ox and the child remains a child.[6] This reminds one of the Augustinian theological idea that humans never cease to be *imago Dei*.[7] Humans are in their ontological nature structurally the image of God, but their capacity of *similitudo Dei* can be totally lost through immoral conduct and original sin. Essentially humans remain the image of God, but existentially they can neglect their essence and lose divine resemblance through malice and immorality. The belief that humans are essentially images of God, but can totally, though not necessarily definitively, lose their similitude persisted throughout the pre-reformational tradition, but can also be discerned in post-Lutheran mysticism of which Boehme is representative. True Christians strive toward rebirth and true renaissance, *Wiedergeburt* as Boehme would say, meaning the restitution of their divine similitude. In this theological interpretation of monstrous dissimilitude, the monstrosity is reversible. The more general and profane line of thought which lies below such theological anthropological doctrines is that monstrosity implies illegitimate dissimilarity, i.e. the child does not resemble its parents, and that a monstrous appearance not necessarily affects the ontological structure of the nature of the being, precisely because like engenders like. Human beings engender human beings, even though the offspring may outwardly resemble anything but the ancestors.

Monstrosity was since Aristotle thus primordially a matter of dissimilarity in appearance and not as much a matter of moral deficiency or evil. However, as the concept monster is plausibly etymologically derived from the Latin *monstrare*,[8] to show – as in *monstrare abdita rerum* to learn the secrecies of the world –, and since *monstrum* may also be akin to *demonstrare,* prove or demonstrate, or to *monere,* to warn, it appears that *monstrum* not only denotes a misshapen being, but also a prodigious, prophetic sign or even a warning. But what does a monster show or demonstrate? Next to the trivial understanding of the prodigious function of the monster as an announcer of upcoming events or disasters,

the monster could reveal how nature functioned, or could be revelatory in a moral or religious sense showing how 'God, the author of the universe, likes to make us admirable his ineffable power in the diversity of his effects'.[9]

The question remains if monstrosity was understood as a play of nature, a miraculous sign of *noumenal* spontaneity erupting from an unintelligible ground underneath the rigid determinate laws of nature, or if it was considered revelatory for the immanent functioning of nature itself. Within the Christian theological and teleological tradition the question was also raised whether monstrosity was just contingently appearing, uncontrolled and purposeless. Of course, especially in the latter tradition, this could hardly be believed. In the Christian teleological frame of mind monstrosity was not considered a coincidental aberration, but a necessary result of a determining cause. Moreover, monstrosity was considered to function as a *signature* revealing the immanent law of nature or as a sign acquiring its meaning through moral and religious interpretation. The examination of the cause of monstrous progeny could have moral consequences or at least unveil moral condemnable behavior of the parental ancestors. Monstrosity was not only a matter of external appearance but also of morality, which allowed for an *a posteriori* interpretation of the monster as a divine punishment for immoral conduct be it, however, not of the monstrous child, but of the parents (an anomaly, as we will shortly be about to see, which was smoothed away in Boehme's peculiar teratological interpretation). The apparent playfulness of nature in producing aberrations and monstrosities was the result of a play following strict rules, therefore unveiling the inner dynamics and processes of nature and/or operating as a divine caveat, more specifically within animal and *a fortiori* human procreation revealing the pernicious repercussions of an unbridled, but unsatisfied desire or of an unpermitted imagination.

3. Imagination Begetting Monstrosity

Monsters have been ascribed to many causes throughout the history of thought and of medicine: plain physical causes such as malfunctioning gametes, malformed genitalia and external physical forces acting on the process of procreation or the foetus in the womb, but also bestiality or copulation with the devil. Since Empedocles, however, a line of thought can be traced over the Greek Physician Soranus and philosophers such as Montaigne, Descartes, Malebranche and also for instance in the works of sir Kenelm Digby and Giambattista Della Porta till it was refuted by medicine in the early nineteenth century, but nevertheless continued in folk science and was recapitulated in novels

from authors such as Goethe,[10] i.e. the conviction that deformities, misshapenness and dissimilarity resulted from the force of parental imagination,[11] particularly the mother's imagination, because women were supposed to have a stronger and more vivid imagination and because after copulation and conception fathers were supposed to have lost direct control of the child's formation until they could significantly contribute to the education of the child.

Even though, important protagonists in the history of philosophy and medicine such as Hippocrates, Galen and Thomas Aquinas's teacher Albertus Magnus were convinced that women contributed in the conception with semen[12] that combined with the male semen and the menstrual blood formed the foetus, the mother's contribution in procreation was since antiquity until the Renaissance considered rather scant in comparison with the father's. The mother was considered passive, the fertile soil in which the seed was planted,[13] but, as Paracelsus (1493-1541) said, 'By virtue of her imagination the woman is the artist and the child the canvas on which to raise the work',[14] Such analogies about the imagining artist, in this case the mother, having a plastic impact on the artefact, in this case the foetus, were recapitulated in Romanticism during which the active role of the male creator was rehabilitated. Between the classic paradigm of the mother's imagination begetting monstrous birth and the romantic paradigm of the artist's imagination begetting monstrous products, there was Boehme, who primarily emphasized neither the role of the male, nor the female imagination, but of the monstrous subject itself, i.e. the child imagining itself into the wrong *matrix* and in that also losing its resemblance with the Father.

The dichotomy between passiveness and activeness played an important role. The more the passive role of the mother is abandoned and the more active her imagination's part in the formation of the foetus, the greater the chance of a monstrous birth. The negative appreciation of the mother's imagination needs to be qualified, though, because the mechanism, which possibly results in misshapen progeny, could also be used for the good. Firstly, it allowed for an explanation of putative adultery, avoiding social or legal repercussions. Secondly, it was supposed that the imagination, which can result in defective progeny, might also be employed to bring offspring to perfection. There are accounts of misshaped fathers who let their wives during coitus gaze at pictures or statues of perfectly formed persons in order to give birth to beautiful children.

Since the product of the imaginative engendering may be misshaped or rather corrected to flawlessness, and given that the product

of imaginative engendering may be aesthetically translated as ugly or beautiful, or morally as bad or good, the imagination appeared as ambivalent. Imagination was considered to be Janus-faced, not only because it serves as a messenger within both the judicial and ministerial domain, as Francis Bacon held,[15] but also because within those domains it could respectively bring about true or false opinion or cognition and right or erroneous – more distinctly ethically formulated: good or evil – actions within the practical domain. Given the paradigm of the intensive plastic imagination, which could form or deform the products of procreation, the imagination appeared either as monstrous or lovely. Throughout the Renaissance in particular the erroneous aspect of the imagination and its moral repercussions, bringing about many evils,[16] was emphasized. Imagination was recognized as a necessary medium between body and soul, senses and intellect,[17] but it was assumed to be an unsophisticated instrument that always had to be controlled by and subordinated to reason.[18] Imagination, obeying the desire agitated by the senses, leads to destruction. Imagination as a constructive element, placing itself under the authority of reason and thus striving toward the higher good, leads to salvation. This ambivalence of the Janus-faced imagination from which all good and evil can be derived,[19] is also present in Boehme who takes the view that 'everything good and evil originates from the imagination'.[20] In contrast with the mainly negative Aristotelian, scholastic, renaissance and rationalist valuation of the imagination, Boehme is surprisingly positive in the valuation of its epistemological function. According to Boehme the imaginative *Verstand* leads to enlightenment and a synthesizing understanding of the great *Arcanum*,[21] whereas the *Vernunft*[22] leads to intellectual deadlock and disbelief as it is confronted with paradoxes and antinomies, particularly in theological matters.[23]

In contrast to the latent rather negative evaluation of the imagination, not only in the theoretical domain of epistemology, but also in the practical domain of ethics, in Boehme the imagination considered as a faculty in itself, is on the one hand strongly a-moralized since it brings about everything whether it is good or evil. On the other hand the opposition between the imagination's good or evil effects is intensified and will have cosmic and ontological repercussions. The good brought about by imagination will be much higher as it is presupposed in religious belief, humility and thus especially in the birth-process towards a new birth. A true re-naissance[24] – through which the individual's will coincides with and thus fully resembles the Father's, i.e. God's, will – presupposes an imagination based belief.[25] However, the evil brought about by dint of false imagination is very serious.[26] False imagination

resulted in the Fall and in existential man's actual monstrous appearance. In Boehme the imagination is thus Janus-faced: Firstly, because the interplay between passive and active will return. The more active the role of the imagination, and the more the passive, merely reflecting, mirror-like function of the imagination is abandoned, the greater the (moral) repercussions. Secondly, because the imagination is on the one hand the poison, which can cause, but on the other hand the medicine, which can cure monstrosity and deficient births.[27] According to Boehme, however, it is the monstrous person who is responsible for any (dis)similarity from the Father and thus either for his own monstrosity or for his regeneration.

4. Imagination Begetting Monstrosity in Boehme

So far we have considered two paradigms: Firstly, the Aristotelian definition of monsters or defective animals as progeny, which does not resemble the parental ancestors, in this case the father. Secondly, the line of thought, originating from Empedocles, which involves the conviction that the parental, in this case the maternal, imagination plays a decisive role in the formation of the foetus and is to be held responsible for deformities and monstrosity.

I will now briefly consider how these paradigms are reintroduced and adapted in the heart of Jacob Boehme's theosophy. Firstly by considering the paradigm of the imagination as cause of monstrosity and secondly by considering what a monster is according to Boehme.

Boehme, well versed in the Bible, may have taken for an established fact, attested by Genesis 30, 25-43, that parental imagination possibly affects the offspring. In this pericope Jacob outsmarts his father-in-law Laban. He agreed to receive all the newborn spotted and speckled livestock as wage. Thereafter he placed white striped tree-branches nearby the watering place and in the troughs, so that the animals would see the striped branches when they mate and would produce striped or spotted young. In a significant passage Boehme explicitly subscribes himself to the group of believers[28] who held that the mother's imagination was a plastic force, which could mould the unborn child:

> ... then in their fusion they will make such a child that she (understand the mother as the female) will raise in her belly, till it is ripe. In the meantime the mother must be careful not to love someone else aside from her spouse and also not to imagine in strange things; else she will imprint a birthmark on the child.[29]

In Boehme's obscure Paracelsian book on *the Signature of all things* in which the external things are understood as the expression of the specific inner essence, this passage, nevertheless, strikes us as familiar. It demonstrates that Boehme is convinced of the influence of imagination on the processes of procreation and birth, even though this process also is to be understood in a more metaphorical sense. The alchemistic processes described by Boehme, all are morally and theologically interpreted. On the one hand the literal understanding of the physical effects of maternal imagination will be mitigated, on the other hand the putative influence of the productive and plastic imagination will reach far beyond the boundaries of the imagination's sheer physical effect on procreation or pathogenesis. Imagination will engender ontological effects. The outward monstrosity is a signature revealing the internal moral and ontological decay.

It is most plausible that Boehme retained the literal understanding of the maternal imagination's effect on the progeny from Paracelsus's doctrine. As it still will be commonplace in for instance Descartes or Malebranche, Paracelsus believed birthmarks were caused by an impression of the mother's imagination on the child.[30] The interdependence between imagination and desire is important in that process.[31] When the woman intensively craves a certain fruit, the shape of that fruit may be impressed on the fetus. Moreover, the maternal could affect the foetus' whole body.[32]

Paracelsus supposed that the intensive imagination also had external effects, affecting not only the fetus the mother carried inside her, but the outside world. Especially the female imagination was to be feared since women had a more vivid imagination, which was less tempered by reason, and were also more spiteful. This dangerous combination can cause the plague (*lantsterben*), when a woman rancorously dies and wishes the whole world would die with her.[33] The misogynist character of the Paracelsian account[34] of imagination is in Boehme somewhat toned down. While Paracelsus' medical discourse is permeated with theology, and while the Boehmian understanding of theo-,[35] kosmo-[36] and anthropogon,[37] combines Genesis and the gospel of John with gynaecology, in Boehme theories about the medicinal[38] and thus also the literal maternal and female role within procreation are less prominently present. Nevertheless, Boehme's metaphysics is permeated with gynaecological terminology. In the attempt to describe the process how God, world and man constantly come to be, Boehme lacks adequate semantic tools, but he understands the process and movement in 'terms of growth and birth'.[39] In this the imagination plays an essential constitutive role, clearly an exacerbation of the general function of the

plastic power of the intensive imagination. In the process of becoming it will be primordially the eternal will, which Boehme also equals with the first hypostasis of the Holy Trinity, i.e. the Father, which impregnates itself via the imagination to become an orientated desire or an intentional will to generate specific things, which were prefigured in the imagination.[40]

The prefigured image with which the primordial will impregnates itself is expressed in the divine wisdom or *Sophia*, which contributes the female role in the eternal conception and birth. Because the divine wisdom only reflects what is already present in the divine, Boehme also uses the metaphor of the mirror to denote this godly imagination. Since it is purely passive it cannot be regarded as a fourth active hypostasis within the divine or as a person, nor can it be understood as 'gynecontotheological source', as Cyril O'Regan points out, because 'Wisdom opens up the possibility of the real birth of difference and otherness, but does not accomplish it'.[41] Rather the divine wisdom is to be understood in a dual scheme in which the subject that sees and the perceived object mutually presuppose each other. Without an object to be seen, there is no sight and vice versa. Implicitly, however, in all this Boehme tends to corroborate the thesis that the imagination ought to be as passive as possible. If the passive divine imagination is considered as a *pars pro toto* for the whole virgin *Sophia,* 'which is a mother who does not give birth and does not want', and if this understanding of the virgin Sophia is considered as alluding to the role of the female and the mother in general, it could be understood that it is especially the female imagination which has to be passive. The chaste divine wisdom, virgin Sophia surely is an ideal model for all Eve's daughters.[42] However, it is clear that Boehme's discourse on imagination is not as bedevilled with misogyny as Paracelsus's, not only because Boehme pays less attention to medical science and gynaecology, but because ultimately man and woman are equally responsible for the false use of imagination. After all, it is Adam who first corrupts Eve by imagining into her.[43]

Throughout the works of Boehme imagination is an equivocal notion, sometimes with more common denotations, such as a mode of thinking, as the empathic capacity to imagine oneself in a situation or as the production of chimaeras while dreaming, but in its strongest sense, Boehme adopts and adapts the Paracelsian denotation of intensive imagination as a formative power which forms and affects things and which is omnipresent in external nature, but is also present in humans in their capacity as microcosm. According to Paracelsus, and to Boehme, imagination is not a sheer psychological function, which enables to preserve images within memory or to produce mental pictures of absent

objects. Intensive imagination is a plastic force within nature, i.e. the macrocosm, and within persons, i.e. microcosms, which can cause physical change. Furthermore, the imagination can be the efficient cause of any event or of the production or mutation of an object. It is a sun-like[44] and magnet-like[45] force, which attracts the outside world into itself and shapes it.[46] Like the radiation of the sun, imagination not only invisibly influences the growth of things, but also engenders life. Paracelsus equates imagination with a craftsman, which is not only adept in his art, but also possesses all the equipment to manufacture everything he has in mind.[47] Imagination, thus, is a subtle, but powerful reality, which invisibly, without hands and feet[48] affects, forms, deforms and engenders things, which may be good or bad. Imagination can cause or remedy disease. Boehme calls the capacity of engendering something out of nothing, magical. Intensive creative imagination is therefore a magical power.[49] Boehme places imagination at the root of being as the mother from which nature issues.[50] Everything originates from the divine imagination.[51] Human beings also possess the creative and plastic power of the imagination, and the more they actively apply this power, the more the risk of engendering monstrosities. Since human beings possess free will[52] to act for good or for bad and since imagination is correlative with an actualised will, imagination is ambivalent and may engender good or bad.

Imagination gives birth to good offspring, such as the modest, faithful reborn man, who renounces his particular own-will and tries to live corresponding the universal will by setting his imagination and sincere will in God,[53] but also to bad, malformed monsters, such as the renegade animal-like man who craves for instant gratification of his animal desires and thus forgets he is a child of God and in his animal-like dissimilarity from the Father, loses his *similitudo dei*.[54] 'Therefore everything is due to the imagination: what a man allows in his desire so is the likeness.'[55]

5. What is a Monster According to Boehme?

According to Boehme, a monster is a gruesome figure.[56] Nevertheless, the figures Boehme describes as eminently monstrous, would generally be considered not as aberrant, but precisely as regular and natural. Therefore, the discourse on monstrosity which can be discerned in Boehme is a mitigation of the fabulous accounts of fantastic monsters, such as the Ravenna monster, hairy virgins and frog-faced children, which were so popular during the Renaissance. To Boehme actual, regular shaped human beings are already severely deformed and

thus repulsive and monstrous enough. The words in which Boehme describes corporate, sexual and mortal humans therefore measure up to the most spectacular and grotesque depictions of fictive monsters in tales of marvel and horror.

On the other hand the Aristotelian paradigm of monstrosity as dissimilarity from the parents is also prominently present in Boehme's discourse and it is exactly this paradigm which leads Boehme to define regular human beings, which have to eat from the elemental, corporeal fruits[57] and sleep[58] to maintain themselves as individuals and have to mate like animals[59] in order to procreate and survive as a species, as monsters:

> Because after his fall, Adam did not himself recognize the first man [*den ersten Menschen*] anymore: therefore he was ashamed of his monstrous shape and hide himself behind a tree in the garden. Because he looked at himself and how he had a beastly shape, he also got straight away beastly genitals, which were created to him by the *Fiat* in the third principle, by the spirit of the great world, for the sake of his reproduction. No one should believe [*wähnen*], that man [*der Mensch*] had beastly genitals to procreate before his fall, but he had heavenly genitals; and also no intestines, for such a stench and torment [*Quall*], which a human being [*ein Mensch*] has in his body, does not belong in the Holy Trinity, in paradise, but on earth, which shall dissolve again in her *Aether*.[60]

Boehme refutes exactly those features, which make people regular and mortal animals, such as teeth and a digestive system to digest food, genitals to procreate and the need of sleep to regain energy, as monstrous. These are signs of the fall of man and of humankind's internal moral decay, which is brought about by dint of false imagination.

By imagining himself as the exclusive child of the external, temporal world, man becomes what he imagines himself to be, i.e. an animal. However, if people were intentionally created to be animals between the other animals, they would not be ashamed of their genital organs or their way to procreate. But their shame about their sexuality proves, according to Boehme, that the actual animal-like nature of human beings is a monstrous perversion of their original, essential nature.[61] The act of circumcision is an external sign of the implicit eschatological

awareness that genitals will not be a part of the original angel-like body in which persons will be resurrected.[62]

Human beings are intended to resemble their Father and be a true image of God, but instead they imagined themselves to be the children of the wrong mother and they consider the external, transitory world as their only, exclusive home or hostelry,[63] eating only the corporeal[64] and not the spiritual fruits which essential, prelapsarian man ate in a magical way.[65] Thus the children give birth to themselves in a monstrous shape, dissimilar from their Father. The latter is not only to be understood symbolically. Human beings imagined themselves to be the children of this external world in the course of which they have taken an animal-like monstrous form with beastly sexual organs and gross intestines and consequently also affected their fellow-creatures. Boehme writes to one of his disciples, the physician Friedrich Krausen, that actual non-human animals deteriorated in monstrous depictions of their original selves because of the Fall of man. Prelapsarian paradisiacal animals had much more beautiful and colourful furs and plumes.[66]

The 'zoomorphication' and thus 'monstrification' of human beings is caused by dint of their imagination. When the 'imagination introduces the outer will into the inner blood, whereby the flesh and blood of the divine substantiality is corrupted',[67] then it may come as no wonder to Boehme that the 'noble image of the likeness of God is eclipsed' and that humans cannot be recognized anymore as God's children.[68] In essence, human beings were not created to be animals.[69] Actual, existential human beings with their animal-like bodies are only a caricature of what they are intended to be, i.e. God's children in a chaste and spiritual body. As Cyril O'Regan says, Boehme gives a 'thick description'[70] of the adamic, prelapsarian state. The right true human essence is purely spiritual.[71] Essential man is an asexual androgyne,[72] which does not reproduce physically, but spiritually,[73] therefore has no beastly genitals; eats in a magical way of spiritual food,[74] therefore has no such things as teeth or digestive system; and is immortal, therefore does not need to sleep to gain strength. A toothless human being without genitals, which can reproduce by purely imaginative power is what more commonly could be understood as a depiction of a monster, but according to Boehme regular corporeal man, i.e. actual existential man, in contrast with essential spiritual man, no longer demonstrates divine similitude through losing himself in the external world and by giving free reign to his desires in his animal-like nature. Human beings can lose their divine similitude entirely, but in essence they never cease to be the image of god.[75] This implies according to Boehme, that however man has lost his divine similitude and gave birth to himself as a monster by

earthly imagination,[76] the divine image can be restituted by heavenly imagination, i.e. by spiritually eating from the fruits of faith and to be reborn as true children similar to their Father.[77] According to Boehme the imagination can dialectically bear either spiritually monstrous or perfect offspring.

6. Conclusion

How can an esoteric discourse such as Boehme's, in which dubious, superseded medical speculations – which define monstrosity as dissimilarity from the ancestors and which believe that the maternal imagination affects the fetus and may beget monstrous offspring – are reintroduced in even more obscure, mythological and theosophical speculations, appeal to the modern reader and interpreter? Perhaps because his religious anthropology in which humans are depicted as beings in between animals and angels, appeals to the perception that humans are immanent beings, longing for transcendence in a world in which values and facts do not coincide. Or maybe, because the topos of human beings imaginary constituting themselves, is reconcilable with modern existentialist theories in which the subject is understood as a project without a fixed nature or essence. Also, because Boehme's doctrine allows for ethical and moralizing interpretations, such as Howard Brinton's: People are no longer acquainted with their, spiritual nature, by losing themselves in the day-to-day worries ('alienated from their destiny' in the parley of the existentialists) and by focusing their desires upon earthly matters and delights. Boehme may have construed this as man's imagining into the third principle of the external world or in the lower or dark ternary of the egotistic will.[78] In the rationalization of the world, science becomes purely instrumental and ethics, in particular the distinction between good and evil, becomes relative. Science and modern morality only serve man's own, egoistic will. Since man imagined himself to be exclusively an animal in the external world, he is, according to Boehme, nothing to be proud of: 'He thinks he is fine and important', but is 'in the sight of God only as a fool, who puts on strange clothing and takes to himself animal form.'[79]

In spite of the possible benevolent interpretations of the theological anthropology that can be discerned in Boehme's theosophy, and in spite of the mitigation of some misogynist traits in comparison with predecessors such as Paracelsus, Boehme's discourse on human monstrosity remains problematical. It is exemplary for those religious and metaphysical doctrines, which tend to consider the natural, sexual and mortal condition of human beings as pathologic and monstrous.[80]

Notes

[1] Jacob Böhme, *Aurora (SW I/i),* 7:36; 16:32; *Mysterium Magnum* 9:6.
[2] Empedocles, *Fragment* 81, 21-22. Refered to by Marie- Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination,* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4-5; and in Jean Rostand, *La formation de l'être, histoire des idées sur la génération*, (Paris: Hachette, 1930), 30.
[3] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*. *IV, iii,* A. L. Peck, trans., (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), 401. Quoted in Huet, *Monstrous Imagination,* 3.
[4] Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 4.
[5] Quoted in Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 4.
[6] Marie-Hélène Huet (Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 31-35) mentions the defense of the lawyers Robert Robin and Simon Houdry over a deformed child with a cloven foot and a pig-like face, which died shortly after it was born and which the church would not baptize and accept as a human child, therefore also having consequences concerning the inheritance for the widow who has borne it. The court eventually ruled that the child should have been baptized: 'monstruous homo est tamen homo'.
[7] Thomas Leinkauf, 'Selbstrealisierung. Anthropologische Konstanten in der Frühen Neuzeit', in *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter*, Vol. 10, 2005, 134-135. Leinkauf refers to Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* XXII 24, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 48, 846-852.
[8] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei,* XXI, 8.
[9] Lawyer Robert Robin in 1690 quoted in Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 32.
[10] Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 8.
[11] For analysis and myriad illustrations of the topic of the mother's imagination influencing the unborn child see Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, *1150-1750,* (New York: Zone Books, 2001); and the already frequently quoted Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, which is a seminal monograph about this theme and treats in the first part the impact of the maternal imagination with special emphasis on the debates on the matter in the Renaissance till the Enlightenment, and in the second part the Romantic interpretation of the poetic power of the imagination, in which the artist creation equals monstrous genesis.
[12] Also during the Renaissance some believed in female semen, perhaps due to too literal an interpretation of the Biblical meaning of semen (offspring).

[13] Aeschylus, *Eumeniden*, 658-661. See also Paracelsus, *Liber De Matrice Cap. I* in Paracelsus *Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493-1541: Essential Theoretical Writings,* Andrew Weeks, ed and trans., (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), 630-631.
[14] Quoted in Walter Pagel**,** *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, (Basel: Karger, 1958), 122. See also Paracelsus, *De Causis Morborum Invisibulium* (H 1:277) in Paracelsus *Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493-1541. Essential Theoretical Writings*, 812-813.
[15] Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon: Faksimile-Neudruck der Ausgabe von Spedding, Ellis und Heath, London 1857-1874 in vierzehn Bänden. Dritter Band,* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Fromann Holzboog, 1963), 382.
[16] Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola *über die Vorstellung. De imaginatione. Mit einer Einleitung von Charles B. Schmitt; Katharine Park,* (München: Fink, 1997), 92.
[17] Ibid*.,* 86-88.
[18] Ibid*.,* 88-90.
[19] Ibid*.*, 90.
[20] Böhme, *Mysterium Pansophicum (SW IV/viii)* 5:5.
[21] Böhme, *De Signatura Rerum (SW VI/xiv),* 3 :7.
[22] According to Boehme the external reason should be subdued, and we should become like a child, longing for its mother: cf. *Informatorium Novissimorum (SW XIII, xiii),* II, 4.
[23] Böhme, *Epistolae Theosophicae (SW IX/xxi),* 40 (Letter to Friedrich Krausen):4-5.
[24] Böhme, *De Regeneratione (Christosophia iv) (SW IV/ix).*
[25] Böhme, *De Incarnatione Verbi Th.1 (SW IV/v),* 11:8.
[26] Böhme, *De Signatura Rerum (SW VI/ xiv),* 7 :7 .
[27] Böhme, *De Triplici Vita Hominis (SW III/iii),* 3 :49.
[28] Which included according to Katherine Park (Katherine Park, *The Imagination in Renaissance Psychology*', Master of Philosophy diss., University of London, 1974, 79) not only 'credulous writers like Paracelsus who would believe any story', but also less superstitious writers 'like Pomponazzi and Montaigne for whom the imagination provided a credible and natural explanation for some of the more far-fetched claims of popular magic and religion.' Mentioned by Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, p. 14.
[29] *De Signatura Rerum (VI/xiv),* 7 :71.
[30] Paracelsus *Theophrastus Bombastus*, 812-813.

[31] Paracelsus, *Sämtliche Werke. 14. Band,* 311.
[32] Paracelsus *Theophrastus Bombastus*, 824-827. See also Paracelsus' *De Virtute Imaginativa*, 318.
[33] Paracelsus, *Sämtliche Werke. 14. Band*, 314-15.
[34] Cyril O'Regan also characterizes the Paracelsian discourse to be bedeviled with misogynist accounts. For a concise, though adequate comparison between Paracelsus's and Boehme's understanding of imagination see his work *Gnostic Apocalypse,* 65-66.
[35] Böhme, *Mysterium Magnum (VII/vii),* 1:2-4
[36] Böhme, *De Tribus Principiis (SW II/ii),* 6 :1-3
[37] Böhme, *De Tribus Principiis (SW II/ii),* Cap. 14: Von des Menschen Geburt und Fortpflanzung, die sehr heimliche Porten.'
[38] Even though medical reflections on the human procreation and the mother's suffering therein can be found in his work, for instance Boehme's ponderings on why the pregnant wife suffers pain in her third month of pregnancy Böhme, *De Tribus Principiis (SW II/ii),* Cap. 13, esp.55.
[39] O'Regan, *Gnostic Apocalypse*, 51.
[40] Böhme, *De Incarnatione Verbi (SW IV/v),*II 2 :1-3.
[41] O'Regan, *Gnostic Apocalypse*, 34.
[42] Böhme, *De Incarnatione Verbi (SWIV/v),* I 6 :14 .
[43] Böhme, *Psychologie Vera (SW III/iv),* 36:6-7.
[44] Paracelsus' *De Virtute Imaginativa*, 311.
[45] Ibid., 313. See inter alia also *De causis morborum invisibilium* in Paracelsus, *Werke*, 225.
[46] Andrew Weeks, *Boehme. An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic*, (Albany,NY: SUNY, 1991), 151-152.
[47] Paracelsus, *Werke*, 222: Die Imagination ist ein Werkmeister aus sich selbst, und hat die Kunst und alles Werkzeug, alles was sie denken kann zu machen, es sei Küferei, Malerei, Schlosserei, Weberei usw.; zu diesen Dingen allen ist sie bereit und kunstfertig.'
[48] *De Causis Morborum Invisibilium* in Paracelsus, *Werke*, 200.
[49] Böhme, *Psychologia Vera (SW III/iv),* 1:195.
[50] Böhme, *Sex Puncta Mystica (SW IV/vii),* 5:4.
[51] Böhme, *Epistolae Theosophicae (SW IX/xxi),* 47:34.
[52] Böhme, *De Triplici Vita Hominis (SW III/iii),* 17 :7.
[53] Böhme, *De Triplici Vita Hominis (SW III/iii),* 2 :51.
[54] Böhme, *De Incarnatione Verbi (SW IV/v),* II 10 :16 .
[55] Böhme, *Psychologia Vera (SW III/iv), Psychologia supplementum* 21.

[56] Böhme, *Mysterium Magnum (SW VII/xvii),* 23:28. The snake in the garden of Eden is a monstrous shape in which the devil dressed himself up according to Boehme. Böhme, *Mysterium Magnum (SW VII/xvii),* 28:8-12. In the glossary added in the 1730 edition of Boehme's collected works entitled *Das Erste Register. Vocabularium oder Erklärung der in des Autoris Schriften enthaltenen Magisch=Mystischen Terminorum, nach dem Sinn des Geistes; wie auch der anderen vorkomenden lateinischen Wörter* in Böhme, *Sämtliche Schriften*, 28-29 monster and monstrous are respectively defined as Monstrum, eine Mißgeburt, ein Ungeheuer, Unthier. Monstrosisch, sehr ungestaltet, abscheulich.'
[57] Böhme, *De Triplici vita hominis (SW III/iii),* 6 :92. See also: Böhme, *De Tribus Principiis (SWII/ii),* 8-13: Compare with Koyré**,** *La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme*, 227.
[58] Böhme, *De Tribus Principiis (SWII/ii)*, 12:16-24 entitled On Adam's sleep (*Von Adams Schlaffe*). See also Böhme, *De Incarnatione Verbi Th.1 (SW IV/v)*, 5:7.
[59] Böhme, *De Tribus Principiis (SWII/ii)*, 11 :4.
[60] Böhme, *De Tribus Principiis (SWII/ii),* 10 :6-7 ;
[61] Böhme, *Libri Apologetici (SW V/x),* 607-609. For Boehme's interpretation of Japhet and Sem's sense of shame about their father Noah's nakedness cf. Böhme, *Mysterium Magnum,* 34:20 ff.
[62] *De Electione Gratiae (SW VI/xv),* 8:33.
[63] Böhme, *Antistiefelius (SW V:xi),* 42.
[64] Böhme, *De Triplici Vita Hominis (SW III/iii),* 5 : 136.
[65] Böhme, *Antistiefelius (SW V:xi),* 41.
[66] Böhme, *Epistolae Theosophicae (SWIX/ xxi),* 39:31.
[67] Böhme, *Sex Puncta Mystica (SW IV/vii),* 1:7.
[68] Böhme *De Incarnatione Verbi (SWIV/v),* I 2:14.
[69] Böhme, *Mysterium Magnum (SW VII/xvii),* 21:15-16. Notice that man intrinsically cannot lose his divine image.
[70] O'Regan, *Gnostic Apocalypse*, 44-45.
[71] J Böhme, *Sex Puncta Theosophica (SW IV/vi),* 8:1.
[72] Böhme, *De Tribus Principiis (SW II/ii),* 10 :18.
[73] Böhme, *Psychologia Vera (SW III/iv),* 8:2.
[74] Böhme, *Antistiefelius (SW V:xi),* 41.
[75] Böhme, *Mysterium Magnum (SW VII/xvii),* 21:16. See also: Böhme, *Sex Puncta Theosophica ((SW IV/vi),* 8:2.
[76] Böhme, *Informatorium Novissimorum (SW V/xiii),* II 7.
[77] Böhme, *Psychologia Vera (SW III/iv),*7:19-21.

[78] Howard Brinton, *Mystic Will: Based on a Study of Jacob Boehme*, (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 220 ff.
[79] Böhme, *Sex Puncta Theosophica (SW IV/vi),* 9: 37-38.
[80] In contrast with other and present-day philosophers who summon human beings to reconcile with their mortality and sexuality. Beverley Clack, *Sex and Death: A Reappraisal of Human Mortality,* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 5: 'A meaningful account of human existence must be predicated upon a recognition and acceptance of the sexuate and mortal nature of human being.'

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Monsters and the Monstrous, Volume 1, pp. 21-31 (2011) Inter-Disciplinary Press
ISSN: 1756-770X

Exhuming Monsters: Historical Archaeology and the Monstrous

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Abstract

The archaeology of ritual and magic has been receiving increased attention over that past decade and is raising fundamental questions about the way the archaeological record is interpreted. As integral components in the belief and practice of protective magic, conceptualizations of monstrosity and subsequent manifestation of monsters must be understood by archaeologists searching for the material culture of magic. While a few archaeological studies have methodologically addressed monstrosity (e.g., cannibalism and vampirism), no studies have theoretically considered the broader implications of the social construction and contextuality of monstrosity and monstrous behaviour, how these conceptualizations change through time, and how they inform continuing issues of intolerance, violence, and xenophobia. In effect, historical archaeologists perpetuate a normalized and sanitized vision of the past by either downplaying or ignoring any discussion of the dark underside of human experience that involves beliefs and behaviours deemed too fantastical or deviant. However, these constructs are directly related to the belief in and practice of popular magic as coping and identity maintenance strategies that delineate the physical and metaphorical line between humanity and savagery, the known and unknown, safety and danger, and 'us' and the 'other.' This article will examine the current dearth of historical archaeological research concerned with monstrosity – particularly in the United States – and propose contexts and research questions about monstrosity that offer the potential to affect significant changes in artifactual analysis and interpretation as well as prompt a re-evaluation of past ideas concerning identity construction and maintenance.

Key Words

Historical archaeology, material culture, magic, belief, monstrosity, normalcy, supernatural, deviance

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1. Introduction

This article represents a reformatted version of a paper presented at the 7th Global Conference on Monsters and the Monstrous. The articles presented at this particular conference primarily provided interesting and stimulating explorations and analysis of monstrosity in literary and psychological terms. Some notable exceptions presented historical examples of starvation cannibalism and its constitutive role in the Cree witigo monster. Others referenced the mythological and folkloric constructs of the monstrous that historically would have been integral to everyday lived experience. Only one article, Ji Won Chung's, explored the integration of monstrous construction with quotidian material culture in everyday Victorian expressions of feminine beauty, albeit still viewed through a literary lens.

The continuing popularity of the annual monster conference has undeniably established that numerous notions of the monstrous have and continue to stimulate analytic psychological, social, and political consideration of the boundaries of identity and threshold interfaces with the abject. But I argue that as valuable as these ideological discussions are, their emphasis on literature and film remains only peripheral to constructs and consequences of monstrosity in real life. As a couple of the articles presented at the 7th Global Conference demonstrate, the very palpable fears of paedophilia and pandemic disease, of terrorist incursions and violent crime compel individuals, communities, and governments to explicitly manifest monstrous identities at which these fears can be targeted and reconciled.

Ironically, as I will discuss in this article, the field of historical archaeology, which should be primarily concerned with the tangible material remains of human thought and activity, also tends to relegate ideas of monstrosity, its implications, and its expressions to the realms of literary and psychological criticism. Traditionally, historical archaeologists attempt to extrapolate from artifactual evidence like buildings and commodities the economic, social, and political realities of a particular time and place. Until very recently there was no acknowledgement that people's fears and beliefs result in the construction of monstrous embodiments that may leave an identifiable footprint in the objects they leave behind.

However, my field, the archaeology of ritual and magic, has received increased attention over the past decade and is raising fundamental questions about the way the archaeological record is interpreted. As integral components in the belief and practice of magic, conceptualizations of monstrosity and subsequent manifestation of monsters must be understood by archaeologists searching for the material culture of magical belief. This is true both for recognizing and understanding maleficent magic, that used by so-called witches to intentionally inflict harm upon their chosen victims, and protective or countermagic, those magical measures employed by victims or potential victims to reverse *maleficium* used against them or to shield themselves from such forces. While a few archaeological studies have methodologically addressed monstrosity (e.g., cannibalism and vampirism), no studies have theoretically considered the broader implications of the social construction and contextuality of monstrosity and monstrous behaviour, how these conceptualizations change through time, and how they inform continuing issues of intolerance, violence, and xenophobia. In effect, historical archaeologists perpetuate a normalized and sanitized vision of the past by either downplaying or ignoring any discussion of the dark underside of human experience that involves beliefs and behaviours deemed too fantastical or deviant. However, these constructs are directly related to the belief in and practice of popular magic as coping and identity maintenance strategies that delineate the physical and metaphorical line between humanity and savagery, the known and unknown, safety and danger, and 'us' and the 'other.' In this article, I will examine the current dearth of historical archaeological research concerned with monstrosity – particularly in the United States – and propose contexts and research questions about monstrosity that offer the potential to affect significant changes in artifactual analysis and interpretation as well as prompt a re-evaluation of past ideas concerning identity construction and maintenance. For the purpose of this article, I will use the American definition of historical archaeology as archaeology focused on the time period 1450 c.e. to the present in colonized settings reflecting the rise of the World System of exchange and the development of capitalism with an emphasis on the under- or undocumented popular masses.[1]

2. Historical Archaeology

The objective of historical archaeological investigation is to gain a richer and more complete understanding of past realities through the material evidence left in the archaeological record – evidence that complements, extends, supports, or challenges written documentary

sources – as a vehicle through which to better comprehend our present. However, like historical documentation, archaeological evidence focusing on pragmatic, rational, and functional concepts is privileged over belief-based manifestations. American historical archaeologists expend little energy (physical or cognitive) considering the pervasive role supernatural belief and perceptions of monstrosity play in past quotidian behaviours and decisions represented through material culture. When researchers do expend such energy, it is disproportionately directed at social groups perpetually biased as exotic others, and, therefore, accepted as more prone to superstitious belief in the fantastical and monstrous. This bias especially constructs African and African American slave communities, Native Americans, and immigrant Chinese as both more likely to believe in the monstrous and as monstrous themselves for their non-Western beliefs and customs.[2]

Archaeologists of prehistory along with anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, folklorists, and literary scholars have contributed greatly to the study of the construct and belief in monsters, yet their insights find scant application in historical archaeological analysis and interpretation. Their research has provided numerous case studies on vampirism;[3] cannibalism;[4] werewolves;[5] and witchcraft.[6] Amongst the hundreds of articles and books published on these topics, less than twenty relate such beliefs to artifactual evidence from historical archaeological contexts. Specifically, a handful of publications address the possibility of starvation cannibalism of the 1846 ill fated Donner Party on their way west to California[7] and the 1845 excursion led by Sir John Franklin in search of the Northwest Passage through Canada to China.[8] Only two publications – one book and one brief newspaper article – discuss the archaeological evidence for vampiristic belief in historical contexts – notably Michael Bell's confirmation of the nineteenth century exhumation and destruction of an alleged vampire, Mercy Brown, in Exeter, Rhode Island;[9] and Matteo Borrini's recent discovery of a Venetian skeleton with a brick in its mouth to prevent the 'vampire' from spreading the plague.[10] I have not located any similar work on werewolves. Witchcraft, on the other hand, has provided greater fodder due mostly to the infamous Salem, Massachusetts witch trials of 1692. Still, the number of published works specifically linking archaeology to Anglo-European witchcraft belief remains negligible.[11]

None of the archaeological studies, whether prehistorical or historical, addressing cannibalism, vampirism, or witchcraft – with the exception of Turner and Turner's *Man Corn,* undertake a theoretical exploration of the social constructs of monstrosity, relying instead on the methodological mechanisms for identifying cannibalistic occurrence,

vampiristic, and witchcraft belief.[12] Belief in witchcraft is well-documented in historical accounts, but given only superficial attention in archaeological contexts and certainly never situated within a broader discussion of monstrosity. I propose a more interdisciplinary, and therefore, more comprehensive approach to the consideration of monstrosity and its subsequent appearance in the material record that necessitates two research tracks. The first entails an analysis of the relativistic social construction of monstrosity and the development of an historical archaeological theory of monstrosity; followed by the development of a methodology to recognize in the material record notions of and responses to belief in monstrous existence.

3. Monstrosity

Societies generate two basic classes of monstrosity: the first includes supernatural creatures that coexist with humankind; the second, humans that exceed the parameters of cultural norms. Of course, this is a simplistic division, as many supernatural creatures, like vampires, werewolves, witches, and windigos are actually humans who have transgressed the social or physical norms, or fallen victim to those who have, resulting in transmogrification into monstrous beings. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize the subtle distinction between traditional belief in supernatural creatures and the more dynamic construction of human monstrosity as a conscious attempt to validate cultural and social boundaries and identities by vilifying extreme deviance.

Conceptualisation of supernatural monstrosity has its origins in antiquity; many Anglo-European images of and beliefs in monstrous forms and races can be traced to ancient Greek and Indian sources, which later filtered through Christian interpreters to imbue them with a generally accepted level of veracity.[13] As such, these monsters continued to inhabit the same world as post-medieval Anglo-Europeans, imposing a constant threat to Christian well-being that required intermediating ritualized administrations to maintain a protective barrier between the realms of human good and monstrous evil. These monsters with their familiar faces and characteristics spread across broad temporal, spatial, and cultural landscapes.[14] The ubiquitousness of such beliefs provides historical archaeologists with a foundation from which to begin an exploration of monstrosity in particular contexts as archaeological evidence for such beliefs continues to accumulate in Britain, Europe, and the United States.

Analysis of supernatural monsters should lead archaeologists to question the circumstances and dynamics governing the emphasis on specific creatures in any given time and place. Most especially

consideration should extend to analyzing the overlap between the society's understanding of supernatural forces and its ideology of social deviance. To undertake this analysis requires that the archaeologist examine the particular society's physical and behavioural parameters of acceptability, keeping in mind that the thresholds between marginal acceptable behaviour and unacceptable monstrosity are context specific and fluid. It seems reasonable to assume that only extreme variance from social norms, what we may call aberrant social deviance, would be construed as monstrous; however, the judgment of just what is and is not extreme must be measured by the standards of the society in question.

Michel Foucault's consideration of monstrosity concurs with this assessment. He identifies 'the human monster' as one of three categories of human abnormality and relative to both natural and social law. Thus the monster's form could be a violation of natural laws as understood at the time, or its behaviour a violation of contextually valid social edicts. According to Stuart Eldon, 'for Foucault, the monster combines the impossible and the forbidden.' Furthermore, 'Foucault suggests that each age had its form of 'privileged monster,' a particular type that was emphasized.'[15] Considering the attributes of these 'privileged' types could reveal valuable insights into the minds of past peoples, especially concerning their notions of normalcy versus deviance.

When considering cultural conceptions of normalcy, it is efficacious to contemplate three categories through which normalcy is determined and weighed: physical, behavioural, and customary. The physical category would include expectations for ordinary variations and responses in regards to both human and natural states of health, disease, and death. Thus, human or animal birth defects; mental illness; and inexplicable physical failings or abilities may be construed as signs of monstrosity. The behavioural category would comprise issues of extreme gender role violation; savage or bizarre violence, and deviant sexual behaviour like bestiality and necrophilia.[16] The final type, customary, refers to the vilification of other cultural groups by targeting their alteric foodway, sartorial, religious, warcraft, and other cultural customs as savagely monstrous.[17]

It must be noted that any physical, behavioural, or customary particular may simultaneously be conceived by the same population as monstrous and normal dependent upon the context and people involved. For example, if an individual tortured and dismembered another individual, he or she likely would be condemned as monstrously inhuman; conversely, if the ruling authorities meted out such a punishment for heretical or criminal acts, their behaviour would largely go unquestioned. In fact, history provides us with too many examples of

just such a gruesome double standard. Elden remarks that 'the mechanisms utilized to police normalcy are often tainted by grotesque or abnormal elements'.[18] In other words, in attempting to control, regulate, or obliterate the monstrous, the regulators become monsters themselves.

4. Conclusion

Throughout most of the historical period that concerns historical archaeologists, the interface between the natural and the supernatural pervaded all aspects of everyday life. My particular research focuses on seventeenth century New England and the magical mechanisms people employed to negotiate the boundaries between themselves and those malign forces they believed were sent to test them. To create and maintain a righteous, legitimate, and recognizable identity for themselves against which they could compare and measure their opposite, they manifested images and ideologies of monstrousness. In some cases these images provided the blueprint for identifying witches among their own communities; in other cases, Native Americans and African slaves appeared to Puritan colonists as devils incarnate. Anyone or anything conveying physical, behavioural, or customary attributes that threatened the established worldview was interpreted as monstrous and dangerous to the world order; thus, New Englanders projected their ideas of monstrosity onto others to vilify them and to create justification for their own violence against outsiders. Of course, these same New Englanders constantly feared succumbing to the powers of evil and becoming monsters themselves as both written and artifactual evidence attests.

Aside from a handful of artefacts discovered in North America like concealed shoes and buried 'witch-bottles' to protect inhabitants from bewitchment, historical archaeologists in the United States simply overlook evidence indicative of magical practice that espoused a viable belief in and fear of monstrous beings. Amy Gazin-Schwartz[19] illustrates through her study of magical belief in Scotland that mundane objects like scissors, pins, knives, shoes, and even the planting pattern of particular trees and shrubs can all be evidence of such magical practices. Knives or scissors, for example, located around a threshold were commonly used as barriers to devils and witches as were shoes in the chimney and rowan planted at house corners, gates, and doors. However, American historical archaeologists interpret these ordinary objects according to their forms and mundane functions, classifying them as household or kitchen utensils, clothing, and flora and then extrapolating ideas like socioeconomic status, access to market networks, spatial distribution of production or activities, or survival of traditional foodways. These socioeconomic interpretations dominate the research agendas of

historical archaeology while ideological explanations remain unconsidered. Such an approach altogether misses the monstrous dimensions of life to which magically employed material culture points.

It is imperative for me as I look to the archaeological record for seventeenth century New England to understand their conceptualizations of monstrosity, how and to whom they attributed such characteristics, and the measures they took to mediate these monstrous forces. I ask myself, 'What cultural, religious, political, psychological, social, and environmental factors influenced their particular ideologies of monstrosity and how do these variables manifest in the material record?' Through time worldviews, perceptions, and concerns change as culture contact continues; knowledge advances; political, economic, and environmental shifts occur; and people face new challenges in a world whose cultural and political boundaries have become more permeable through technology and communication. How and under what circumstances do monstrous conceptualizations change and what residue do those changes leave on the human landscape in the wake of these shifts? Only by first understanding their conceptualizations of monstrosity, can we as archaeologists begin to recognize the material responses to those ideas. At that point a more comprehensive methodology will emerge to more accurately interpret artifactual evidence as indicative of monstrous belief and mediation.

In heterogeneous populations where people from various customary, ideological, political, and racial or ethnic backgrounds intermingle, a degree of toleration along a continuum of 'otherness' generally allows for maintaining distinct cultural identities without demonizing each other. When those differences transgress the outer limits of what any given group perceives as natural or social laws, the transgressors shift from being not just 'other,' but alteric or beyond recognizable. People will always create monsters, either as a mechanism to provide a face and form to the nebulous fear of the unknown or as a way to validate themselves by denigrating this alteric other. If historical archaeologists give more consideration to these constructs of the past, we would be better equipped to interpret not just magical and ritualistic artifactual evidence, but would gain a more nuanced understanding of the human response both past and present to cultural contact, dislocation, high stress, and crisis situations.

Notes

[1] Charles Orser, *Historical Archaeology, 2nd edition* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson, Prentice Hall, 2004.

[2] Christopher Fennell, 'Conjuring Boundaries: Inferring Past Identities from Religious Artifacts,' *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* vol. 4, issue 4 (2000): 281-313.
[3] Alan Dundes ed., *The Vampire: A Casebook* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).
[4] Daniel D. Donnelly and Mark P. Donnelly, *Eat Thy Neighbour: A History of Cannibalism* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2006).
[5] Douglas Adams, *The Beast Within: A History of the Werewolf* (New York: Avon Books, 1992).
[6] Brian Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[7] Donald Hardesty, *The Archaeology of the Donner Party* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1997).
[8] John Carey, 'Answers From an Icy Grave,' Newsweek, October 8, 1984.
[9] Michael Bell, *Food for the Dead: On the Trail of New England's Vampires* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2002).
[10] Heather Whipps, 'Medieval 'Vampire' Skull Found,' *Live Science*, Live Science, 2009.
[11] Brian Hoggard, 'The Archaeology of Counter-Witchcraft and Popular Music,' *Beyond the Witch Trials*: *Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe*, ed. Owen Davies and Willem de Blécourt (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 167-186.
[12] Christy Turner and Jacqueline Turner, *Man Corn: Canibalism and Violence in the Prehisteric American Southwest* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998).
[13] Rudolf Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 5 (1942), 159-197.
[14] Arthur Lehman and Pamela Moro eds., *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural, Sixth ed.* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2005).
[15] Stuart Elden, 'The Constitution of the Normal: Monsters and Masturbation at the Collège de France,' *Boundary 2* vol. 28, issue 1 (2001): 91-105.
[16] Jane Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[17] Diana DiPaolo Loren, *In Contact: Bodies and Spaces in the Sixteenth- and Seventeenth- Century Eastern Woodlands* (Lanham, Maryland: Altamira Press, 2008).
[18] Stuart Elden, 'The Constitution of the Normal, 104.

[19] Amy Gazin-Schwartz, 'Archaeology and Folklore of Material, Culture, Ritual and Everyday Life,' *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, vol. 5, issue 4 (2001), 263-280.

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Monsters and the Monstrous, Volume 1, pp. 33-46 (2011) Inter-Disciplinary Press
ISSN: 1756-770X

Triggering Time's Trapdoor

Keira McKenzie

Abstract

The monstrous entities populating the fiction of H. P. Lovecraft are amongst the most imaginative in Horror. Lovecraft's 'Cthulhu Mythos' contains entities that exist outside of linear time, emphasizing the author's ambivalent attitude to knowledge and the broadening scientific horizon extant at the time: '…but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality… that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.'[1]

The narrators of Lovecraft's fiction frequently learn part of these 'revelations' through their experiences, illuminating Lovecraft's ambivalence. I intend examining how his monsters exist both within and outside of time, from their intimated existence in the earliest history of the planet, to their continuance 'outside' the implied space/time continuum of human history, influencing events in the future: 'That which is not dead can eternal lie/ and through strange aeons, even death may die.'[2]

While these themes are found in many of Lovecraft's writings, I intend to concentrate on two stories: 'The Call of Cthulhu' and 'At The Mountains of Madness'. In these two texts, the monsters exist within a range of historical and futuristic vistas which have immediate and horrific consequences in the narrators' present circumstances. These monsters are both precursors to the advancement of human knowledge as well as echoing lost knowledge, relating to both scientific enquiry and those 'archetypes of horror' that should have safeguarded humanity from the awareness of what Lovecraft terms 'cosmic horror'.

Key Words

H.P.Lovecraft, science, horror, sublime, Cthulhu, Shoggoth, Antarctica, boundaries, time, history.

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1. Staring into the Abyss

The monsters of H.P. Lovecraft (1890 – 1937), American writer of science fiction and horror in the early twentieth century, are unique in their separateness from humanity. They do not figure in the warp and weft of commonly known mythology, are set apart from civilizations that rise and fall, and their interference in human affairs is minimal. These monsters ascend from the purely horrific to the sublime, crossing all the known boundaries of time, of human certainties such as history, the supposed rock-solidity of the geological ages of the earth, and even the quasi-certainty of the properties of the universe.

Humanity exists safely within time's boundaries, cocooned from the wider chaos of the unknown universe, and our comprehension of evolution, history, and the progression of knowledge proceeds in a readily perceptible linear fashion. But time is an illusion and Lovecraft's monstrous creations, not being of human making or subjected to the laws of human time, trigger the flaw inherent in time's strictures in the very fact they exist within those imposed boundaries, and without. These entities are, in effect, in a quantum state: present now, then, and in the future. Their existence reduces all certainties as they reveal that there is no time – not as we measure it. The monsters within these stories intimate multi-dimensional universes; they illustrate an unheard of expansion of biologies and states of being as well as unexpected instability of not only the Earth's geophysical history, but time itself. The existence of Lovecraft's monstrous entities expose humanity to the sublime universe we are really part of.

Lovecraft created an entire pantheon of monsters and monstrous entities, but I shall concentrate on two of his creations: Cthulhu, from his 1926 short story 'The Call of Cthulhu', where a narrator pieces together a horrific revelation of both past and possible futures through notes left by a dead relative, and learns what an earthquake has caused and the reason behind a tale of piracy and shipwrecks and islands in unmapped seas; and the Shoggoth, from his 1931 novella 'At the Mountains of Madness', which tells of an Antarctic expedition, the unexpected discovery of ancient, pre-human cities in East Antarctica and the horrors encountered there.

Both stories speak to the vast, unplumbed chaos of space, of universes and histories beyond our own time, reaching far back into the murky depths of the planet's past, reducing the elaborately structured stories of human history to a mere instant. While the interaction with each monster is minimised, their physical descriptions encapsulate the monstrous chaos of the universe from which these entities came, and the more disconcerting possibility that there are universes other than this

one. The horror experienced by the characters is profound, crossing into the sublime, well beyond normal perception and imagination. For Jennifer Wawrzinek, '(t)o inhabit the sublime is to confront one's borders and boundaries'[3], which the characters in Lovecraft's short fiction are forced to do: to face the immensity of the universe and the possibility of things outside the universe and beyond any border we can conceive. This, Fritz Leiber says, was one of the motivations behind Lovecraft's writing, 'the universe of modern science engendered a profounder horror in Lovecraft's writings than that stemming from its tremendous distances and its highly probably alien and powerful non-human inhabitants.'[4] The immense reaches implied in the stories, both temporal and spatial, are inconceivable in normal, everyday reality, but are hinted at by the narrative structure of both stories where the first person point of view separates the reader from unfolding events.

H.P. Lovecraft lived during an age that was experiencing some of the greatest scientific discoveries since Newton caught the apple, when previous astronomical assertions and quantum theory were being tested and widened. But Lovecraft preferred the clockwork universe of the 18th century. In a letter on Einstein's theory to one of his many correspondents, he says:

> All is chance, accident and ephemeral illusion – a fly may be greater than Acturus, and Durfee Hill may surpass Mount Everest – assuming them to be removed from the present planet and differently environed in the continuum of space-time. … All the cosmos is a jest, and fit to be treated only as a jest, and one thing is as true as another. ... all is chaos, always has been, and always will be.[5]

In these two stories, the monsters are encountered by chance or chaotic accident, as though it was due to Azathoth, blind idiot god at the centre of Lovecraft's universe; 'the monstrous nuclear chaos beyond angled space'.[6] This description not only strengthens the intimation of universes beyond this one, it makes it possible to read Azathoth as the 'personification' of what the entire twentieth century revealed: that there is no certainty[7]. In keeping with this uncertainty, both Cthulhu and the shoggoths are physically plastic and ill-defined in form; both represent that same monstrous chaos, melting the rigid structure of the human perceptions of time. Their bodies mirror the inability of the human mind to conceive of true vastness, and as such, they enter the sublime in that

the experience of encountering them exceeds both the perceptual and imaginative ability to fully comprehend what is seen.

Through his stories, Lovecraft enables insights into the potential for these monsters to reveal possibilities outside the human sphere of existence, of philosophy and time, a potential expressed in the language of horror. As Edmund Burke writes: 'Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*.'[8] The colossal ages of ruins encountered in both stories are referred to as 'hideous', or 'blasphemous', as though the domination of the human species was something that had never thought to be challenged. But challenged it is, as Lovecraft in another letter states:

> Our human race is only a trivial incident in the history of creation. It is of no more importance in the annals of eternity and infinity than is the child's snow-man in the annals of terrestrial tribes and nations.[9]

Just as Copernicus revealed that the earth is not the centre of the solar system, or the universe, so Lovecraft insists on the bleak fact that humanity is not the centre of anything, nor its achievements worth noting in the great cosmic void surrounding us.

2. Cthulhu: Out of the Watery Abyss

If gods are the ultimate representation of the sublime, exercises in power and the diminution of humanity, then 'The Call of Cthulhu' is the story of one such encounter, although the god it speaks of is alien to the Earth and all it contains. Nothing in the story is a balm to the potential doom of the earth and humanity, even if most of the horror of Cthulhu is experienced more through the human activities surrounding and perpetuating his existence than from actual encounters. Of course, an actual encounter is horrific beyond the human mind to contain, as is reported in the story. Part of Cthulhu's history is known by an ancient, secret cult, for Cthulhu is one of 'the Great Old Ones who lived ages before there were any men, and who came to the young world out of the sky.'[10] Cthulhu is revealed within a drowned and ruined city intimating a civilization before humanity had even begun to evolve. Those who stumble across the ancient knowledge are murdered; though the narrator is not physically present during any encounter, the revelation of Cthulhu's reality awakens him to the fact his own life is in very real danger.

Time and distance are intrinsic to the narrative's structure. The narrator, whose name is only ever mentioned in the subtitle not normally included in most anthologised versions[11], receives all his information second or third-hand, and some time after the events themselves. The reader is completely divorced from any action, only through the narrator's emotional responses to the accounts he reads can the power of the revelation be felt, and the revelation that Cthulhu exists shatters human perspectives on both the progression and nature of time, and of earthly history. This illustrates the plasticity of time in relation to these entities – the past experiences of others are so powerful that Cthulhu is brought into the present through the imagination and reflection of the narrator.

As do many monsters, Cthulhu defies categorisation, his very appearance and structure realising him, as Jeffrey Cohen writes, 'as incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond – of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within.'[12] Cthulhu is both within the earth, yet not part of it. He comes from the stars, possibly another dimension, but exists in current time and space through dreams, just as he has done for thousands of years, referred to in ancient books that themselves are mostly forgotten[13]. The ages of the earth, reckoned in thousands and millions of years, become meaningless.

Cthulhu is the same as all of Lovecraft's monsters: 'generally disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration.'[14] For example, in artworks of alien stone, Cthulhu is 'cuttlefish head, dragon body, scaly wings,'[15] or a 'pulpy tentacle head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings,'[16] or 'a monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore-feet, and long, narrow wings behind... of a somewhat bloated corpulence'.[17] The final description of him is from the journal of a sailor who survived the encounter long enough to write:

> A mountain walked or stumbled. … the green sticky spawn of the stars had awakened to claim his own. The stars were right again… After vigintillions of years great Cthulhu was loose again, and ravening for delight.[18]

Cthulhu rises into physical, terrifying reality through occurrences that humanity is powerless against: an earthquake and a storm. Mystery and terror incarnate, Cthulhu populates the nightmares of humanity,

moulding the thoughts of evolving humans, distorting and debasing them. Neither dead nor alive, Cthulhu lies in his sunken city R'lyeh, in a form of suspended animation that disregards the boundary between life and death: 'in his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming,'[19] but he does and is more than that. Entities such as Cthulhu:

> had shape… but that shape was not made of matter. When the stars were right, They could plunge from world to world through the sky; but when the stars were wrong, They could not live. But although they no longer lived, They would never really die.[20]

Teetering on the brink of impossibility, Cthulhu becomes the Sublime: his immense bulk, chimerical and apparent deathless composition, all result in an entity too much to take in and survive, mentally intact. Cthulhu himself also promises nothing less than the destruction of civilization:

> Mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and revelling in joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom.[21]

This assertion that humanity itself would exceed the natural laws of time and space implies the social boundaries of behaviour and morals that ensure the continuity of human civilization would be breached by the existence of these boundary-negating monstrosities. So Cthulhu's existence disconcerts more than the narrator's sense of time and history. The presence of the Great Old Ones now existing 'hidden in distant wastes and dark places all over the world'[22] implies a continual existence from pre-human times to time far in humanity's future, making a nonsense of the linear progression of time. And not only existence on the Earth itself, for Cthulhu came down from the stars almost before the planet Earth itself was fully formed. Neither living nor dead, Cthulhu simply *is*, a monstrous threat deep within the ocean, itself an expression of the sublime in its lack of boundaries, ready to rise when terrestrial reality is disturbed by natural forces such as earthquakes or storms.

3. The Shoggoth: Out of the Frozen Abyss

'At the Mountains of Madness' is set with atmospheric realism in East Antarctica, geologically more ancient than the western half of the continent.[23] The horror in this story is layered, each layer peeled back to reveal greater and more horrific wonders, enlarging the narrator's perception of the sublime by expanding the boundaries of earthly habitation, of time, and of space.

The continent of Antarctica: 'the great unknown continent and its cryptic world of frozen death,'[24] is the introduction to the world of the monstrous sublime. Icebergs are referred to as 'the battlements of unimaginable cosmic castles'[25] and katabatic winds have 'cadences (that) sometimes held vague suggestions of a wild and half-sentient musical piping.'[26] Against this backdrop, some members of the expedition make a discovery of an unexpected mountain range that is '(l)ike land of mystery in a dream or gateway to forbidden world of untrodden wonder.'[27] The simile deepens into reality when the next layer of horror is revealed by the discovery of a 'monstrous, barrel-shaped fossil of wholly unknown nature; probably vegetable unless overgrown specimen of unknown marine radiate.'[28] Eight foot long, its prints found in rocks that were 'from a thousand million to fifty or sixty million years old,'[29] the fantastically preserved fossils were excavated in a cave halfway up the unknown mountain range which was thought by the observers to exceed the Himalayas in height. Apparently neither vegetable nor animal, these creatures named by the explorers 'elder ones' conform to the monstrous by defying categorization.

The revelation that these apparent fossils then come to life, that the entities were in suspended animation, implies terrible revelations, which the narrator and the reader are distanced from. But this builds into the revelation of the next layer of the story as the two surviving characters, hoping to effect a rescue of missing team members, cross the mountains; they 'stare across the momentous divide and over the unsampled secrets of an elder and utterly alien earth.'[30]

> The effect of the monstrous sight was indescribable, for some fiendish violation of known and natural law seemed certain at the outset. Here, on a hellishly ancient table-land fully twenty thousand feet high, and in a climate deadly to habitation since a prehuman age not less than five hundred thousand years ago, there stretched nearly to the vision's limit a tangle of orderly stone which only the desperation of a mental self-

> defence could possibly attribute to any but a conscious and artificial cause.[31]

Even the characters recognize the monstrous: a ruined city where a city should never have been certainly defies rational categorization.[32] Nothing in the city dates later than the Pliocene, and geological evidence dates the city from the Mesozoic, far before human history. Everything these scientists know of time and the universe is thrown into disarray.

Descending below the glacier to read the alien histories inscribed on the ruined city's walls, the characters realize this was the city of those 'elder ones' whose remains they had discovered. Monstrosity fades into familiarity and the 'elder ones' become identified with humanity because of those recorded histories, their obvious social organization and their concerns: 'Radiates, vegetables, monstrosities, star spawn – whatever they had been, they were men!'[33] The horror of the first discovery is dispelled by the wonder of the city, the obvious intelligence of its long vanished inhabitants. Then the final layer of horror is peeled back to reveal a shoggoth: 'the utter, objective embodiment of the fantastic novelist's 'thing that should not be'.'[34] It is worse than Cthulhu who at least has a perceivable shape, but a shoggoth does not:

> (T)he nightmare, plastic column of fetid black iridescence oozed … a terrible, indescribable thing vaster than any subway train – a shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles, faintly self-luminous, and with myriads of temporary eyes forming and unforming as pustules of greenish light all over the tunnel-filling front that bore down upon us.[35]

The formlessness, the chaos explicit in a shoggoth's biological makeup, defies all rational belief let alone categorization. Shoggoths are not only alien to earth, they were synthesised by the 'elder ones', they are technology gone bad. Acquiring intelligence over millennia, the shoggoths' lack of a social structure reflects their lack of stable physical structure. Their sentience is ruthless, and they were at least partially responsible for the decline of the civilisation of the 'elder ones'. These terrible things, these shoggoths, are not described as living or dead, they simply *are*: monstrous globs of sentient goo pervading the unknown depths of Antarctica's subglacial tunnels and lakes.

Jennifer Wawrzinek's statement that '(t)he power that articulates the sublime is so great that the perceiving subject has the sense of being annihilated through the very encounter,'[36] is illustrated by the shoggoth's

apparent malice in the novella, and its appearance, its lack of borders or any definable form is a horrific representation of the Kantian sublime: something found in formlessness and without boundaries. Both the sight of it and what it represents force the characters to flee. The sublime enfolds both the shoggoth and the city whose ruins are not less than five hundred thousand years old. Shoggoths not only displace time by their existence, they have no sense of place - in defying the space-time continuum where humanity lives, in being manufactured through alien technology millions of years prior, they remain alien to the earth despite existing within it for millennia. The history of the planet, its geological ages and the perceived order of evolution from single-celled organisms to the complexities of the higher order mammals now populating the planet, is rendered meaningless in the face of the vast civilization ruined before Antarctica froze over, and by that alien race's own nightmare populating those ruins. The shoggoth is monstrous and sublime in the one moment.

4. The Abyss Stares Back

The boundaries of time and space in which humanity exists are elided by the entities in these stories, the universe(s) they represent, and the achievements of alien beings. This is intensified by descriptions within the stories: the massive ruins in Antarctica are blurred by the white on white of glaciation, and the outlines of Cthulhu's city of R'lyeh are equally ill-defined: '(t)he very sun of heaven seemed distorted when viewed through the polarizing miasma welling out from this sea-soaked perversion.'[37]

Monsters, usually because of their size and unrestrained natures, are generally destructive, but the damage done by Cthulhu and the shoggoths amount to subtle traces of disquiet at the edges of the known world. They leave minimal traces of their existence because they skulk at the borders of known space and biology. They are too liminal to be approached except in terms of horror, and their existence extends the boundaries and possibilities for the definition of existence itself. There is no simplicity in Lovecraft's monsters. They are not the result of wrongdoing against known laws of existence or behaviour. They dissolve the humanly perceived boundary of time, disorganising history, while human origins and achievements are put firmly in their place. Lovecraft wrote:

> We imagine that the welfare of our race is the paramount consideration, when as a matter of fact the very existence of the race may be an obstacle to the

> predestined course of the aggregated universe of infinity![38]

History and the lessons of history lose validity, because neither Cthulhu nor shoggoths have any relation to it. They liquefy the boundaries of the known world, of human perception of time and of the universe by existing outside human history. Nothing is stable, not continents, bedrock, past geological ages - nothing. Both time and space, like Lovecraft's entities, become plastic. While we are trapped within the Newtonian universal time - linear time, deathless Cthulhu has waited since human time began, and shoggoths have raged for at least as long. It is in conquering the conception of death that the sublime inherent in the dissolution of the boundaries that define life is revealed.

Both monsters reveal that humanity itself is trapped into thinking that time and history are certified by the experience of those histories. But these stories posit the incompleteness of all history, whether biological, geological or human. The natural laws defied by Cthulhu's deathless sleep, or by the ruins in 'At the Mountains of Madness', highlight humanity's brief domination as a species, as though while playing in a beautiful garden, the children of Earth have discovered that it is owned by a monstrous something that could return at any moment[39]. As reported in 'At the Mountains of Madness', 'the earth has seen whole cycle or cycles of organic life before known one that begins with Archaeozoic cells.''[40] And time?

Time is questioned in both stories, the meaning of it, the relevance of it. Its structure is revealed to be fragile and dangerous. Brian Greene writes that one of the 'implications of Einstein's work is that the special relativistic reality treats all times equally.'[41] Lovecraft's monsters are here because the stars moved, the continents changed and oceans rose and fell, ice ages came and buried alien hopes and dreams. Cthulhu is stasis, a trapped moment that covers all our histories and reduces them to a mere slice, an instant that means nothing. Cthulhu and the shoggoths exist now and a billion years ago, threatening the future with their potential for chaos. In breaching time's boundary, they trigger the trapdoor of the sublime, and we are in danger of falling into the abyss.

> What might have been is an abstraction
> Remaining a perpetual possibility
> Only in a world of speculation.
> What might have been and what has been
> Point to one end, which is always present.[42]

Notes

[1] H.P. Lovecraft, 'The Call of Cthulhu,' *Omnibus Three: The Haunter of the Dark* (London: Harper Collins, 1985), 61.
[2] Ibid., 81.
[3] Jennifer Wawrzinek, *Ambiguous Subjects: Dissolution and Metamorphosis in the Postmodern Sublime* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 13.
[4] Fritz Leiber, 'A Literary Copernicus,' *Fafhrd and Me: A Collection of Essays* (Newark: Wildside Press, 1990), 68.
[5] H.P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters Vol. 1, 1911-1924,* eds. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1965), letter dated 26 May 1923, 231.
[6] H.P. Lovecraft, 'The Whisper in Darkness,' *Omnibus Three*, 216.
[7] Lovecraft's apparent horror of non-Euclidean space, which figures in much of his work, is one example of this.
[8] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), Part One Section VII, 39.
[9] Lovecraft, *Selected Letters Vol. 1*, 24.
[10] Lovecraft, 'The Call of Cthulhu,' *Omnibus Three: The Haunter of the Dark* (London: Harper Collins, 1985), 78.
[11] The title was originally published as, 'The Call of Cthulhu (Found Among the Papers of the Late Francis Wayland Thurston, of Boston)', S.T. Joshi and Peter Cannon, *More Annotated H. P. Lovecraft* (New York: Dell, 1999), 173.
[12] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 7.
[13] Lovecraft created a series of ancient works, the most famous being the Necronomicon, which details Cthulhu and other entities, though it attempts to obscure all references to shoggoths.
[14] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 6.
[15] Lovecraft, 'The Call of Cthulhu', 90.
[16] Ibid., 63.
[17] Ibid., 72.
[18] Ibid., 97.
[19] Ibid., 74.
[20] Ibid., 80.
[21] Ibid., 81-82.
[22] Ibid., 78.

[23] It is not yet known whether East and West Antarctica are joined from separate ancient land masses or the result of another type of tectonic activity. Not far from the coordinates Lovecraft gives in 'At the Mountains of Madness', a range of mountains was discovered some 20 years after his death. These mountains, the Gamburtsev Range (dubbed the Ghost Mountains) are four kilometres below the glacial ice that coats most of East Antarctica. Their existence is a geological puzzle. Of (not serious) concern is the possibility that the Russians might recommence drilling Lake Vostok, a subglacial lake to one side of these Ghost Mountains. In Lovecraft's novella, shoggoths haunted the subglacial lakes where the 'elder ones' had fled at least half a millennia ago.
[24] Lovecraft, 'At the Mountains of Madness', *Omnibus One*, 15.
[25] Ibid., 15.
[26] Ibid., 16.
[27] Ibid., 24.
[28] Ibid., 32.
[29] Ibid., 35.
[30] Ibid., 62.
[31] Ibid., 63.
[32] These ruins of what had been a great civilization saw the coming of Cthulhu from the stars, proving him to be no god. He and others are 'mere extra-terrestrials', as T. S. Joshi says in his *Lovecraft: A Life* (West Warwick: Necronomicon Press, 2004), 492.
[33] Lovecraft, 'At the Mountains of Madness', 126.
[34] Ibid., 132.
[35] Ibid., 132-133.
[36] Wawrzinek, *Ambiguous Subjects*, 13.
[37] Lovecraft, 'The Call of Cthulhu', 94.
[38] Lovecraft, *Selected Letters Vol. 1*, 24.
[39] The shadow evolution that biologists are now seriously considering has potential relevance here: that the definitions of life may be inadequate to recognize life that has been here far longer than we recognize.
[40] Lovecraft, 'At the Mountains of Madness', 31.
[41] Brian Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos* (London: Penguin, 2008), 132.
[42] T.S. Eliot, 'The Four Quartets,' *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 171.

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Monsters and the Monstrous, Volume 1, pp. 47-56 (2011) Inter-Disciplinary Press
ISSN: 1756-770X

The Enormous Crocodile: The Horrific Hope of a Walking Handbag

Amena S. Hassan

Abstract

Roald Dahl is no stranger to the macabre in his writings. His monsters, for children and adults alike, take on every shape and hue imaginable. In his children's books, they have the innate ability to create dread in the space of just a few pages. They have a knack for disguising themselves as something, initially, benign, and many times possess a mythical air. Most simply have motives that resemble the illogical ambitions of a tyrant and can be purely selfish and ego-driven.

The Enormous Crocodile represents many traits inherent in Dahl's monsters but his cunning lies in his insatiable greed and inventive methods for devouring children. What makes him particularly fascinating is the ravenous behaviour that drives him to go beyond the secluded environment of his species to actively pursue prey outside the banks of the river. But like many of Dahl's monsters, both animal and human, we find there is a weakness present, which gives the reader hope. In this case, the crocodile is boastful – a failing that proves to be the avaricious creature's Achilles' heel. Although he is finally thwarted and overcome by other animals of the jungle, his potential to create disaster makes him nothing short of a demon to the children he pursues, who are not equipped to even handle ghouls under their beds, let alone a romping crocodile in their midst.

This article looks at some of the different influences that may have helped finalize Dahl's vision of the crocodile with references to the author's autobiography, his passion for Norwegian folktales, and comparisons to other literary fiends in his works. It also includes why Dahl chose similar traits for other monsters he created such as the grand witch and the flesh eating giants and why they are sometimes harder to decode than the crocodile.

Key Words

Roald Dahl, crocodile, myth, Norway, Norwegian, folktales, trolls, witches.

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1. Children are Bigger than Fish

The Enormous Crocodile was first published in 1978 and Roald Dahl dedicated it to his granddaughter Sophie, which is also the name of his heroine in his later book *The BFG*. A common theme throughout many of Dahl's children's stories is the misunderstood, threatened child against a hostile world immersed in a series of plot points where the protagonist, because of evil beyond his or her control, is forced to develop defence mechanisms and coping strategies towards the enveloping hostility. In many instances the child receives outside help in the form of a benevolent giant, a nurturing grandmother, or a group of animals. Finally, there is revenge, partnered with the recognition of an inner strength that is more enduring and empowering than even the temporary support he or she received throughout the course of the story. *The Enormous Crocodile* is different in its approach since the main character in the story is not a child but a seemingly unstoppable villain, whose main aim is to fulfil his ambition of chewing on several juicy children. The crocodile is very vocal about his goals from the beginning of the book, which simply starts like this:

> In the biggest brownest muddiest river in Africa, two crocodiles lay with their heads just above water. One of the crocodiles was enormous. The other was not so big.
>
> 'Do you know what I would like for my lunch today?' the Enormous Crocodile asked.
>
> 'No,' the Notsobig One said. 'What?'
>
> The Enormous Crocodile grinned, showing hundreds of sharp white teeth. 'For my lunch today,' he said, 'I would like a nice juicy little child.'
>
> 'I never eat children,' the Notsobig One said. 'Only fish.'
>
> 'Ho, ho, ho!' cried the Enormous Crocodile. 'I'll bet if you saw a fat juicy little child paddling in the water over there at this very moment, you'd gulp him up in one gollop!'

> 'No, I wouldn't,' the Notsobig One said. 'Children are too tough and chewy. They are tough and chewy and nasty and bitter.'[1]

From this point onwards, the crocodile is now seen as greedy, reckless, and mad by those who live around the river. His fellow crocodiles dismiss him and turn their backs on him. But as his desire to eat children escalates, he ploughs into the jungle to fulfil his awful cravings. Along the way he meets other jungle dwellers and proudly tells a hippopotamus, an elephant, a monkey, and a Roly-Poly bird about his 'secret plans and clever tricks' (taking an attempted snap at the monkey and the bird in the process of his journey to provide them with a sampling of his appetite). These animals, horrified by the obnoxiousness of his evil, later come to the help of the children who are targeted by the crocodile and, unlike most of Dahl's other stories, the children in this case are completely helpless and solely dependent on these animals for both immediate aid and assistance.

2. The Crocodile as a Mythical Presence

Before exploring Roald Dahl's Norwegian background in some more detail and the possibility of any Nordic roots for the crocodile myth, it may be worth putting this narrative into context by connecting it, first, with some more widespread myths. In many areas of the world, for those who imagine otherwise, the crocodile has not simply remained stagnant in a river, eating fish. For centuries it has taken on a mythical air in many established nations and played a prominent and enduring role in the symbolism and psyche of several cultures. As far back as 2,500 BC, the crocodile was a foreboding feature in Egypt's Nile River, where it was blamed for everything from causing blindness to creating solar eclipses. Its visual representation has generally been one of darkness in Egyptian hieroglyphic language combined with an undercurrent of respect, since pictorially it is shown swimming beneath boats carrying pharaohs to the underworld. Crocodiles took on god-like characteristics in places such as the Philippine island of Luzon, where it was widely believed the crocodile contained the spirit of a dead chief. In Madagascar, the water was kept pure for them because it was thought that the spirits of tribal chiefs resided amongst the crocodiles, which were protected as long as they did not kill any other member of a tribe.[2] The tales of the tribes who lived in the Pomeroon River basin in Guyana narrate that the origin of a woman came from the crocodile.[3]

Similar myths appear in Indonesia, Africa, India, Polynesia, Hawaii, China, Japan, Australia, and South America. The mystery

remains as to how these stories are so similar despite their genesis in some of the most isolated cultures all over the earth. An amalgamation of these legends has amounted to a complex structure of global stories about the crocodile that range from god-like and noble to cruelly despicable.

3. Influence of Nordic Mythology

As one of the most successful writers of children's books in modern times, Roald Dahl's life did not always follow the moral simplicity shown in the works he published, which he was much loved for by the general public. He was a complex character with a fantastically vivid imagination and according to Jeremy Treglown who wrote a biography of the author, he was, 'an intriguing, contradictory figure…famously a war hero, a connoisseur, a philanthropist, and a devoted family man who had to overcome an appalling succession of tragedies'.[4] Dahl wrote his first children's book while he was a British military attaché in wartime Washington, DC (and a suspected spy). He came to the United States after a long stretch of working for the Shell Oil company in East Africa and then as a fighter pilot for the Royal Air Force. However, he wrote most of his children's books in the last twenty-six years of his life, when his familial obligations were less stringent and he could concentrate fully on his writing career. But the more literary lifestyle did not free him from being the target of controversy for comments he made in social and political circles, which continue to affect his legacy even after his death.

The most idyllic period of Dahl's life was undoubtedly his childhood trips to Norway with his family, which he describes in some detail in his memoir *Boy*. Even though his younger life was spent in Cardiff, both his mother Sofie, and father Harald, were from Norway, and when his father passed away, Dahl's mother took their family to Christiania, now Oslo, on an annual basis. There they visited his grandparents and other members of his family in other parts of Norway, where he and his sisters who all spoke Norwegian fluently 'ate fresh fish, ice cream with burnt toffee, and heard stories of trolls and witches'.[5] It is hard to say whether Dahl took some content for his own fairytales directly from the stories he heard in Norway or whether they came from his own independent research of Norse or Nordic mythology, but it is worth taking note of some of their corresponding elements within his writing.

It is difficult to specifically pinpoint the origins of Norse mythology, but we do know that its origin came before established religion and that its pagan roots originated in north Germany, with eventual links to Iceland, Sweden, Denmark, and even Russia. In recent

years, interest in Norse mythology has undergone a revival and a more focused recognition of its folktale history, with over 4,500 recorded versions of its folktales in print and manuscript version housed in the Archives of the Norwegian Folklore Institute at the University of Oslo.[6] Many of the more popular ones deal with humorous themes such as fights with trolls and giants, marriages between mortals and other-worldly beings, tales of sea dwellers, and anecdotes about animals, but the tradition of Norwegian myth and folktale was formed by very prominent, if not traumatic events, such as the plague in 1351 followed by years of wars with the Swedes and episodes of famine.[7] These were very adult experiences and showed that the beginnings of these folktales dealt with subject matter not necessarily meant for children. Legends were based in history and were read, similar to stories in religious teachings and a folktale could be founded on a legend. Folktales also connected people socially, were spoken aloud, and were addressed to whole families or communities. According to Reidar Thorwald Christiansen:

> The national characteristics of Norwegian folktales are far less in evidence and are accordingly more difficult to define than is the special Norwegian flavour of the legends. The reason seems apparent. As has been emphasized, folktales are to be classed with fiction, while legends are akin to history and determined by folk-belief which is a steady growth of centuries, with lines running back to prehistoric times. Legend motifs are often migratory and international, but when introduced, they are transposed into a Norwegian key.[8]

4. Shape Shifting

Shape shifters commonly appear in Norse folktales. They generally shift between human form and that of animals. *Kelpies* are one type of shape-changing water spirits who were known to materialize as ordinary horses. When tired travellers climbed onto them, they would immediately rush into the water and drown their rider. Additionally, fairies are known for taking on different shapes sometimes appearing as dogs, horses, or calves or tricking people into losing their way by imitating human voices.[9] One of the most famous Norwegian tales is about shape shifting during harvest time. A couple is threshing in the fields and then returns home. Before the husband leaves again, he tells his wife to strike any bear who enters their house. She asks him not to leave but he seems compelled to go. When a bear does come into their

home that night, the wife attacks it with her long scythe and later, when her husband returns she finds he has lost one of his thumbs and his hands are bloody. From this evidence, she concludes that it was her husband who had recently transformed into a bear. [10]

The trick of shape shifting comes up repeatedly in *The Enormous Crocodile.* There are many elements of it as the crocodile enters the territory of humans and lies in wait for the children he tries to eat. The alteration to his looks is not as completely magical a metamorphosis as the ones demonstrated by the kelpies or fairies, but he does physically change his looks to trick other humans. His first shape change is when he becomes a coconut tree, standing upright with branches and coconuts attached to his head, before the children are warned off by the hippopotamus. His second transformation requires no costume change-he simply closes his eyes and lays himself across a piece of wood, exactly like a seesaw, hoping the children who later come into the playground will sit on him so he can easily gobble them up. The change is so cunningly done that they are nearly convinced he is part of the playground equipment. When this plan fails, he places himself on a merry-go-round, disguised as a wooden crocodile, but this groundwork also never comes to fruition. Right before his demise, he finally puts himself under a picnic table, shaping himself into a long wooden bench where children might sit down to eat before meeting the terrible end of his jaws. However, the elephant ultimately puts an end to the crocodile by taking him by the tail with his trunk and whirling him into space, past the moon and stars, until he is finally set ablaze as he enters head first into centre of the hot sun.[11]

In addition to the shape-shifting influence in *The Enormous Crocodile*, Dahl's passion for folktales through his other character creations connect back to stories of giants or trolls in Norwegian lore, who are called *jutul*, similar to the giants in *The BFG* who unabashedly run off to other countries at night to devour children. They are usually always grotesque and huge. Very often they have three heads each with a single eye, like a cyclops. They feed on humans, are slow-witted, and are known to randomly throw boulders into the middle of human landmarks such as churches. In *The BFG*, Dahl's flesh-eating giants could have easily come out of these folktales. They live in a dry rocky environment and have a low IQ, which makes them easy to trick. They are grotesque to look at, throw rocks, and feed on children on a nightly basis (until they are finally seized and imprisoned by the British Royal Air Force). On the other hand, even though he is technically a giant, the more lovable, BFG (or Big Friendly Giant), whose main objective in life is to catch and blow dreams into children's bedrooms, resembles more of what is know in

Norway as the *huldre-folk*, who generally look like humans but have slight distortions to their features.[12] The BFG is also much taller than most humans and has extremely large, distinctive looking ears. This is a trait Sophie the orphan immediately notices when she catches him trumpeting dreams into other children's bedrooms before she is kidnapped by him. Similarly, the *huldre-folk* are best known for taking human children from their beds. [13]

5. Witches and Green Mambas

In addition to the strongly possible influence of Norwegian folktales, Dahl also created his own unique mythology. It was his stint in Africa in his twenties, specifically in Dar es Salam in 1938, where Dahl had his first-hand encounters with the dangerous unpredictability of the exotic fauna. Snakes were ubiquitous and filled him with fear but the inhabitants of the village where he was stationed had a system of getting rid of species such as the black and green mamba that killed humans with a single strike. Like Dahl's crocodile, they lay absolutely still before an attack. At one point, a large male 'simba', the Swahili word for a lion, carries off a villager's wife in its jaws, but she is later retrieved when her husband causes a commotion and the lion then drops the woman in the savannah after it is scared off by a nearby gunshot.[14] Everyone who experiences the incident is both relieved but also puzzled by what they've seen, wondering why the lion didn't simply eat the cook's wife. Dahl wonders what the reason is behind the combination of the volatile yet strangely capricious behaviour of the lion. Could his experience have led him to portray animals such as the crocodile as also erratic and impulsive?

Beyond the crocodile, Dahl's younger days were a very possible source for another menacing character – the Grand Witch in *The Witches*. The Grand Witch, like the crocodile, is simply bent on eliminating children and is even more dangerous since she wants to cleanse the world of them and is driven to eliminating them on a much bigger scale. He devotes a large section of his book, *Boy*, to an encounter, at the age of seven, with a sweet shop owner – Mrs. Pratchett.[15] He describes her as not only visibly grotesque but also someone with a conspicuous mean streak, who always viewed Dahl and the schoolmates who accompanied him to the shop as potential thieves. She was skinny, had a moustache on her upper lip, and a mouth as sour as a green gooseberry. Her apron was grey and greasy with toast-crumbs, tea stains, and splotches of dried egg-yolk. However, it was her hands that were most disturbing to the young Dahl. They were grimy with dirt beneath the nails of her fingers – the same fingers she used to dig chocolate fudge out of the jars. This is

similar to how he describes the features of the women in his story *The Witches* who cover their disturbing looking fingernails with gloves, and have traces of blue spit on their lips when they talk. They are bald and cruel and cover their baldness with wigs. He also makes it clear in his book that it is their underlying motive to kill children that makes them truly ugly and not just their physical features.[16] Perhaps it was Dahl's sensitivity to Mrs Pratchett's suspicion and paranoia about the curiosity of young boys that moulded his early inspiration of what it took to be a witch. The reader later finds out that Dahl succeeded in placing a dead mouse in one of her sweet jars one afternoon and then inevitably caught one morning after assembly when she visits his school and picks him and several others out of a line of boys, with the help of the headmaster. Mrs. Pratchett then gleefully attends their caning, cackling at the crack of each stroke on their behind, adding further insult to the sting of being caned in front of their nemesis. From her reaction it is obvious that, for her, revenge upon these boys is truly personal.[17]

6. Crunching Sounds

The amalgam of folktales, childhood experience, and later, episodes from Roald Dahl's young adulthood that could have formed the basis for the unforgettable *Enormous Crocodile* are separate from the overall myth of the crocodile itself. Generally seen across the world as less of a god and more of a predator, its persona remains basically primal and unwelcome in human territory. Dahl successfully builds on this collective fear by supplying individual personality facets to not only the crocodile, but several of his other characters. He creates a link between the very ancient dread of the crocodile and his own experience with human and animal nature to create a distinctive personality for his *Enormous Crocodile*, a creature that relentlessly dreams about devouring children, regardless of any obstacles or annoying moral codes.

He also does this for his child-gobbling giants and the frightful witches, unique in their traits, but who share extreme dislike for the children or humans they happen to meet. Whereas the crocodile seems more global in its origin, the giants and witches seem to have more direct connections to the Norwegian myth described earlier, to which Dahl adds his own modern twist and perspective. All of these beings rarely live in a vacuum. Their existence, intentionally or unintentionally, overlaps with human domain, and when they are dangerous it is usually children or the underpowered who are then forced to take action. Perhaps the sole objective of those who are threatened in Dahl's stories is survival and a subconscious intent to conserve the fragility of the future that lies before them.

Notes

[1] Roald Dahl, *The Enormous Crocodile* (New York: Puffin Books, 1978), 1.
[2] David Alberton, *Crocodiles and Alligators of the World* (London: Octopus Publishing Group, 1992), 9.
[3] Ibid., pp. 17-20.
[4] Jeremy Treglown, *Roald Dahl: A Biography* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994), 9.
[5] Ibid., 18.
[6] R.T. Christiansen, P. Iversen, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), xliii.
[7] Ibid., xxii.
[8] Ibid., xl.
[9] Jacqueline Simpson, *European Mythology* (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1987), 57.
[10] Christiansen, 49
[11] Roald Dahl, *The Enormous Crocodile*, 10-30.
[12] Christiansen, xxxiii-xxxiv.
[13] Roald Dahl, *The BFG* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982), 16-17.
[14] Roald Dahl, *Boy and Going Solo* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 214-224.
[15] Jeremy Treglown, *Roald Dahl: A Biography* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994), 18.
[16] Roald Dahl, *The Witches* (New York: Puffin Books, 2007).
[17] Roald Dahl, *Boy and Going Solo* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 36-50.

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Monsters and the Monstrous, Volume 1, pp. 57-73 (2011) Inter-Disciplinary Press
ISSN: 1756-770X

The Screaming Tunnel: Fire Down Below

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Abstract

Assuming a sociological and psychoanalytical methodology, this article examines the nature of the Screaming Tunnel, a supposedly haunted site in the Niagara Region. This landmark is an abandoned locomotive tunnel dating from the last century and has long been a fixture of Ontario's ghost landscape. According to local legend, a young female was set ablaze and perished within the tunnel; as a result her scream can be heard whenever a visitor walks mid-way through the structure and lights a match. The shape of the tunnel and the landscape that surrounds it references gyno imagery, with possible implications of rape or some form of sexual transgression. These themes are a common feature of the stories associated with the Screaming Tunnel and the woman who has made it her lair. The female specter, which dwells within the Screaming Tunnel has strong parallels with other international folkloric figures. Specifically, she bears eerie congruencies with the mythic character of the Banshee from Ireland and La Llorona from Chicano literature, all fitting within the categorical confines of the 'Wailing Woman'. The similarities between these three female characters raise the matter of the archetype, and there are strong implications that the figure of the lamenting woman has universal appeal, which manifest in almost all cultures and civilizations.

Key Words

Tunnel, Ghost, Banshee, La Llorona, Rape, Death, Subterranean, Haunted, Folklore.

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A young girl's charred corpse lies smouldering on the cobbled stones of a dank, abandoned tunnel, smoke wafting upwards from the seared wreckage of her mortal remains, captured by the capped roof of her arched casket, never to reach the heavens... or so the story goes.

The Screaming Tunnel has been a fixture of St. Catharines' haunted landscape for decades and has enthralled and terrified locals and tourists alike; a touchstone of the illustrious Bruce Trail in southern Ontario. Yet despite its underground following, it has remained surprisingly inconspicuous, and is still unknown to many citizens even within the limits of the Niagara Region. The story which compliments this foreboding structure and has leeched into the fabric of Niagara's social tapestry concerns a fire at a local farmhouse and occurred a little over a century ago.[1] According to urban folklore, somewhere in close proximity to the Screaming Tunnel, a house was set aflame and one of the inhabitants of the house, a young girl, escaped the initial blaze. Still alight, she ran into the tunnel, collapsing midway though and perishing on the spot. The legend goes on to state that should an individual visit the tunnel at midnight, walk to the mid-way mark and light a wooden match, the young girl will emit a chilling scream, audibly manifesting in the last agonizing moments of her death.[2] In 2005, John Savoie and psychic Pauline Raby visited the site and claimed to have encountered a spirit aged approximately thirteen, named Annabelle.[3] Supernatural suspicions aside, there is no historical validity to this story, though many local researchers have attempted to find credible evidence to substantiate it. There was, however, a barn, which burned down in 1937 due to a lightning strike, as, revealed by local resident David Grimwood during an interview conducted by a local newspaper. As a result of the blaze, a team of horses was killed; it is possible to conceive that this event served as the foundation from which the Screaming Tunnel myth evolved.[4]

Such fantasies as the one associated with the Screaming Tunnel seem pervasive in present day Western culture and allude back to the folk tales of previous centuries. However the contemporary bard spins a yarn quite different from that of their predecessor; modern urban legends are unlike fairy tales in many regards, namely '[they] are believed ... set in the recent past and involve normal human beings...'.[5] Despite the camp element present in the story connected with the Screaming Tunnel, there is something altogether monstrous about this monument, and by extension, something 'beyond just frightfulness' about the ghostly attendant who frequents it.[6] What is particularly fascinating about the tale connected with the Screaming Tunnel is the fact it operates somewhere between a traditional ghost story and an urban legend. Jan Harold Brunvand characterizes these modern chronicles by the fact '...their narrative structure sets up some kind of puzzling situation that is resolved by a sudden plot twist, at which point the story ends abruptly'.[7] The geographical situation of the tunnel fits perfectly with the typical settings associated with the monstrous, placed in the midst of an urban desert. As

David White points out, monsters often occupy 'peripheral space',[8] namely those areas which have been abandoned or marginalized by the living. David Gilmore, in his book *Monsters*, goes on to add locales deemed 'as wilderness, as noncultural space, as unexplored territory...' are periodically occupied by ghosts.[9] In accordance with these observations, the Screaming Tunnel is nestled in a semi-rural landscape, sandwiched between the outskirts of three cities, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The myth connected with the Screaming Tunnel has served as fodder for two fictional short stories by Canadian authors Robert Julian and Tony Burgess. The latter writer altered the myth slightly, adapting the story to incorporate the locomotives which frequent the tracks passing above the tunnel, '...in 1946 a child ... had been struck by a train on the tracks that go over the tunnel...'.[10] Also, Burgess blurred the sex of the spectre and appointed very specific rituals concerning the ghost's apparition, '...if you drive your car through the tunnel at exactly 11:07 p.m., on October 31, you will hear the child screaming...'.[11]

The tunnel itself occupies a liminal or transitional space, operating as a threshold between the semi-urbanized area of a dirt road (Fig. 4) and the unchartered wilderness of a forest clearing (Fig. 3). This dramatic shift in spatial context is amplified by the belief that the center of this tunnel is inhabited by the spirit of a young woman who perished due to an inferno. Measuring 16 feet (4.9 m) high, 125 feet (38 m) long[12] and with 14 feet high ceilings,[13] the tunnel is an imposing structure. Overgrown and somewhat decrepit, the channel is dominated by 'slick brambles, like a high collar of thorns, ramped up steeply and joined at the top, like a hood of spikes'.[14] Composed from '...cold concrete-block...' and '...mildewed over years of shaded existence...,' the tunnel is a gloomy abode, even for a ghost.[15] With the endless stream emanating from the depths of the tunnel and gurgling away from the mouth, the Screaming Tunnel is more reminiscent of a Roman aqueduct than an abandoned passage for locomotives. The initial intent of the architects was for the tunnel to be part of a train line that would run adjacent to the old Welland Locks, another popular feature of the Niagara Region. It was originally built by the Grand Trunks Railway Company shortly before World War I began; the tracks however were never laid, and the project was left unfinished.[16] The obvious gyno imagery of the tunnel is capitalized within this urban legend, as the image of a young girl on fire brings up connotations concerning sexual infatuation and desire. The match functions as a talisman, a device to rekindle or awaken the slumbering spectre within the tunnel.

The fact that it is a female spirit associated with this tunnel is not coincidental, throughout history female figures, specifically deities, were synonymous with subterranean openings, varying from wells to cavernous recesses. According to Rosemary Ellen Guiley, traditionally 'In folklore, wells are believed to be passageways for ghosts and spirits to enter the physical world.'[17] This is such a pervasive theme that there is actually an urban legend motif referred to as 'The Well to Hell,' in which a well functions as a gateway to the land of eternal damnation.[18] Though the structure of the tunnel itself does not breach the earth, it carries many of the same connotations connected with such underground structures; it is dank, deprived of light and slightly overgrown. This facet of the tunnel is amplified by its close proximity to an actual well and '...a local cemetery dating back to the early 1800s.'[19] The tunnel also possesses yet another tantalizing feature, outside the mouth of the tunnel there is a natural underground sulphur spring that bubbles up, giving off certain repellent odours (Fig. 1). As it rises, it causes the stones around it to shift, creating the sounds of steps on the rocks, giving the spectator the impression there is company watching;[20] this ambient sound is compounded by the bellowing traffic of the nearby highway. The shape of the tunnel also references the colossal mouth, an 'organ of predation and destruction ... monsters are depicted as having yawning, cavernous mouths brimming with fearsome teeth, fangs, or other means of predation.'[21] This symbolic allusion is not simply due to the ravenous aspects of the maw, but also because it is the instrument through which screams are emitted; monsters '...use their mouths to issue the shriek or hoot of the animal...'[22]

This phantom girl is in many ways a composite figure, cobbled together with characteristics from monstrous and demonic female figures from various cultures. The most prominent and influential sources include La Llorona from Chican@ folklore and the Banshee from the Gaelic tradition. Peripherally, the goddess Hecate from the Greco-Roman world also plays a role in forging the spectral figure connected with the Screaming Tunnel. Hecate was inextricably tied to transitional openings, namely doorways and gates, and thus stood before palaces and temples.[23] Despite this kinship, Hecate and her contemporary counterpart differ in one profound characteristic; whereas the ghostly apparition at the Screaming Tunnel instils fear and terror, Hecate conferred protection.[24] In a chilling similarity, Hecate was associated with dogs, and this iconic feature manifested in 'a howl that shakes the universe...,' a common feature of her cosmic persona.[25] Likewise, throughout the Middle Ages, the mysterious figure of the Black Madonna was deeply intertwined with

the chthonic powers connected with the earth and thus her image is often depicted in conjunction with naturally occurring cavities.

Whereas these religious and deified characters share certain passing features, it is the Banshee, a venomous female figure primarily tied to Ireland, who is a doppelganger for the Screaming Tunnel phantom.[26] She is also known as the 'death-messenger,' as the role of the banshee is primarily 'proclaiming deaths which are imminent or have just occurred.'[27] Her origins are elusory, but as Patricia Lysaght points out, '...on the basis of an early Irish text it seems that *bean si* ... meaning 'supernatural death-messenger' may be traced to about the middle of the eighth century.'[28] There are numerous stories which account for the origin of the death-messenger, her nature varying from a demonic being to a human woman who had committed unjust actions in life.[29] In 1888 W. B. Yeats wrote, 'the peasants say that they are fallen angels who were too good to be lost, too bad to be saved, and have to work out their time in barren places of earth…'[30] The death messenger, also known as the badhb/babha, is synonymous with non-violent deaths, while her likely precursor, Badb (Bodb), was almost exclusively connected with battles.[31] Often this facet of the Badb (Bodb) was represented by her 'appearing after death rejoicing over the slain...'[32] Much like La Llorona, this version of the Banshee is synonymous with water, and it is possible that this symbol holds some sort of cleansing properties, perhaps a symbol of redemption.[33]

These elusive female figures, often subjugated and sexually defiled, surface in various cultures, and seem to border on the archetype. The archetype, defined in the tradition of Carl Jung, is a predisposition, which inclines certain qualities and attributes to cluster together in the unconscious. In Jungian theory this clustering in the unconscious has the effect of influencing, in the sense of shaping, our conscious thought.[34] The Banshee and La Llorona represent only a sliver of a large group of mythic females who could be termed 'wailing women.' These fantastic ladies generally carry with them stories of hardship and torment, and as a result of their endured pain, have channelled their rage into an external outlet, namely the viewer or listener. The fact that this category of character appears to be pan-cultural insinuates that it is possibly a component of what Jung termed the 'collective unconscious,' and therefore inherently acknowledged.

The three figures of La Llorona, the Banshee and the anonymous female spectre tied to the Screaming Tunnel conflate at once particular juncture, namely each is associated with a story which depicts them as the victims of male neglect or aggression. This transgression generally manifests in the form of sexual assault, the haunting of a particular site or

family thereby becomes a form of retribution. There exists a version of the death-messenger motif, in which she is the ghost of a woman who suffered violence from the progenitor of the family she follows.[35] In addition to all these congruencies, the kinship shared by Niagara's female spectre and the ancient figure of the Banshee is predicated on the salient feature of the howl.

The aural manifestations of the Banshee fall under two categories, namely a mournful and plaintive sound and those, which denote a frightening and animal voice.[36] In keeping with the stories of La Llorona and the Screaming Tunnel, the Banshee is almost exclusively encountered in the evening. A night setting occurs in 41 percent of the accounts of stories tied to the aural manifestations of the figure believed to be the Banshee.[37] This statistic may seem meagre, however when considered in conjunction with the fact fifty percent of these accounts fail to indicate the time of day, it is much more impressive.[38] There are certain geographical correlations between the death-messenger and her Canadian counterpart, namely the fact that as Irish citizens immigrated to Canada, the Banshee hitched a ride. In fact, traces of the death-messenger stories are found in Canada, and there may possibly be a direct tie between the ghostly apparition at the Screaming Tunnel and the notorious Irish figure of the Banshee.[39] The specific settings in which the Banshee performs her duties also coincide with that of the apparition at the Screaming Tunnel, both favour an exterior stage. The death-messenger, similar to the presence at the Screaming Tunnel, is 'an outdoor being,' and her cry is 'never heard emanating from the inside of a building...'[40] Many of the features shared by the Banshee and the young maiden of the Screaming Tunnel are likewise present in tales involving La Llorona, a mythical vixen from Chican@ culture.

La Llorona mimics the activities of the Banshee, however whereas the Banshee's scream was an ominous precursor of death, the cry of La Llorona is a lament of previous sins; as indicated by her alternate name 'the Weeping Woman'.[41] She 'is one of the most famous figures in Mexican and...Chican@ oral literary traditions.'[42] Domino Perez articulates the mythical origins of La Llorona in her book *There Was a Woman*:

> According to a popular traditional version of the legend, La Llorona is a woman abandoned by the man she loved and left alone to raise their children. Grief or desire for revenge compels La Llorona to murder her children and throw their bodies into a river. Despair ultimately contributes to La Llorona's death, and in the

> afterlife, she is condemned to wander for all eternity until the bodies of her children are recovered.[43]

Perez goes on to postulate that the story of La Llorona echoes even earlier European motifs, which were 'grafted onto Native stories about the gritona, the shouting woman.'[44] Whatever her origins, La Llorona has functioned as an ominous figure in the history of Mexican culture, a warning to both men and women cautioning against the dangers of unbridled sexuality.

In contrast to the otherworldly woman at the Screaming Tunnel who appears to any visitor, La Llorona seems to specifically appear to young men. Her presence generally poses a threat to her victims' masculinity, indicating some sort of punitive connotation. As Tey Rebolledo states in *Women Singing in the Snow*, she 'is known to appear to young men who roam about at night. They believe she is a young girl or beautiful young woman, but when they approach her (with sexual intent), she shows herself to be a hag or a terrible image of death personified.'[45] Her role with the opposite sex is mainly as temptress and seductress, and the carnal aspects of her persona provide the means for killing her prey. 'Men are attracted to her, follow her, and she leads them to dangerous places. Often they are found dead...'[46] Latent within the story of La Llorona is the belief that '...female independence and personal agency create monsters capable of destroying even their offspring...'[47] We shall see a strong correlation between these villainous aspects of La Llorona, directed towards young promiscuous men, and a particular version of the Screaming Tunnel myth.

La Llorona is a perpetuation of another mythic figure from Chicano culture, the Malinche, both are based upon the historic figure of Dona Marina, the concubine of Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés. La Llorona and Malinche bear such a strong likeness to one another that 'in many areas they are transformed into a unitary figure.'[48] Malinche's conflation with La Llorona arises primarily from the fictionalized fate of Dona Marina's children. People often mistakenly contend that when Cortés announced that he was returning to Spain with 'his' children, Malinche murdered her children in an act of defiance and personal agency rather than allow them to be taken from her.[49] Marina was likely Nahua, born on the Mexican Gulf Coast; she was the progeny of a noble Aztec family.[50] The title Malinche itself derived from the addition of 'tzin' to Marina's native name, resulting in Malintzin, from this term the word Malinche originated.[51] Since Marina conspired with Cortés and the Spaniards, some see her as the ultimate betrayer of her people, and her name has become synonymous with the most treacherous of deeds.[52]

The Malinche, and by extension La Llorona, are deeply intertwined with the chingada, a misogynistic concept predicated on Mexican sexual roles. The chingada is the mythical mother figure who has suffered, and been forced open, violated or deceived;[53] every woman is the chingada, even when she gives herself willingly.[54] The term 'chingar' is a masculine verb, implying the idea of failure and to do violence to another; namely a female being.[55] Essentially the chingada is akin to the Western concept of the fallen woman, defamed for her involvement in a sexual transgression. Texan writer Carmen Taffola cements the connection between the Malinche and the chingada in her short story 'La Malinche;' '…I came to be known as Malinche, and Malinche came to mean traitor, they called me – *chingada* … they said I was raped, used, chingada...'[56] Perhaps the most disturbing and poignant aspect of the chingada is the fact it essentially refers to the loss of identity through passivity.[57] At this particular juncture the Malinche merges with the Screaming Tunnel poltergeist, as both are recipients of sexual assault.

As mentioned earlier, another popularized version of the Screaming Tunnel oral legend indicates the female spectre was a victim of rape, and was set ablaze by her perpetrator, likely as a means of eradicating any evidence of the crime.[58] Under this context, the tunnel itself functions as a monument marking the boundary between the unspoiled foliage of nature and the semi-developed landscape of the urban environment, marked by the hand of man. This transformation can be read in sexual terms, emblematic of the shift from the role of young naive virginal girl to victimized woman, aware of both the evils of the world and human sexuality. This may also account for the fact the myth demands participants visit the tunnel under the cover of night, the witching hour, but also the time of lovers and transgressors of love. The fact we are met by the figure of the girl before we reach the unspoiled utopia hidden on the other side of the tunnel reveals that once the sexual threshold is transgressed, it can never be revisited, neither by the girl nor the participant.

Under this light, the entry of a participant into the tunnel becomes a re-enactment of the violent penetration of the vaginal opening. Both the Malinche and the maiden dwelling within the Screaming Tunnel represent the endurance and internalization of intense pain. This anguish becomes such a pervasive force within their being that they come to embody it; personifying an inward directed fury. As David Gilmore states in his 2003 book *Monsters*, 'the monster represents the cast-off part of the self, the inner negative, the violence and aggression within...'[59] This is particularly true for the Screaming Tunnel ghost, who

is perpetually trapped in a state of extreme physical anguish and emotional turmoil, caught in a loop of torment, a process of which the visitor becomes a participant. The shape and structure of the shaft alludes to the natural orifices of the human body, namely the mouth and the vaginal opening. The tunnel therefore functions as both the reservoir of penetration and pain, as symbolized through the violated vagina, as well as the vehicle through which this pain finds voice, in the form of the furious scream.

Notes

[1] Stephanie Lechniak, 'The Screaming Tunnel,' Haunted Hamilton, <http://www.hauntedhamilton.com/14_niagara_screamingtunnel.html>, 27th July 2010, 6.
[2] John Savoie, *Shadows of Niagara: Investigating Canada's Most Haunted Region* (Third Printing, 2005), 116.
[3] Ibid., 118.
[4] Michael Clarkson, 'A Week of Ghosts,' *The St. Catharines Standard* October 30, 1980, 10.
[5] Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1981), 3.
[6] David Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and all Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 10.
[7] Jan Harold Brunvand, *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), xxviii.
[8] David Gordon White, *Myth of the Dog-Man* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), 1.
[9] David Gilmore, *Monsters*, 192.
[10] Tony Burgess, *Fiction For Lovers Cut Tales of Flesh, Fear, Larvae and Love* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2003), 35.
[11] Ibid.
[12] John Robert Colombo, *Mysteries of Ontario* (Toronto: Hounslow Press, 1999), 156-157.
[13] Savoie, *Shadows of Niagara*, 116.
[14] Burgess, *Fiction For Lovers*, 37.
[15] Cheryl Clock, 'Haunted Niagara', *The St. Catharines Standard* October 31, 2000, 3.
[16] George Brady and Kathy Brady, 'The Legend of the Screaming Tunnel,' Hamilton Paranormal, <http://hamiltonparanormal.com/screaming1.html>, 27th July 2010.

[17] Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits,* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2000), 398.
[18] Brunvand, *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends*, 476.
[19] Savoie, *Shadows of Niagara*, 116.
[20] Brady and Brady, 'The Legend of the Screaming Tunnel, 8.
[21] Gilmore, *Monsters*, 176.
[22] Ibid., 186.
[23] Jacob Rabinowitz, *The Rotting Goddess: The Origin of the Witch in Classical Antiquity's Demonization of Fertility Religion* (New York: Autonomedia, 1998), 69-70.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 163.
[26] Patricia Lysaght, *The Banshee: The Irish Supernatural Death-Messenger*, (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1997), 1.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 30.
[29] Ibid.,. 46.
[30] Robert Welsch, ed., *Yeats, W.B.: Writings on Irish Folklore, Legend and Myth* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 24.
[31] Lysaght, *The Banshee*, 38.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Anthony Stevens, *Archetype Revisited* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 2003), 33.
[35] Lysaght, *The Banshee*, 48.
[36] Ibid., 85.
[37] Ibid., 120.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 135.
[41] Domino Renee Perez, *There Was a Women: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 2.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 18.
[45] Tey Diana Rebolledo, *Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 63.
[46] Fernano Horcasitas and Douglas Butterworth, 'La Llorona,' *Tlalocan: Revista de fuentes para el conocimiento delas culturas indigenas de*

México, (México: Independent National University of Mexico, 1963), 204.
[47] Cordelia Candelaria, 'La Malinche, Feminist Prototype,' *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 5.2 (1980), 94.
[48] Rebolledo, *Women Singing*, 63.
[49] Perez, *There Was a Women*, 30-31.
[50] Candelaria, 'La Malinche, Feminist Prototype, p. 2.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Perez, *There Was a Women*, p. 30.
[53] Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*, trans. Lysander Kemp, Yara Milos and Rachel Philips Belash (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 199-200.
[54] Ibid., 203.
[55] Ibid., 201.
[56] Ibid., 198.
[57] Ibid., 208.
[58] Savoie, *Shadows of Niagara*, p. 116.
[59] Gilmore, *Monsters*, 154.

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Appendix

Figure 1. Front of the Screaming Tunnel. Photograph Taken by Author.

Figure2. End of the Screaming Tunnel. Photograph Taken by Author.

Figure 3. Wood Clearing at the End of the Screaming Tunnel. Photograph Taken by Author.

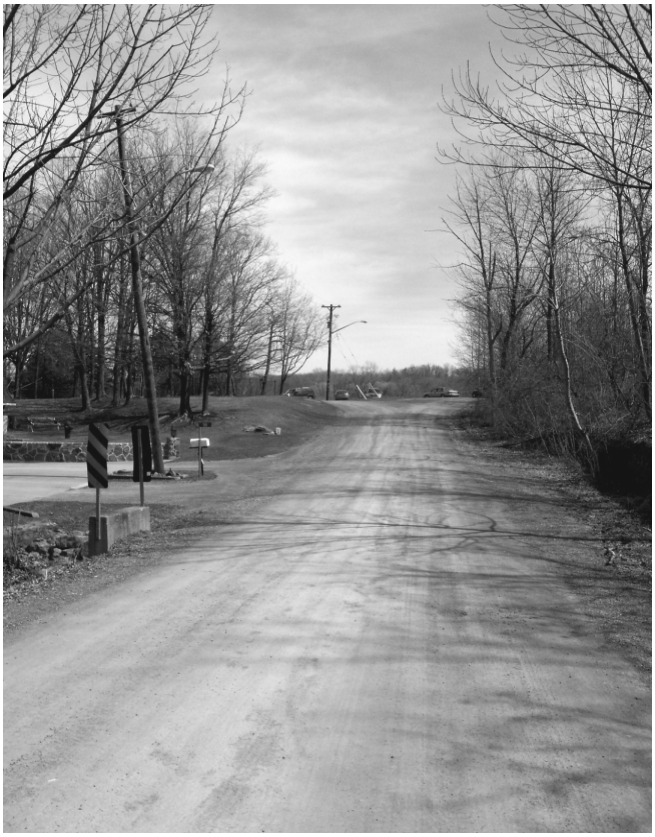

Figure 4. Roadway at the Front of the Screaming Tunnel. Photograph Taken by Author.

Monsters and the Monstrous, Volume 1, pp. 75-92 (2011) Inter-Disciplinary Press
ISSN: 1756-770X

The Aesthetic Simulation of Murder in *Dexter*land

Lee Baxter

Abstract

Mark Seltzer's underlying focus in *Serial Killer: Death and life in America's Wound Culture*, is the blurring of the real and the imagined world of serial killers. His argument, in part, highlights our cultural fascination with and our inability to avert our eyes from the graphic horrors in both the fictitious and the factual world of serial killers and victims' bodies strewn across the pages and screens for us to gaze upon. With this in mind, my article examines how the first season of Showtime's television drama *Dexter* (2006) invites the viewer to play along with the simulated aesthetic game of murder. Echoing Jean Baudrillard's 'The Precession of Simulacra,' Dexter both invites and warns the audience in the first episode that it is entering 'Dahmerland,' a world in which the audience implicates itself in a simulated world where aesthetics, morals, and ethics are turned inside out for the audience's mere pleasure by tuning in each week on the television. I argue that *Dexter* is a self-reflexive narrative product reflecting pop culture's fascination with the serial killer while at the same time critiques contemporary culture's ambiguous relationship with ethics and morality. Tracing the cultural fascination with the ethical implications of murder back to Thomas De Quincey's 1827 essay 'Murder' I examine how the aesthetic experience of the sublime is evoked through the act of murder. I argue that *Dexter* portrays how the serial killer moves into the uncanny realm of the normal, or as Seltzer states, the 'abnormal normality' of the serial killer's body. The serial killer, therefore, becomes intricately part of the collective. He becomes every body and any body because his body cannot be distinguished or marked as different from the general public, thus collapsing the distinction between fact and fiction.

Key Words

Dexter, serial killers, aesthetics, simulacra, sublime, abnormal/normal body, murder.

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1. Introduction: *Dexter*'s Simulation

Showtime's television serial drama, *Dexter*, based on Jeff Lindsay's novel, *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*, was first aired in October 2006. The main character, Dexter Morgan, is a serial killer who works for the Miami Police Department, helping them to solve crimes. Throughout the show voice-over narrative is employed to acquaint the viewer with Dexter's interior identity. In Episode One, as Dexter walks onto a crime scene, he reminds the viewers that they are entering into a world of make-believe: 'There's something strange and disarming about looking at a homicide scene in the daylight of Miami. It makes the most grotesque killings look staged, like you're in a new and daring section of Disney World: Dahmerland.'[1] Echoing Jean Baudrillard's 'The Precession of Simulacra,' Dexter's narrative invites us to play along with his simulated aesthetic game of murder as well as warns us that we are about to step onto a ride of terror that hinges on the horrific.[2] Dexter's land is one which reflects and distorts the real serial killer's status to that of an icon of sorts within pop culture. The act of serial murder is mimicked through texts and films produced for mass consumption functioning both as an aesthetic and as a generic type of meta-cinema. This is reflected in the proliferation of books, films, and television shows that are reproduced for mass consumption creating a multi-million dollar commercial industry predicated solely on murder. I believe that *Dexter* is a self-reflexive narrative product highlighting pop culture's fascination with, as Mark Seltzer argues, 'torn and open bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound.'[3]

2. Culture's Fascination with Murder

Mark Seltzer's underlying focus in *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture*, is the blurring of the real and the imagined world of serial killers. Seltzer's argument highlights our cultural fascination with and our inability to avert our eyes from the graphic horrors that surround us in both the fictitious and the factual world of serial killers and the bodies of victims strewn across the pages and screens for us to gaze upon. Part of our fascination with the serial killer is to understand her/him. Seltzer notes how a 'social mirror-effect' takes place through the analysis of the serial killer in order 'to understand [the]

celebrity psycho[]' not only as a product of her/his environment, but how the killer's confessions to 'investigator, media, and popular culture […] become merely the occasion of social construction reflecting back on itself.'[4] Therefore, as the audience becomes acquainted with Dexter's narrative, his past can only be reconstructed as violent in order for the audience to understand and sympathize with his monstrous psyche. Furthermore, as Judith Halberstam suggests:

> Serial killings, like chapters in a periodical, stand in need of interpretation and their interpreters (like the police, the tabloid, the public, the detective, the psychologist, the critic) produce the story that the bodies cannot tell … Telling does not mean finding a story in the unconscious that fits, it means inventing the unconscious … so that it can lie well enough to keep up with the fiction of everyday life.[5]

In addition to Halberstam's comment, I believe that the interpreter reproduces the story of the serial killer precisely to invent a conscious understanding for the public to continue 'with the fiction of everyday life.'

Within the fiction of everyday life there is a longstanding cultural fascination with the ethical implications of murder, but it is Thomas De Quincey in his 1827 essay 'Murder' and his subsequent 1859 essay 'On Murder' who, like Friedrich Schiller, discusses murder as an art form.[6] De Quincey utilizes Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* to discuss how pleasure and pain are intricately connected, for without pain we cannot understand pleasure.[6] Both pain and pleasure are a result of the sublime precisely because the sublime incites the most powerful emotions experienced by individuals, including awe, astonishment, fear, and terror. Terror, as Burke argues, is 'the ruling principle of the sublime' which can suspend all motions in the individual because s/he cannot think of anything beyond the object that has created such intense horror.[7] This suspension can cause a numbness that would leave the individual unconscious to the aesthetic experience. Constructing an opposition between the beautiful (pleasure) and the sublime (pain) Burke explains that the pleasure of beauty has a relaxing effect on an individual, whereas the sublime constricts and stiffens the individual. Yet at the same time, both the beautiful and the sublime can produce pleasure. Consequently, the sublime can simultaneously inspire horror as well as pleasure within an individual. Joel Black argues that the foundation of Burke's aesthetic

pleasure is predicated on the social, 'civilizing principle of unity, cohesion, and morality', whereas the sublime is based on the 'primal impulse of self-preservation that [is] intrinsically amoral and antisocial.'[8] In other words, Burke states that from a distance the spectator gains pleasure from viewing pain, however, when pain presses too near, the spectator recoils and turns away. Therefore in order for a witness to have an aesthetic experience of the sublime there must be a form of mediation, or a separation, that creates a distance from terror/horror in order to gain any pleasure from the sublime experience.

The aesthetic distance, for Burke, is necessary in order to imagine another's pain – transferring the self into an other – creating a sympathetic community. As noted, when pain 'presses too nearly' one can feel too much which evokes self-preservation and destroys community.[9] However, through literature, theatre, artwork, or the imagination, a distance is maintained which creates a feeling of delight: 'It is by this principle chiefly that poetry, painting, and other affecting arts transfuse their passions from breast to another, and are often capable of grafting a delight on wretchedness, misery, and death itself. It is common observation, that objects which in the reality would shock are in tragical, and such like representations, the source of a very high species of pleasure.'[10] By regulating the experience of another's pain through the imagination – such as fiction – the witness can form a sympathetic connection with the real body in pain. This sympathetic viewing, however, induces pain in the witness who seeks to understand an other's pain – a form of 'shared pain.'[11] Yet, Steven Bruhm argues that 'shared pain' is in fact an '*individual* experience' which creates a tension whereby '[p]ain is always and never a communal moment' – pain becomes both a private and a public spectacle.[12] It could be argued that the sympathetic pain felt by the witness's imagination is nothing more than a false reproduction of the original pain felt by the victim. The imagined pain is, therefore, diabolical in the sense that it is an artificial representation of the real pain that can distort the sense of real compassion for an other. The discussion and critique of the detrimental effects that the proliferation of horrifying images has on society is one that 'numbs' and therefore creates an inability to feel human compassion (sympathy).[13] Nevertheless, these images of shocking incidents are important for encouraging critical engagement with the public's fascination with traumatic events. Yet, Burke's idea that the imagination – in this case the artist's rendering of the aesthetic treatment of the act of murder which comprises the human body – needs to be kept at a safe distance from the horror in order to experience the sublime cannot be overlooked and dismissed. By maintaining a distance of the spectacle the

spectator can be compelled to reflect upon the ethical and moral implications of the horrifying images.

The distancing also keeps the spectator physically and morally safe from punishment and the killer's torment, which allows her/him to become a voyeur thus producing an aesthetic experience of the sublime. For this reason, Joel Black in his book, *The Aesthetics of Murder*, notes: 'If any human act evokes the aesthetic experience of the sublime, certainly it is the act of murder. And if murder can be experienced aesthetically, the murderer can in turn be regarded as a kind of artist – a performance artist or anti-artist whose specialty is not creation but destruction.'[14] Black investigates the relationship between life and art, and real and simulated images of violence while asking the reader to reflect on the roles assumed by the murderer and the reader as voyeur, witness, and audience to the spectacle of murder. Black, echoing Baudrillard, contends that the fictional form of mimicking/imitating reality blurs the notions of ethics and aesthetics making them 'no longer distinguishable, [a] virtual simulacra of each other.'[15] Walter Benjamin in his article, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', argues that through the mechanical reproduction of art – photography, film – changes the function of art, which emanates from a ritualistic cult value, into a political function.[16] Benjamin contends that art in the time of reproduction reflects the political struggles of the time, at which point art and media begin to blur. In Benjamin's words: 'By the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value as opposed to an ahistorical cult value, the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental. … This much is certain: today, photography and the film are the most serviceable exemplifications of this new function.'[17] Film records a 'reality' from which an audience can participate in the understanding of the historical situation of the time period: 'film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action.'[18]

3. Reproduction and Simulation

The blurring of art and media, art and life, reality and imaginary, brings the discussion back to Dexter equating his world – the television show – of crime and murder to stepping into 'Disney World' or rather 'Dahmerland.' Baudrillard argues:

> Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America, which *is*

> Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, which is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation.[19]

Furthermore, Baudrillard examines how Watergate functions as a scandal, which is not a 'real' scandal, but a scandal nevertheless that is used to revive a moral order within the discourse of power – governmental, law enforcement – and the social order. Baudrillard notes how the 'scandal' is a 'means to regenerate a moral and political principle' pointing to the need to renew 'political morality on a global scale.'[20] The dissolution between reality and fiction causes a blurring of representation through media that enters into the domain of simulation.

Dexter follows the every day events in the life of Dexter Morgan, who also happens to be a serial killer. Working for the Miami Police Department Dexter is a forensic blood spatter analyst. Dexter kills people who have either escaped or where not suspected by the legal system. Taught by his adoptive father, Harry, to hide his true identity and pretend to be normal, Dexter only kills the people 'who deserve it.' The first season focuses on a serial killer, 'The Ice Truck Killer', who is secretly communicating with Dexter (and turns out to be Dexter's biological brother) through his crime scenes while managing to elude the Miami Police Department. *Dexter* is a simulated media representation of a serial killer who is aware of his audience – his voice over narratives and flashbacks are employed for the audience's edification – and, like Baudrillard's scandal, there is a conflation between the representation of a 'real' serial killer and an imagined serial killer. In other words, Dexter is the product of fiction, a fiction that explores the media's representation of 'real' serial killers and their psyches, which blurs the line between reality and fiction. If as Black contends, that mass media via 'the murderer and the film-director seize control of the arbitrary mechanism of fantasy,' and therefore acts as 'the differential principle governing the fundamental cultural distinction between the real and the nonreal', then does *Dexter*'s aesthetic game of murder draw the audience's attention to the ethical complications that society has created through its consuming collective gaze and fascination of mutilated and monstrous bodies?[21]

4. Critical Engagement with Horror/Terror

The Parents Television Council warned against CBS's decision to air *Dexter* in February 2008 and asked for the broadcast to be cancelled as the 'show is not suitable for airing' because 'the series compels viewers to empathize with a serial killer, to root for him to prevail, to hope he doesn't get discovered.'[22] The PTC President, Tim Winter, also noted how 'Dexter introduces audiences to the depths of depravity and indifference as it chronicles the main character's troubled quest for vigilante justice by celebrating graphic, premeditated murder.'[23] Statements like the PTC's are troubling because they do not actively engage with the material as a parody that critiques American culture's fascination with wounded bodies.[24] Furthermore, to condemn *Dexter* without critical engagement (other than to say that it is a violent show reproducing the proliferation of violent images can lead to a lack of empathy) denies reality. In other words, the PTC is denying the reality that heinous acts take place on a daily basis. As William Patrick Day in his book, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire*, reminds us: 'Gothic fantasy provides an escape that leads readers back to a confrontation with those realities from which they wished to flee.'[25] Day's discussion on the Gothic draws on Burke's pain/pleasure principle and links it to the reader (and viewer of twentieth-century film) who attempts to escape the everyday horrors through reading about murders and other atrocious crimes. Day recognizes, unlike the PTC, that the viewer of the horrifying spectacles in Gothic novels and Horror films confronts rather than runs away from the fears and anxieties caused in the real world. This confrontation can bring about critical engagement with the self and society.[26] Unlike the PTC, I believe *Dexter* is a self-reflexive piece of work that calls attention to contemporary culture's ambiguous relationship with ethics and morality. Tania Modleski in her article, 'Terror of Pleasure', explores how the horror genre employs a subversive strategy of attacking the bourgeois culture's dominant conservative ideologies, such as reflected in the PTC's statement.[27] Similar to Modleski's analysis of horror films, *Dexter*, while invoking terror on the screen through the opening of bodies, slashes open a dialogue which critiques society and its lack of empathy for the real bodies of real crimes through its fictitious world of murder.

Dexter combines textual – and factual – references that evoke both terror and pleasure 'around the remains of other films and literature.'[28] *Dexter* literally consumes and reproduces scenes from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), Tobe Hooper's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), Irvin Kershner's *The Eyes of Laura Mars* (1978), and Bret Ellis's and Mary Harron's *American Psycho* (1991, 2000). *Dexter*,

like Judith Halberstam's analysis of *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) follows in the tradition of the gothic/detective genre by 'cannibaliz[ing] its genre, consum[ing] it bones and all and reproduc[ing] in a slick and glossy representation of representations of violence, murder, mutilation, and matricide ….'[29] By creating Dexter out of fragments and scraps of films and real police psychological profiling there is a blurring between reality and fiction. Moreover, the show functions as a parody that invokes the monstrousness of human nature and its social constructs revolving around morality.[30] *Dexter* is a vampiric parasite literally feeding on a multitude of narratives ripping bits and pieces from each one. Engorged with the individual pieces *Dexter* reassembles them by spewing them out onto a blank canvas creating both his own narrative and his own work of art. Like Dexter at a scene of a crime recreating the murder by analyzing the blood patterns on the walls, the audience is left to decipher Dexter's reconfigured pattern on the canvas – a canvas that the audience is never truly shown because Dexter's murders are private and never fully shown. In our secure position as television viewers we become the murder artist's audience in the sense that we can only act as spectators that watch Dexter turn murder into a literary representation.

Working on the principle of terror *Dexter* keeps the viewer at an aesthetic distance, while at the same time allowing her/him to derive pleasure from watching the game of murder presented on the screen. The television screen acts as a barrier that removes the audience from any threat of becoming a victim to the murderers presented on the screen. Yet, at the same time, through the employment of voice-over narrative and flashbacks, the viewer is lulled into what I would call a false sympathetic view of Dexter's ambiguous body. By false sympathetic view I mean that as an audience we are drawn together as spectators to a murderer who is presented as a product of a traumatic wound that has left him scarred. This traumatic wounding – watching his mother and others cut into pieces with a chainsaw – causes Dexter to repeatedly re-enact the murders he witnessed as a small child. In order for the audience to sympathize with Dexter flashbacks and voice-over narratives are used to portray his apprenticeship in the 'fine art of murder' taught to him by his adopted-father Harry Morgan – who also happens to be a police officer. The viewer is shown how play, life, and murder are all bound together in Dexter's make up. Consequently, the viewer is intricately implicated in the spectacle of the pleasure/pain principle. Harry not only teaches Dexter how to fit in and appear normal within society (to smile when photos are taken, how to behave when playing with others), but also a moral code which includes abiding by the law in order to avoid being caught by the police. Harry, recognizing that Dexter's past has made him

what he is (a killer), mimics the way police agencies, psychologists, and the media describe in the real world a serial killer to the public. Harry explains to Dexter that he is a killer because of 'what happened' in the past. This traumatic event 'changed something inside you [Dexter], it got into you too early … you can't help what happened to you.'[31] However, because Dexter has blocked out the traumatic incident that 'got into [him] too early', Harry, without telling Dexter about the event to which he alludes, decides to school Dexter in the fine art of murder in order to turn murder into an act that dispenses justice. Dexter's memory, through the use of flashbacks, provides evidence for the viewer in order to shape an understanding of his damaged psyche.

Flashbacks are constructed to allow the viewer, alongside Dexter, to understand Dexter's past, while simultaneously reproducing the original event in the present. The convention of the flashback draws attention to the television show's artificiality. Dexter's memory is employed to produce a narrative for the audience to witness his schooling 'to fit in' – or simulate a normal identity – just like everyone else. Dexter, as Harry notes, needs to appear like everyone else in order to blend in with the crowd.[32] For example, Dexter remembers the lessons taught to him by his stepfather at the exact same sites that the police find Tony Tucci's body parts (a hand and a foot). While at the site of the soccer field Dexter realizes that the body parts are being left for him to be recognized for the monster he is: 'He [The Ice Truck Killer] knows. He's not corrupting the happy Hallmark images of my youth. He's revealing the ugly truth behind them.'[33] Dexter's memory then flashes back to a scene of a group of boys teasing a teammate on the soccer field. Harry stops the 'bullying' and takes Dexter aside to explain to him that he cannot act like a bully because people remember bullies, especially policemen, therefore Dexter needs to avoid drawing attention himself and 'Blend in.'[34] Dexter's memory serves him as a moral guide and to provide the viewer with a narrative to understand Dexter's actions. Moreover, the flashbacks appear as fragments of a dream or hallucination and create a narrative that interrupts the linear continuity that represents reality. By subverting the real world with the use of flashbacks the narrative draws attention to its artificiality.

In addition to the flashbacks acting as part of the narrative structure, they also reveal Dexter's triumph over death and his repressed memory of the initial trauma that produced his inner emptiness. This repressed memory (he does not remember what made him the way he is until the second half of the season) nevertheless haunts Dexter as he transforms his status of victim into perpetrator by recreating the murders he witnessed as a child. For example, as Dexter's victims awake from

their drug-induced sleep the camera angle looks down at the faces of his victims, showing their disorientation and fear and placing Dexter in the position of authority.[35] His authority is one that allows him to take control over his own life as well as the life of others – if only to kill them and save himself. However, the viewer not only continues to be drawn toward Dexter's broken and torn psyche, like Norman Bates in *Psycho*, but also sympathizes with him because s/he is shown Dexter's damaged identity through flashback sequences and voice-over narratives.[36] As the narrative structure denies the viewer a linear sequence of action Dexter's 'real' world of murder appears chaotic and random causing a sense of unease and tension within the viewer. Nevertheless, Dexter forces the viewer to look at him, which in turn compels the audience to look at the cultural constructs resulting from the pervasive representations of the media's spectacle of torn and opened bodies. The use of flashbacks reflects that Dexter's ritualised murders are, as Baudrillard argues, simulated re-enactments of real murders and psychological profiles of the murderers publicized in the media.

5. Constructing Murder as an Art

Dexter's murders are private and highly constructed rituals that begin with his investigation and collection of evidence against the chosen offensive body. His victims are all murderers. As already mentioned, Dexter's stepfather, Harry, taught Dexter a moral code to abide by in order to serve justice and to avoid being caught by the police. Part of this code is to be sure of the victim's guilt, never to kill impetuously, get rid of all evidence, and above all 'take out the garbage.'[37] Dexter's investigation of murderers critiques the state justice system and the inefficiency of the police force. By subverting the justice system Dexter illegitimately obtains power not only over his own life, but the lives of others. The power Dexter seizes allows him to control his identity – a moral killer – as he defies moral and social laws. For instance, Dexter, unlike the police, does not need a search warrant to enter the private spaces of suspected criminals in order to gather evidence to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. After gathering the incriminating evidence Dexter chooses a location that reflects the murderer's crimes in which he holds court, passes the final judgment on the murderer – guilty – and then sentences her/him to death. In Episode Two, Dexter investigates Matt Chambers, who is accused and subsequently acquitted of vehicular homicide under the influence of alcohol.[38] Unlike the state of Florida, Dexter searches the national database for crimes committed by Chambers outside of Miami. Finding numerous similar cases that Chambers has been involved in Dexter meticulously sets up his courtroom in an

abandoned liquor store. Dexter's mock courtroom is constructed not only as his killing room, but also as a room where the guilty person, in this case Matt Chambers, is forced to confront his crimes via photographs, home video clips, and newspaper articles of the innocent victims. In this instance, Dexter reconstructs and ritualizes both the morality that Matt Chambers repeatedly violates as well as his fall from morality.[39]

Like most serial killers Dexter keeps a trophy of each of his victims. Ritualistically before each murder Dexter cuts the offender with a scalpel on the right cheek in order to collect a blood sample. He then preserves the blood on a glass slide and places it into a trophy box alongside his other victims. Dexter's murders, as the audience pieces together through the use of flashbacks, are mimetic re-enactments of the murders he witnessed as a child. Yet, at the same time Dexter murders with a difference. Dexter's crimes serve to save the lives of others. Moreover, if Dexter's true identity is that of a killer, and everything else is just a mask in order to simulate normality, then what do we make of his working for the law and abiding by the rules and regulations established by the law and his adopted father Harry? Seltzer would say that Dexter hyperidentifies with the law precisely because he simulates his identity. Dexter's body simultaneously signifies and reduces 'the social order to a 'pretendsy' signifying game.'[40] Furthermore, Dexter's body has the ability to do what other people only fantasize or dream about doing, not only does he take justice into his own hands and dispenses it based on the factual evidence, he 'really' kills people. Although his body appears to reside within the confines of the law by pretending to be something he is not (a friend, a brother, a lover, a good person) his true self, the killer inside, resides outside of the confined social constructs because he stands outside of the law. Like Jekyll and Hyde, Dexter's ambiguous body combines good with evil and man with beast, only to be reproduced in a world in which he can create his 'own set of rules' and walks amongst the masses appearing as a normal person.

Running parallel to Dexter's private 'game of Murder' a serial killer, dubbed The Ice Truck Killer, engages Dexter in a private game of hide and seek. In very public settings The Ice Truck Killer artistically stages the bodies in various areas of Miami for the public to gaze upon. Dexter's first encounter with a carefully staged and laid out bloodless body makes him feel both jealous and in some sense inept at his own practice of murder: '[N]o blood at all, why hadn't I thought of that? What a gorgeous idea … This guy may have exceeded my own abilities.'[41] After examining the second crime scene Dexter tells his girl-friend that the killer is 'an artist …' and admiringly affirms, 'His technique, it's incredible.'[42] In the final scene of Episode One, Dexter is

given what he describes as 'a friendly message' from The Ice Truck Killer when he finds a Barbie doll's head stuck to the front of his fridge. Opening his freezer, Dexter finds the rest of the Barbie doll's body laid out neatly replicating the sliced body parts of the two prostitutes Dexter has previously examined. Dexter notes that he 'should feel upset, even violated' but instead he 'think[s] this is a friendly message [from The Ice Truck Killer] like 'Hey wanna play?''. Dexter's response is, 'And yes I wanna play. I really, really do.'[43] The Ice Truck Killer functions as the other monster to remind both Dexter and the audience that although Dexter is a monster as well, he is a new breed of monster. Unlike the Ice Truck Killer, Dexter's code is a moral code that allows him to kill only the guilty. Dexter kills with and for a reason. Dexter channels his thirst for blood to, as Harry states, 'use it for good. [After all] there are people out there who do really bad things, terrible people. And the police can't catch them all.'[44] Dexter is a serial killer with a difference.

Yet at the same time the viewer needs to remember that the difference is simulated. The difference is replicated through moral constructs ingrained in Dexter by Harry. In the first season's final episode, 'Born Free', Dexter returns to both his birthing places: 'to a place where a boy was born' and the cargo container where 'Dearly disturbed Dexter was born … born free of all that's human' – born because of a traumatizing wound.[45] As Dexter is reunited with his real brother Brian (The Ice Truck Killer) – who masquerades as Rudy a prosthetics doctor and Deb's (Dexter's foster-sister) boyfriend – Dexter is offered a space where he no longer needs to hide his true identity so that '[Dexter] can be his self … his real genuine self.' Brian attempts to extricate all of Dexter's human attachments to make Dexter 'truly free.' However, in order for this freedom to happen Brian asks Dexter kill his 'fake sister' Deb. Throughout the episode Brain and Dexter repeatedly use words such as 'genuine,' 'fake,' 'pretend,' and 'real' to describe both their feelings (or lack of them) and who they really are – killers with the ability to pretend to be normal human beings.

Yet, there is nothing real about Dexter or Brian; the murders they commit are only simulated representations of real murders and murderers. The world of *Dexter* is not real, but imaginary, a representation of a new daring ride offered at 'Disney World: Dahmerland.' Brian offers Dexter a chance at a life to become part of Dahmerland where Dexter no longer needs to pretend to be something he is not. Nevertheless, Brian and Dexter are two very different monsters. Brian points out the difference as he hovers over Deb's inert body – lying taped on a table the way Dexter kills all of his victims – and asks Dexter if all of his victims are killers. Explaining that Harry 'taught me a code

… to survive'[46] Dexter becomes Brian's uncanny doppelganger. Dexter, unlike Brian, was provided with a 'real' family after the death of their mother. Dexter, unlike Brian, was taught not only a code to survive, but also a moral code in which Dexter's murders help others. Dexter tells Brian, and the audience: '[You're] a killer without reason or regret. You're free.'[47] Dexter, however, cannot truly be free to be who he is because, as Brian notes, Dexter lives by Harry's code; therefore, as Brian surmises, the only way for Dexter to be truly free is for him to kill Deb – the last remnants of Dexter's 'fake' family. Yet, Dexter cannot, or will not, kill Deb because he is 'very … fond of her.' Dexter is a killer with a reason and a killer with a moral code. Nevertheless, viewers cannot forget that Dexter is a killer – both a killer and a hero, like cowboys in a Western. Dexter is a 'fake' representation of real modern day serial killers.

6. Conclusion

Seltzer asks: 'What is it about modern culture that makes the type of person called the serial killer possible?' At the turn of the 1900's:

> The wound … is by now no longer the mark, the stigmata, the sacred or heroic: it is the icon, or stigma, of the everyday openness of the every body. This is a culture centred on trauma (Greek for wound): a culture of the atrocity exhibition, in which people wear their damage like badges of identity, or fashion accessories. And by 1900 a new kind of person has come into being and into view, one of the superstars of our wound culture: the lust-murderer or stranger-killer or serial killer.[48]

Following Seltzer's thinking that 'the everyday openness of the every body' I believe that the serial killer moves into the uncanny realm of the normal, or as Seltzer states, the 'abnormal normality' of the serial killer's body. The serial killer becomes intricately part of the collective, he becomes 'every body' and 'any body' because his body cannot be distinguished or marked as different from the general public. Moreover, the serial killer has the ability to remain private/anonymous (until he is discovered by the police) while his body remains free to walk in public spaces. Dexter from the outside appears normal to the average eye; however, his inside reflects the abjectification of the 'torn and open bodies' he has witnessed as a child. Furthermore, Dexter, and the program as a whole, collects and reproduces a proliferation of both real

and fictitious serial murders that are consumed with pleasure by the viewer. Dexter invites and warns us at the beginning of the show that we are entering 'Dahmerland,' a world in which we collude by the act of tuning in each week on the television; thus, implicating ourselves in a world where aesthetics, morals, and ethics are turned inside out for the audience's mere pleasure.

Notes

[1] *Dexter,* 'Dexter,' television program. New York: Showtime Networks Inc., October 1, 2006.
[2] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra,' in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, Brian Wallis, ed. (Massachusetts; New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art; David R Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1984), 253-81.
[3] Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1.
[4] Ibid., 126.
[5] Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1995), 172.
[6] Thomas De Quincey, 'Murder' (1827) and 'On Murder (1857), in *On Murder*, Robert Morrison ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[7] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, (1757), Abraham Mills ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1994), 73.
[8] Joel Black, The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study in Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1991), 14
[9] Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry*, 52.
[10] Ibid., 57.
[11] Steven Bruhm, *Gothic Bodies: The Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 19.
[12] Ibid., 19.
[13] Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry*, 56-58. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, notes how writers, such as William Wordsworth and Charles Baudelaire, have and continue to discuss the public's fascination with the proliferation of horrifying images within the newspapers. Wordsworth and Baudelaire, alongside contemporary critics, claim that horrifying images desensitize society to the shocking atrocities that take place, such as murder. Sontag also mentions how these same arguments

continue in contemporary society (106-108). See also Carolyn J. Dean *The Fragility of Empathy After the Holocaust*.
[14] Black, *The Aesthetics of Murder*, 14.
[15] Ibid., 16.
[16] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1996), 217-252.
[17] Ibid., 225.
[18] Ibid., 235.
[19] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', 262.
[20] Ibid., 263.
[21] Black, *The Aesthetics of Murder*, 17.
[22] James Poniewozik, 'Dexter, Decency and DVRs,' *Time,* April 12, 2008, <http://tunedin.blogs.time.com/2008/01/30/dexter_decency_and_dvrs>, 27th July 2010. For further information see: 'CBS Shows Ultra-Violent Serial Killer Drama Dexter in Prime Time', in *PTC Insider: Because Our Children are Watching*, 10.3 (2008),. 1-5. 12 April, 2008, http://www.parentstv.org/PTC/publications/insider/insider3-08.pdf, and Allie Martin, 'Parents Television Council advises CBS to dump 'Dexter'', 2 January, 2008 in *OneNewsNow*, <http://www.onenewsnow.com/Culture/Default.aspx?id=66111>, 12th April 2008.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Although Baudrillard argues that parody is part of the second order of simulation ('it is an *evil* appearance – the order of malefice' (256)) *Dexter* as a whole is a simulation of murder and the serial killer.
[25] William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 70.
[26] For a more in-depth discussion of how the Gothic reflects history and society see: Day, *In the Circles of Fear*.
[27] Tania Modleski, 'The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory' in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture,* Tania Modleski ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 155-66.
[28] Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1995), 163.
[29] Ibid., 163.
[30] See William Patrick Day's discussion of Parody in Day, *In the Circles of Fear*, 59-62.

[31] *Dexter,* 'Dexter,' television program. New York: Showtime Networks Inc., October 1, 2006.
[32] *Dexter*, 'Let's give the Boy a Hand,' October 22, 2006.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid. In an earlier scene after the first body part is found at the beach Dexter recalls a family outing to the beach, which included the taking of a family photograph. Harry tells Dexter to smile when his photo is taken because it is 'how you fit in. Remember how we talked about that … This is how you do it. … you just [smile] to fit in.'
[35] We see similar camera angles used when Dexter is taking instruction from Harry about how to behave in public. See episode *Dexter*, 'Let's give the Boy a Hand,' October 22, 2006.
[36] Day, *In the Circles of Fear*, discusses how the spectator acts as a voyeur to the spectacle of horror in which s/he has power over the fear and anxiety produced by the narrative. Similar to Burke's analysis of distancing from the horror, by standing outside of the action the spectator see a reflection of her/himself in the object s/he is watching (64-69).
[37] Ibid.
[38] *Dexter,* 'Crocodile,' October 8, 2006.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Seltzer, *Serial Killers*, 162.
[41] *Dexter,* 'Dexter,' October 1, 2006.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] *Dexter,* 'Born Free.' December 17, 2006.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Seltzer, *Serial Killers*, 2.

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Monsters and the Monstrous, Volume 1, pp. 93-116 (2011) Inter-Disciplinary Press
ISSN: 1756-770X

Reviews

On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears

Stephen T. Asma
New York: Oxford University Press, 2009
Xii + 346pp.

One of the most popular franchises of the past 30 years began with the1979 science-fiction horror film *Alien* that features relentless creatures from beyond Earth who stalk, maim and kill their human prey without reason or remorse. The franchise has spawned numerous movies, novels, comics, games and other merchandise that feature the terror of the hapless victims slaughtered by the aliens. What fascinates mankind, and specifically Western civilization, so much about such creatures that we are willing to spend millions of dollars to be 'entertained' by unstoppable monsters who prey on human vulnerability? If the reason aliens in these films are killing humans is because they perceive them as a threat to the preservation of their species, and are using humans as receptacles to breed new aliens, then why do we consider the aliens monsters? Is it because of their actions, or do we consider them monsters just because they look different from us? These are the questions that Stephen Asma confronts in his book *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fear*s.

Dr. Asma, a Professor of Philosophy and Distinguished Scholar at Columbia College Chicago, has written a fascinating and insightful analysis into the anatomy and evolution of monsterology in the Western World. He examines how mankind has defined monsters in ways that filter and categorize our experiences with what we consider monstrous. Additionally, using a wealth of primary and secondary sources, he discusses how our imaginations have fuelled our perceptions of monsters from ancient to contemporary times from biological, theological and moral perspectives. Through examples from religion, science, literature and films, Dr. Asma outlines how the depiction and use of monsters have evolved over the past several thousand years in both physical and metaphorical ways. He also examines how mankind has psychologically and philosophically dealt with the concept of the monstrous from ancient

and medieval demons to the pathological and violent criminals of modern society.

In his review of the ancient past, Dr. Asma discusses how cobras and rhinoceroses encountered in foreign lands were described in soldiers' accounts as huge and terrifying beasts from unknown regions. Not understanding what they had uncovered, fossils of the dinosaurs were transformed into the skeletal remains of mythical beasts such as griffins (half eagle/half lion) and dragons. Mastodon skulls found in Mediterranean caves were believed to have come from monstrous Cyclops due to the large nasal cavity in the centre of the skull. Seeking to understand and explain such beasts, the Greek philosopher Aristotle stated that 'monsters are simply mistakes that occur when normal reproductive processes are interrupted or otherwise corrupted.' (p. 47) Asma makes the point that these monsters, seen as free from the control of gods, were believed to be biological deviations, and to a superstitious people they could possibly be interpreted as omens or signs for social, military or political changes, but they were not beings threatening mankind at the behest of outside forces or a vengeful God.

By the time of the Middle Ages, monsters were seen as evil beings sent by God to tempt and torture mankind with God's permission. The depiction of monsters in the medieval world was one that involved the threat of demon possession and witches cursed by God. Seen as puppets of evil magic, mankind had to confront these beings and overcome them through spiritual strength and faith. Demons could be exorcised, and witches could be made to recant, but dealing with evil meant wrestling with spiritual origins and treatments for monsters. In the wake of the Scientific Revolution of the 1600s and the Enlightenment period of the 1700s, superstitious assessments of cause and cure were replaced by scientific and psychological explanations.

From Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, in which science is used to intentionally create the monstrous, to atomic-bred creatures such as Godzilla, Asma does an excellent job of analysing how Darwin's theories were used to explain the evolution of species generation and individual aberrations in species development that could be seen by mankind as monsters. He also demonstrates how Freud's psychological analysis of fear can be used to explain the helplessness and powerlessness we feel when confronting the unknown or unstoppable monsters as depicted in movies such as *Alien*. Modern monsters are seen not as henchmen sent or cursed by God, but rather individuals subject to pathological desires fuelled by internal personal demons and genetic disposition, or created by outside forces beyond their control.

A particularly fascinating analysis in the book is Asma's discussion of how modern monsters are used to define 'the relatively unhealthy aspects of our social, psychological, cultural and biological environments' within human society. (p. 277) Whether dealing with serial killers such as John Wayne Gacy, or with zombies eating people's brains in a horror film, it would be hard to disagree with an assessment that these are monstrous beings conducting monstrous acts. But Asma makes the point that cultures can disagree about what it means to be monstrous. He points out that many people who live in Islamic countries see Americans as 'godless, consumerist zombies, soulless hedonists without honour, family, or purpose.' (p. 241) To many Americans, followers of Islam are seen as 'wild-eyed jihad primitives who seek to destroy our modern and tolerant way of life.' (p. 242) In analysing this East/West conflict, it is easy to see that cultural biases can be used to create individual monsters who practice murder, terrorism and torture when they act on these exaggerated perceptions.

Through historical and cultural scholarship, mixed with humour and serious insight, Dr. Asma has provided readers a comprehensive analysis of the literal and symbolic monsters found in Western World history. His book is an outstanding journey into understanding the monsters that have shaped and fuelled our feverish imaginations and fears in dealing with forces that are beyond our control.

John Donovan
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The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales by Robert Louise Stevenson

Robert Louis Stevenson and Roger Luckhurst
Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008
xxxviii + 205 pp.

The central aim of the new Oxford World's Classics edition of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is made apparent in the opening paragraphs of the Introduction; to pare away the multitude of retellings and adaptations that have appeared in the century or so since the publication of Stevenson's novella, and to return to an analysis of the original text, setting it firmly in its Victorian, Gothic, psychoanalytical context. *Jekyll and Hyde* in this collection accompanied by Stevenson's less well-known tale 'Markheim' (1885), the oft-critically neglected 'Olalla' (1885) and 'The Body-Snatcher' (1884), as well as Stevenson's intriguing essay 'A Chapter on Dreams' (1888) in which the Scottish author ruminates on the subconscious origins of his writing (Brownies, a type of sprite, are involved). It is a curious compilation of fiction that emphasises the themes of the Double and the psychological aspects of the title work. Some contemporary writings on Victorian psychology are also included in the Appendices; 'The Disintegrations of the Ego' by Henry Maudsley (1883), 'The Multiplex Personality' (1885) by Frederic Myers and 'Has Man Two Minds or One?' by W T Stead (1894) help to illustrate some of the probable influences on Stevenson's most famous work and also its subsequent effect of the field of psychiatry. Roger Luckhurst, the author of the Introduction, manages to cover a substantial amount of material within a limited space, offering plenty of information without getting too preoccupied any one aspect of Stevenson's novella.

The collection is unashamedly a work for the newcomer to Stevenson's fiction; the Introduction is geared, as noted, to putting the story in context, and does an admirable (albeit necessarily brief) job of doing so. A Chronology of Stevenson's life and a brief publication history fill in many of the drier details, and the referencing for all of the stories is meticulous. Admirably, Luckhurst does not shy away from the problems in addressing a work like *Jekyll and Hyde,* noting that the surest conclusion we can draw about such a work is that there *is* no definite conclusion. His Introduction does a thorough job of introducing the binary opposites of *Jekyll and Hyde* – which range from method of publication to Stevenson's own existence – and then decides, that rather than breaking down these opposites, to hold them in tension to

demonstrate the conflicting aspects of the work. As noted, Luckhurst's preoccupation is with the original text to the exclusion of all subsequent adaptations, and this allows not only for examination of its main themes, but of exploration of narrative style and construction of the story. Given Luckhurst's stressing of the fact *Jekyll and Hyde* was originally a mystery story, a little more comparison with other works in this field (both by Stevenson and other authors) would have been beneficial when investigating narrative tropes, although what comparisons Luckhurst does provide are pertinent and informative.

In all honesty, the devoted scholar of Stevenson's work will probably not find a great deal they have not already encountered in this edition; Luckhurst addresses the most prevalent concerns of the novel (social decline, degeneration and so forth) and the Bibliography is filled with tried and true stalwarts of their respective fields; Freud, Fred Botting, Elaine Showalter, Sally Shuttleworth and so on. This however is no fault; for an untested student of Stevenson there is a wealth of information and a solid overview of major theories surrounding his work available here. The Introduction is particularly strong on psychoanalysis and the concepts of masculinity and the body in Victorian society – some arguments could be expanded upon, but the limited space available for analysis must be kept in mind. If the Introduction has a fault, it is that it focuses on *Jekyll and Hyde* to the exclusion of all else, which considering the other stories on offer in this collection seems a wasted opportunity. There is 'Markheim' (a direct descendant of *Dr Faustus* and Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*) that utilizes both the concept of Double and the concealment of criminal tendencies, and also 'Olalla,' a neglected tale that also makes use of contemporary fears of degeneration and the Other. It is also notable for a scene in which an animalistic woman leaps upon the English narrator in order to suck the blood from a wound he has sustained; one cannot help but wonder if Bram Stoker was familiar with this story, given its similarity to a certain scene that takes place in Dracula's castle. But to return to the original point, the themes explored within *Jekyll and Hyde* infiltrate the other stories in this collection, and given Luckhurst's preoccupation with context, it seems rather odd he pays such scant attention to Stevenson's other works, even though they are less well-known. This is particularly odd where 'Olalla' is concerned, as it was a mere year before *Jekyll and Hyde* and incorporating so many similar ideas.

Constraints notwithstanding, given the amount of research that already exists on *Jekyll and Hyde*, it would have been gratifying to see some exploration and examination of these tales, which continue to be

overshadowed by the famous story of split-personalities. However, given that these stories had far less impact on both the literary and scientific scenes of their day, this focus on Stevenson's most eminent work this is not overly surprising; naturally *Jekyll and Hyde* takes precedence. And this disregard for the other stories in this compendium does not detract from the fact that this is a very clear, comprehensive and thorough edition of *Jekyll and Hyde*, and should provide a perfect springboard for any student who is either approaching the work for the first time or is returning to it after a long hiatus.

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Peter Pan and Other Plays

J. M. Barrie
New York: Oxford University Press, 2008
384 pp.

The 2008 Oxford World's Classics edition of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan and Other Plays* is a reissue of the World's Classics 1995 edition, with introduction and explanatory notes by Peter Hollindale. Five pieces by Barrie are included in the collection: *The Admirable Crichton*, *Peter Pan*, *When Wendy Grew Up*, *What Every Woman Knows* and *Mary Rose*. As the introduction notes, *When Wendy Grew Up* is not to be read as a stand-alone play, as it exists as an 'alternative ending' to *Peter Pan*. It is, however, presented separately from the latter in this volume.

Hollindale's introduction to the collection draws attention to some of the difficulties in producing a collection of Barrie's plays. Barrie frequently rewrote his texts during performance and prior to publication. Hollindale suggests that 'none of his play-texts is ever fixed and stable'.

As such, careful editorial choices must always be made when publishing the plays. In selecting which versions to include, Hollindale follows the 1942 text of *The Definitive Edition of the Plays of J.M. Barrie*, edited by A.E. Wilson for all the plays except *When Wendy Grew Up*, as he wishes to 'respect Barrie's own inclinations, and retain the texts in the form which he approved for printing'. The rationale for this decision is underlined at several points in the introduction, as well as in the 'Note on the Text' that follows. Hollindale succeeds in making a logical and well-reasoned argument for retaining certain features of the 1942 text, rather than using one of the various available production scripts of the plays. He argues, for instance, for the retention of the lengthy and novelistic stage directions that Barrie added to his scripts prior to approving their publication, even where such direction represents 'unactable whimsy'. The sustained emphasising of the 'theatricality' of such stage direction, in the introduction, textual comment and explanatory notes, builds a compelling case for their inclusion and suggests that they are fundamental to an understanding of the plays as Barrie apparently envisioned them.

Nevertheless, despite the clear editorial agenda set out by Hollindale, not all of the decisions made in compiling this volume are clear. Although the introduction discusses the thematic and stylistic connection between the collected plays and Barrie's *Dear Brutus*, no explanation is given for the exclusion of the latter play from the volume. More strikingly, the sustained prominence of *Peter Pan* – evident in the title of the volume and continued throughout the editorial content – is not commented on. The introduction begins with an anecdotal description of a 1908 performance of the play, and many of the notes to the other pieces in the collection draw on comparison with *Peter Pan* for elucidation. While not disputing the fact that this play is Barrie's most popular and well-known work, the relegation of the rest of the volume's content to 'other plays' seems to undermine Hollindale's otherwise thoughtful and considered evaluation of Barrie's plays.

As well as his introduction and notes, Hollindale offers further material to aid study and reading of the texts. A chronology of Barrie's life and select bibliography is included. These are both accessible and illuminating, and yet reveal much of the implicit critical focus of the volume. Hollindale's chronology is telling in its almost strict adherence to the 'facts' of Barrie's life. It combines brief biographical details with publication and performance history. While it notes some key dates in Barrie's relationship with the Llewelyn Davies family, these are not given special weight. It is simply stated that the Llewelyn Davies' children 'were very important to the evolution of *Peter Pan*'. This is

characteristic of Hollindale's approach as whole, as elsewhere in the volume he is similarly succinct in his discussion of the relationship between Barrie's life and his writing. The collection does include the c.1928 dedication of *Peter Pan* to the five Llewelyn Davies boys, and this passage is heavily annotated by the editor. Here, as elsewhere, however, Hollindale resists using the playwright's relationship to the boys to make assertions about authorial intention or psychological motivation.

Since the 2004 release of Marc Forster's *Finding Neverland*, there has been a resurgence of popular and critical interest in Barrie's life, relationships and the impact these had on his plays. The reissuing of this volume, with Hollindale's 1995 introduction seems a somewhat timely intervention in this discourse. The edition, on the whole, focuses on Barrie's writing style and narrative persona. Indeed, the bibliography contains near-didactic commentary from the editor on certain schools of Barrie scholarship. In considering criticism of *Peter Pan* from the 1980s and 1990s, Hollindale unequivocally writes that such works often 'confuse psychological analysis with literary evaluation', and that 'criticism of Barrie will not itself reach the maturity which it habitually questions in Barrie until it begins to keep the distinction clear'. While the use of the original introductory material means that there is no response offered to twenty-first century criticism of Barrie's plays, the argument made in the bibliography is still relevant and significant.

That said, however, Hollindale's commentary on the texts, especially that of *Peter Pan*, occasionally veers dangerously close to the type of criticism he apparently condemns. A telling example of this is found in one of the notes to *Peter Pan*, in which the editor reflects on Barrie's describing the children as 'the heartless ones'. Here, as in many of the other notes, Hollindale offers a critical interpretation of the text, rather than merely glossing difficult vocabulary. He suggests that the phrase represents 'Barrie's endemic neutrality of stance towards childhood and adulthood', concluding that Barrie is 'peculiarly able to keep switching sides (like Peter)'. This elision of the playwright with the man, and the association of both with 'the boy who would not grow up', fails to wholly preserve a distinction between 'psychological analysis' and 'literary evaluation'. The impression given by such occasional slips is that, while it is apparently important to attempt to preserve scholarly detachment, the allure of reading Barrie himself as a Peter Pan-like figure is sometimes just too strong to resist.

Overall, this edition is an accessible and engaging collection. Barrie's texts are presented clearly, with endnotes signalled in an obvious, but unobtrusive, manner. The editorial material is both thorough

and critical, and yet the plays themselves are eminently readable without editorial interruption. The resulting volume succeeds in being an informative introduction to study, but also an enjoyable and enduring collection of fiction.

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Late Victorian Gothic Tales

Roger Luckhurst ed.
New York: Oxford University Press, 2009
ix + 326 pp.

The power of the Gothic is that it creates a language that can be used to discuss cultural fears. As educators and scholars, it is our job to inform ourselves on these languages, and what Editor Roger Luckhurst has done is create a collection of short stories from the late Victorian period that can be used in a variety of ways, regardless of whether one is using this book to teach or conduct research. If you're a scholar who loves horror, but is afraid of the Victorian period, this anthology will help you navigate common Gothic concepts (race, class, sexual repression), as well as quite possibly inspire new territories of scholarship to explore (post-colonialism, nationalism, psychoanalysis). Roger Luckhurst uses an eclectic eye to form a very specific collection of well-known stories mixed with stories that deserve wider readership. Luckhurst's introduction, too, goes a long way toward making these stories relevant to readers today from a variety of backgrounds. His introduction highlights how the Gothic addresses, questions and polices the borders of transgression threatening British society.

As the nineteenth century progresses, the British Empire expands its colonies around the world and there is apprehension about the purity

of race and the strength of nationalism. B. M. Croker's *The Dâk Bungalow at Dakor*, as well as Arthur Conan Doyle's *Lot. No. 24* and *The Case of Lady Sannox*, revolves around the threat of the Other and its containment. As the British colonies absorb indigenous cultures during the late Victoria era, the Other is not so easy to control because not only is the Other at once exotic and intriguing, but the Other is now also assimilated by the Empire, making them, in essence, British, which complicates concepts such as nationalism. Even as nineteenth century British society is built on boundaries, and transgression is a central focus of the Gothic plot, the narratives of this collection at once serve to reinforce and dismantle the boundaries delineating dominant cultural values, especially in regards to imperialism and reproduction.

The expansion of the Empire brought on fears of inevitable decline, so that the threat is no longer read as something foreign, or something to be found from without, but threats turned violently inward. Writers have long examined the threat that comes from within – from within Britain, but from inside ourselves as well – creating anxiety around the safe and familiar suddenly becoming strange and dangerous. Rudyard Kipling's *The Mark of the Beast* and Oscar Wilde's *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* both probe fears of the double, or doppelganger, fears of the dual life; however, the representation of the double is polymorphous during this period, as it is characterized by the comingling of two monstrous bodies in one.

The ways in which the Gothic is employed during the late Victorian period, particularly during the fin de siècle, exposes cultural anxieties around gender and sexuality. To an industrialized, capitalist-based culture, such as nineteenth century Britain, gender and sexuality become a part of commodity culture. For, if women are the tools of imperialism as reproductive machines – reproducing British patriots to be used to expand the nation – then the various monstrosities pose a threat to the free market system: as the New Woman emerges, the Labouchere Amendment goes into effect condemning homosexuality, and he Gothic addresses the complexity of the changing social spheres of the nineteenth century Britain. Henry James's *Sir Edmund Orme* and Vernon Lee's *Dionea* both deal in the realm of the supernatural to 'force victims into compulsive repetitions and very strange trans-historical and trans-gendered identifications.'

The collection ends with stories that question ideas of progress, and all of the messy trappings 'progress' has come to define, such as industrialization, city expansion, and technology. While *The Pallinghurst Barrow*, by Grant Allen, and, *The Great God Pan*, by Arthur Machen, bring to light deeply rooted apprehensions about modern society coming

face to face with ancient creatures and pagan gods destroying the crowning achievement that is the metropolis, Jean Lorrain's works, *Magic Lantern* and *The Spectral Hand*, are written in the Decadence tradition of the fin de siècle which emphasized indulgence and pleasure – and in these instances indulgence and pleasure came in the form of intense cruelty. Finally, M. P. Shiel's *Vaila* chronicles the demise of a noble, aristocratic family in the face of so much progress – written as an apparent homage to Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the narrative is bittersweet in its irony: Shiel was influenced by the American writer, and America was a lost British colony.

During this period, the monstrous body, in all its incarnations, both physical (and conceptual (from were-leopards to 'progress') transforms into something familiar, uncanny: the monster's body becomes our body. No longer is the dominant fear of monstrosity externalized as something marked without, fear begins to turn inward, becoming internalized, until the line between man and monster is blurred into a polymorphous perverse space. This is the power of the Gothic, and it's a power that Roger Luckhurst has harnessed in a single volume.

Jillian Burcar
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Dexter is Delicious

Jeff Lindsay
Orion Books: London, 2010
368 pp.

I am a fan. I have to state that for the record because this review is not the one I intended to write when I ordered my copy of the book.

When it arrived in the mail, I tore open the wrapping and prepared to devour this latest iteration of the Dexter story with something akin to maniacal hunger. I ended up with a slightly bad taste in my mouth and a suspicion that Lindsay's fifth novel had been tragically misnamed. It was pointedly *not* delicious. To be fair, and to catch up those more familiar with the Showtime series, it is a supreme task to maintain the narrative tension of a serial killer with a conscience into a fifth book. The Showtime series premiered in October of 2006, between the publication of Lindsay's second and third Dexter novels, and it followed closely along with the plot of Lindsay's first novel, *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*. Is Dexter a bad person doing good things or a good person doing bad things? After the first critically acclaimed season, the Showtime *Dexter* began branching off from Lindsay's books and the storylines of the television and literary Dexters have since diverged completely. However, this review concerns the literary path of our favourite mild-mannered serial killer; I mention the series only to suggest that Lindsay's novelistic endeavours must have become that much harder once his character began to have a televised life of his own.

I have long suspected that it was in an effort to differentiate himself from the series that Lindsay embarked on his Moloch exploration in *Dexter in the Dark*, where Dexter finds out that his Dark Passenger—his name for the dark force that guides his predatory adventures—is not a solitary entity. There are others; two budding little demons inhabit the bodies of his soon-to-be-stepchildren Astor and Cody, who—like small versions of the blond kids from *Village of the Damned* (1995)—stalk Dexter and insist that he instruct them in the finer points of dismemberment. Harry Morgan, Dexter's upstanding police officer father, rescued Dexter from a blood-filled shipping container in which he'd been trapped for three days amongst the severed body parts of his mother and two other people. Something like that is bound to have a profound effect on the development of a small boy, and when we are asked to believe that this is the source of Dexter's homicidal tendencies most of us find it plausible. This is, of course, aided by the strict 'Code of Harry' that keeps Dexter surprisingly moral and conscientious. He kills only bad people: verifiable, indisputable evil-doers who for one reason or another have escaped the punitive arm of justice. They do not escape Dexter.

When we are also asked to swallow that the same horrific experience also turned Dexter's long-forgotten older brother into a serial killer, we can still suspend disbelief because there is just so much *drama* in the idea. This is where the Showtime series begins to outshine Lindsay's novels, though, because it becomes clear that the series refuses

to pull punches whereas Lindsay seems to be taking an easier route. I suspect that he is trying to maintain his literary franchise as separate from the Showtime drama, but I think he is trying too hard: the opposite of surprising and exciting and shocking is… well… not. By the time *Dexter is Delicious* rolls around, Dexter—the guy who in the first book could not even mimic sexual intimacy—is now both married and a daddy. The pull of the earlier novels was in the friction between Dexter *pretending* to be normal and the Dexter who was decidedly *not* normal. In this fifth iteration, there is simply too much normalcy… so much so that even when Lindsay breaks out a coven of cannibals things get only slightly more interesting. Daddy Dexter is determined to silence his Dark Passenger in order to make the world safe for Lily Anne, his new daughter, and he fully becomes what his alter ego always pretended to be: an absolutely average drone who never does anything interesting… ever. Think Clark Kent without any hint of Superman. That horrifying smell emanating from the trunk of Dexter's car is, unfortunately, not the dismembered body parts of some drug pusher or serial paedophile; it is just a bag full of used diapers. We can see this little plot twist coming a mile away so it doesn't even produce a small chuckle, merely groans.

In the fourth novel, *Dexter by Design*, the oncoming complacence of our favourite serial killer was evident, but he had a moderately compelling reason to be chasing the bad guy, who is treating all of Miami as a gallery for displaying his artistically clever but murderous pastiches. Of course, he also tries to kill Debs—Dexter's unrestrained sister and police detective—but more importantly this evildoer is threatening to expose Dexter and take away all that lovely normalcy. We almost hope that he does, but Dexter survives to avoid conflict yet another day. It is practically prosaic.

In *Dexter is Delicious*, Dexter's reasons for getting involved are nearly non-existent. He is dragged around town to play second fiddle to Debs because she can't ever seem to get along with any of her assigned partners. She bullies him because she now knows his secret—if we can still even remotely consider it a secret. Even Dexter's signature phrases of self-deprecation—references to his darker side, to his weakness when it comes to social interaction—begin to pale as he does less and less of the nocturnal activities that once made him such a compelling enigma. Harry's code seems to have flown out the window, with Dexter abiding by and ignoring it as the mood takes him. Sergeant Doakes, who exploded off the screen in the television series, is still very much alive in the books (parts of him, at least) but deprived of his tongue and a few other appendages he is little more than a hovering menace, capable of squashing the mood in a room but little else. He glowers at Dexter in

that 'I know you're up to something' way, but it is an impotent threat; Aster and Cody are scarier than Doakes—to be honest they are almost scarier than their step-daddy. When Dexter's fellow serial killer and sibling, Brian, reappears as the adoring, supportive uncle after the birth of Lily Anne, he seems to promise some delightfully squeamish moments, but he proves to be a bigger disappointment than Dexter himself. Unbeknownst to Dexter, Brian takes Aster and Cody out for lovely night of stray dog dismembering, but more often than not he appears calmly bouncing baby Lily Anne on the Morgan family sofa—a perfect familial tableau.

Lindsay does devote considerable time to investigating the theme of toxic families and unholy parental failings, with a 'victim' who doesn't want to be rescued because she *secretly desires to be eaten.* Samantha's father used to read her bedtime stories, 'and he would come to the part where the ogre or the witch eats somebody, and he would, you know, make these eating noises and pretend to eat my arm, or my leg' (227). Contrary to any logic I know of, this teenager came to believe that what she enjoyed about those touching family moments was 'the idea of somebody eating me. Of having some witch or, you know, just somebody slowly, slowly roasting my body, and cutting off little slices, and eating me, and really… liking it' (227). Not even Dexter knows what to say when confronted with such obvious psychosis, and he came from a really messed up family. Family, it seems, 'is for rescuing you from cannibals' (335) and Brian, complete with black executioner's hood, shows up just in time to spoil dinner and rescue Dexter, Debs, and FBI agent Chutsky from being the main course.

Dexter snidely and repeatedly hints that, given his mother and father's proclivity for extra-marital activities, he and Brian might have untold numbers of psychotically inclined siblings roaming about South Florida, but the idea of a murderous Morgan family reunion just doesn't carry any bite. I am still a fan, but I have to confess I am swiftly losing my appetite.

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Reoccurring Nightmares: Revisiting 1980s American Horror on Elm Street.

Reviews: *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Dir. Samuel Bayer, 2010)
Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy (Dirs. Daniel Farrands & Andrew Kasch, 2010)

According to essayist and novelist George Orwell, 'Every generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it'. While this feels undoubtedly true for each generation, especially when a new generation mines the previous generations' beloved cinematic representations without care or due respect, Orwell's observation takes on a more caustic and knowing tone when examining popular culture and cinema. In recent years, the multiplex has been dominated with re-boots and re-imaginings of 1980s horror classics. Different subgenres of horror, such as the slasher, have been revised or wholly disembowelled by the Hollywood machine, recently having rather unimaginatively reverted to popular horror franchises to ensure financial success, rather than to invest in new and innovative projects. Ironically, the very films that have been 're-booted' struggled to be made or released during the late 1970s/early 80s because major studios believed that the films had no guaranteed commercial gain – the independent producer became the bastion of the slasher movement in the early days of the subgenre. Films such as John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) and Sean S. Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* (1980) initially relied on private investors and regional screenings of the films back and forth across the United States in order to make any profitable box office returns; had Hollywood dominated the financial helm of such projects, the struggle to bring the film to audiences may not have been so difficult, but, undoubtedly, creative control would have been relinquished, and the shocking violence would have been tamed considerably, taking with it the very elements that secured the cultural status these films gained by notoriety and word of mouth.[1] With this in mind, watching multiplex-bound remakes of slasher films that were denounced as filth and misogynistic to begin with during the 1980s takes on a new form of irony – the films that have been subject to the remake machinations of Michael Bay et al have stripped the core elements of these films away in favour of recycling the vision of others, illustrating a

real lack of imagination, and an over reliance on CGI special effects which harm the films' aesthetic currency and sense of horror.[2]

So one must ask the uncomfortable question – why now? Why are the *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984-1994), *Friday the 13th* (1980- 2001) and *Halloween* (1978-2002) films (among others) being recycled so unnecessarily in an age ripe with political and cultural disquiet?[3] Indeed, that the very cultural circumstances that tend to replenish horror cinema are resurfacing within the cultural narrative presently, and the failing to provide much commentary on the present anxieties speaks volumes about Hollywood's continued attitude towards the horror genre as a loathsome but financially necessary bedfellow. Something is most certainly amiss when few imaginative horror films – excluding the *Saw* franchise distributed by Lionsgate (2004-2010) - are gaining releases from major studios who are instead opting for the remake movement: having pillaged the best of Japanese and Korean horror with English language remakes during the 2000s, Hollywood has now turned to self-cannibalisation of any successful horror franchise for sustenance. Given that remakes are viewed within the industry as having certain box-office bankability, Samuel Bayer's remake of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, financially backed by Michael Bay's production company Platinum Dunes, 'attempts' to remain faithful to Craven's original film while updating the look and technological aspects of the film for modern audiences. This is a reductive exercise considering that the original film has dated considerably well, and maintains its sense of genuine originality in the 1980s horror cycle. However, while moments of Craven's original nightmare are evident (though not fully intact), much of the subtleties that haunt the margins of original film are conflated, poorly scripted and awkwardly repackaged, turning the surrealist 'nightmare' into a narrative mess.

The film begins in a diner, a setting of familiar cultural Americana, where we meet Dean (Kellan Lutz), Nancy (Rooney Mara), Kris (Katie Cassidy), Jesse (Thomas Dekker) and Quentin (Kyle Gallner), all of whom are experiencing strange and surreal nightmares. Dean is the first of the teenagers to be dispatched, seemingly by his own hand – his 'nightmares' being categorised as delusions and due to 'emotional problems'. As evidenced in almost all 80s slasher films, parents and authority figures are seldom believers in their children's justified fears, nor capable of helping them at crucial moments. Next to fall under Freddy's sway is Kris, whose death mimics Tina's (Amanda Wyss) horrific demise in the original but without the scene's infamous and nauseating disorientation. Kris's death is ultimately blamed on her boyfriend Jesse, who also meets a similar end at while in custody. As the

body count continues to rise unabated, Nancy, the final girl, begins to piece together the links that bind her to the other terrorized teens. Surprisingly, the tie that binds these teenagers to their terrifying dreams has little to do with Elm Street itself. Wes Craven's script places its scenes of violence and community in 'Elm Street' because nominally it is a site of 'pure Americana… the name of the street [in Dallas] that Kennedy was shot on' – the death of innocence.[4] The association with Elm Street and the death of ideological innocence is an important connection that is sorely overlooked (or rather shamefacedly replaced) in Bayer's version – effectively using the connotation in name only. Indeed, one of the most frightening aspects of the original concept for *A Nightmare on Elm Street* was the simple fact that we all must sleep – the comfort and safety of this necessity turned into a surrealist dreamscape where Freddy is master of our inner dream worlds. While this structure is left largely intact, the process of 'micro-napping' is introduced to heighten tension: we are informed that our heroes, being so sleep deprived, cannot prevent their brains from temporarily attempting to induce sleep, providing moments of horrific flashes of Freddy's dreamscape. Micro-naps function as a warning that the brain will eventually give way to sleep and, if detrimental damage has occurred due to deprivation, the possibility of coma, locked permanently within the dreamscape with Freddy. While this plot device is wholly unnecessary, it does attempt to add the 'ticking-bomb' scenario to the finale of the film, albeit failing to truly add pace to the film.

Repression and the sins of the parents of Elm Street are the overarching themes evident throughout. The parents repeatedly tell their children to rest and sleep, with little interest in communicating with them over their panicked state. Furthermore, to unsubtly exploit the origins of Krueger's interest in the Elm Street children, flashbacks and repressed memories of pre-school link these children together as victims, where they were molested by Krueger who worked as the school's janitor and groundskeeper. While these cultural signifiers of abuse, trauma and class distinction are mostly marginalized in Craven's original script (the pre-school encounter with Krueger is not present in Craven's version), Bayer's film exacerbates the current fears on child abuse in popular culture. Here, Freddy is no longer the phantasmagorical terrifying spectre that we knew, but rather a weary representation of the return of the repressed. As the parents of Nancy, Quentin and Kris speak in hushed tones about their children slowly remembering their repressed pre-school childhood, the denial of abuse runs so deep that Freddy's monstrosity of abusing and murdering children is inadvertently aided by the vengeful parents who burned him in retribution for his actions. The continuing

lack of communication and empathy between the vengeful parents and abused children only furthers the repression of the past, which in turn rears its ugly head when Krueger becomes the stalker of their dreams. The hyperbolic sexual element of Freddy's abuse of the children is particularly unnecessary and harmful to the film overall. Through pop culture alone we are aware of Freddy's monstrosity as a child killer who was burned in retribution by the parents of Elm Street. Yet, Bayer confuses and betrays this narrative by introducing an element of doubt regarding Freddy's past actions, posing unnecessary questions over Freddy's guilt, until the over-worn and obvious revelation, never in question to the viewer, is finally tediously unveiled. All attempts to pose thought-provoking questions about guilt, complicity, abuse and retribution are so carelessly added and subtracted from the narrative that the whole exercise seems redundant.

The serious problems which evidently mar the remake of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* are not anomalous either. 2009 saw the release of the remake of Sean Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* (1980), again under the production of Michael Bay and the original film's director Sean S. Cunningham. The remake of *Friday the 13th*, directed by Marcus Nispel, fails even in its basic narrative structure: the plot and aesthetic of *Friday parts 1-III* are awkwardly combined together - bearing in mind that the first three parts of the *Friday* series do contain diegetic reasons for Jason's and Mrs. Voorhees' murder sprees at Camp Crystal Lake.[5] This version glibly removes all class and social commentary in favour of presenting the hockey-masked Jason chasing victims while wielding a machete (truly the mark of later and poorer Jason films). Jason is presented visually in three stages (marking the remake's three act script): as a child who was believed to have drowned; as an adult killer wearing a bandage-like bag over his deformed face; and finally as the culturally established hockey-masked resident of Camp Crystal Lake. By removing the grind house aesthetic origins of *Friday part 1* and instead opting for a brown/green filter colouring which gives the film a sickly, murky look, scenes appear dimly lit, poorly acted by a cast of young actors, and awkwardly scripted. The film's only true pleasure lies in the dispatching of these particularly unlikeable teenagers. Notwithstanding the glaring glossing over of Jason and Mrs. Voorhees' origins, major plot holes remain unconcealed with superfluous amounts of CGI effects, nudity, drug use and gore, reducing the film to a shallow and gratuitous exercise. Mark Kermode concluded his review of it for the BBC rather succinctly: 'it's not new, it's not interesting, [*Friday the 13th*] is just boring'.[6]

Rob Zombie's re-imagining of John Carpenter's classic slasher *Halloween* (1978), released in 2007, did not fare any better. Indeed,

while Jason Voorhees' origins are severely compacted (though for the most part faithful) in the remake, Zombie's retelling of Michael Myers' origins derive solely from Zombie's primary interest in cinematic depictions of 'white trash', suitably coloured with Zombie's now established criteria of sexual assault, severe neglect, torment, and abuse. Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) created a monster that was deemed to be 'born bad', a child that was 'simply evil'. Zombie's own re-imagining of the film reinforces the link between class wars, social stigma and menace, unearthing the Neo-Con mantra of the 1980s – an association that clearly nods to the politics of the slasher genre overall, but one that was not thematically established by Carpenter's original film.[7] Zombie's reworked vision of *Halloween* is largely informed by the films that became successful *because* of *Halloween* in the early 1980s, such as *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Prom Night* (1980) and *Terror Train* (1980). However close the thematic links are between Zombie's reimagined film and the original slasher cycle, his film fails for other critical reasons: like the other remakes that have been produced since Zombie's *Halloween*, particularly in the case of *Friday the 13th* (2010) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (2010), all have failed to provide any sense of horror or any genuine fright. Stripped of their original intelligence, the films are imbued with excessive amounts of decoration but are bereft of the essence of their vastly superior originals.

Returning to Elm Street, the site of six 'Nightmare' films from 1984-1991, may have seemed like a logical step for Hollywood– its place in 1980s popular culture secured by teenagers of the era, now bequeathed onto their own children a generation later. Largely, the success of Craven's film says much about the reigning mood during the Reagan era – in a period when 'monsters' lurked in schools (the allegations of sexual abuse during the McMartin pre-school trial), government (the Neo-Con perception of the liberal left), within communities (increasing drug use including the rise of cocaine and gang wars), and the rise of the serial killer in popular culture and entertainment (serial killers Richard Ramirez and Ted Bundy in particular were the focus of much media attention), narratives of doom and destruction reigned unabated.[8] Even Freddy himself claims this generation as his own in *A Nightmare on Elm Street Part II* (1985), positioning himself simultaneously as President Reagan and the monstrous invader of suburban bliss: 'You are all my children now!'[9] An interesting notion of ownership and leadership arises in the popular culture here – for who is Freddy Krueger but the symbol of 80s consumption (especially during the decade that gave rise to the Hollywood sequel) and the shadow that lurks beneath the façade of

suburban idealism so propagated during the decade. Yet, these cultural markers are not replaced in the remake, but rather removed completely.

Much of the pleasures of the slasher genre derive from the iconic killer's use of their signature weapon and guaranteed indestructibility, and from the survival skills of the final girl in defeating the killer in the finale – the pleasure of genre pieces lie particularly in recognising the formula, and how such conventions are reused or reconfigured in each film. Yet, the very pleasures of familiarity with the *Elm Street* series are denied to us in the remake by reducing both Freddy Krueger and Nancy to merely killer and victim roles. Haley's Krueger is wholly bereft of wisecracks, surrealist appearances, and sadistic glee, which reduces Freddy to a boring and frustrating threat onscreen. Unlike Englund's iconic visage, Haley's make-up is particularly disappointing, giving the appearance of being thrown on clumsily to resemble melted cheese rather than the horrific burns that made Englund's original appearance so profoundly disturbing and painful to view. Haley's performance is understated and growly, lacking the menace that so personified Englund's Freddy – he is neither menacing nor truly horrific in his dreamscape appearances. Nancy, heroine in both the original and remake, is drastically reduced onscreen, removing all of her ingenuity and bravery that made her an intrinsic part of the final girl fellowship. Her act of turning her back on Freddy in the original film's finale, which denies and nullifies his existence in the dreamscape, is overwritten and replaced by her simply killing him in our reality. Aided by her friend Quentin, Nancy acts as a target only to ensnare Krueger, and, despite discovering the connection between all of Freddy's victims, she fails to be the innovative and resourceful final girl that the formula requires. By relying on external factors such as Quentin's adrenaline shots to best Freddy rather than her own initiative, Nancy sullenly and drearily stumbles through the narrative rather than actively participates to shape the finale. Discarding the narrative rules that has come to define the slasher genre of the 1980s, the film simply dwindles without scares or cerebral contextualisation, focusing merely on Freddy's hyper sexualised 'bad touch' with his vastly overused taloned-glove. Failing to compensate for the lack of imaginative surrealism that Craven's original relished in, Bayer's film is illustrative of Hollywood's depressing attitude to horror cinema overall – steal from the best and over-emphasise the peripheral elements of gore and body count, rather than understand the plot, characters, symbolic and cultural contexts of the original text.

Within the same week as the reimagined *A Nightmare on Elm Street* appeared at the multiplex, a documentary on the *Elm Street*

phenomenon, *Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy*, was released in the US on DVD. This excellent four-hour documentary charts the seven *Nightmare* films starring the original Freddy (Englund) and the *Elm Street*/*Friday the 13th* crossover film *Freddy vs. Jason* (2003).[10] In exhaustive detail, the documentary charts the origins and plot of the original film written by Craven, and how the film itself became a cultural phenomenon in late 1984, spawning financially successful sequels for the remainder of the decade and a brief television show, *Freddy's Nightmares* (1988-1990). While most horror documentaries gloss over the plot and special effects details of individual films in favour of presenting a thematic history of the genre, *Never Sleep Again* delights in revisiting each instalment of the franchise in detail, complete with cast interviews, and fascinating stories of proposed and un-filmed scripts. Particular attention is paid to the special effects used in the dream sequences, from revolving rooms, sculptures, puppetry, and state-of-the-art make-up, to the (often problematic) translation of the nightmare sequences from script to screen. Yet, the frank interviews reveal stories of on-set tensions, particularly between Craven and New Line Cinema CEO Robert Shaye, and the financial difficulties faced by New Line to produce the film. Shaye in particular is presented as the difficult step-father of the series, with numerous directors, writers and producers of the series describing his set visits as extremely stressful. Having subsequently enjoying enormous success with the franchise, New Line was fondly monikered 'The House that Freddy Built' until its subsumption into the Time Warner group in 2008. Few but nonetheless noted absences from the interviews include then new-comers Patricia Arquette (of *Nightmare 3*) and Johnny Depp (*Nightmare 1*), but it does not take from the depth or scope of the documentary overall. What is particularly excellent is the introduction of sections with Michael Granberry's stop-motion animations of Freddy, providing a humorous touch ripe with a genuine love of the series.

Perhaps most telling in the documentary is the evolution of the franchise from Craven's first and last film of the series, the character's ascent from terrifying child killer to a heavily marketed pop culture icon, complete with kids' striped pyjamas, an MTV video by 80s rock band Dokken starring Englund, collectable action figures, and the short-lived *Twilight Zone*-esque television series. Being so aware of the cultural power of the series, there are very few references outside of the series itself, save a few quips about the series' box-office rival *Friday the 13th*, which makes the scope of the documentary feel quite insular and self-referential. For viewers not enamoured with the series, the four-hour running time will seem quite exhaustive (roughly devoting thirty-minute

segments to each of the eight films), but never slows in pace or structure. Overall, it is an insightful and thoroughly detailed account of the franchise that captivated 80s horror audiences.

It is interesting to conclude that, while Hollywood producers will continue to remake classic films of the 1970s and 1980s unabated, the production of such an intensive retrospective documentary on the same horror icon ultimately underscores the problematic nature of the remake movement. In viewing both films, the soullessness of the remake becomes a glaring reminder that Hollywood does not fully appreciate the complexities of the genre overall, and that any attempt to reinvent such series seems to desecrate rather than commemorate the icons of the previous generation. Horror continues to be Hollywood's reluctant bedfellow, a necessary evil in times of financial crisis, but no more than that. Orwell's observation has come full circle – we can only hope they leave Freddy and his legion to rest and introduce some new blood.

Notes

[1] It must be clarified that the lack of Hollywood support for the horror genre in the early 1980s was due to a number of factors, including some distaste for the genre. Paramount Pictures purchased the rights to distribute *Friday the 13th* (1980) and were heavily criticised by film critics Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel on national television for backing a project that they deemed too violent for its MPAA awarded 'R' rating. Lobby groups also found Paramount's involvement in slasher cinema distasteful and vowed to boycott future Paramount releases because they were producing and promoting 'sick' and 'misogynistic' slasher films. For more on this, see James Kendrick. *Hollywood Bloodshed: Violence in 1980s American Cinema*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009. 135-170

[2] The CGI evident in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Dir. Samuel Bayer, New Line Cinema, 2010) is a case in point here. Freddy Krueger's (Jackie Earle Hayley) make up is particularly problematic as gaps in his distorted facial flesh that have been touched up in post-production and look both un-convincing and lazy to the viewer. 1980s special effects, spearheaded by make-up artists such as Dick Smith, Tom Savini and David B. Miller, relied on imaginative mechanics, puppetry, sculpture, visual trickery and plasticity, keeping a visual authenticity that is ultimately lacking and lost in the exaggerated computer-generated special effects of today's rebooted films.

[3] When citing the dates of the original film franchises, I have not included the cross-franchise film *Freddy Vs. Jason* (Dir. Ronny Yu, 2003) as it is both within and beyond the original franchise domain. Indeed, Wes Craven in particular has rebooted the slasher genre at significant moments of cultural and political anxiety, including *Last House on the Left* (1972) as a reaction to the Vietnam War; *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) when Reagan's Neo-Con policies were whitewashing the harsh realities of Reaganomics and class wars in America; and *Scream* (1996) (alongside Freddy's postmodern, final outing also under Craven's direction, and *Scream* pre-cursor *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (1994)), with all of its postmodern, self-reflexive ingenuity and cultural affection for the 80s slasher cycle, reflecting 90s re-birth of the genre post the Reaganite 1980s.

[4] Interview with Wes Craven on the origins on 'A Nightmare on Elm Street'. *Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy*. Dirs. Dirs. Daniel Farrands & Andrew Kasch, 1428 Films, 2010.

[5] Director Wes Craven and screenwriter Kevin Williamson poke fun at the omission of Mrs. Voorhees by fans who only recall Jason's presence in the *Friday the 13th* series in the opening scenes of the postmodern slasher *Scream* (1996).

[6] Mark Kermode reviewing *Friday the 13th* (2009). 'Kermode Uncut: Back in the 1980s - Friday 13th was lucky for some.' BBC Film blog. Posted online February 26th 2009. Online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBjIdbH9ZuE>.

[7] For more on this, see Sorcha Ní Fhlainn. 'Sweet, Bloody Vengeance: Class, Social Stigma and Servitude in the Slasher Genre' in *Hosting the Monster*. Holly Baumgartner and Roger Davis (eds). Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2008. pp. 179-196.

[8] For much more on this see, Stephen Milligen. *Better To Reign in Hell: Serial Killers, Media Panics and the FBI*. London: Headpress, 2006. pp.151-179

[9] In particular, President Reagan can be considered the most influential political figure of the 1980s, vastly shaping the cultural landscape of the 1980s and the teenage generation of the period. For much more on Reagan's influence see, Susan Jeffords. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Jersey: Rutgers Press, 1993; Robin Wood. *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan… and Beyond*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003 [Rev. Ed].

[10] To clarify, six of the *Elm Street* films take place on the suburban 'Elm Street': *Nightmare on Elm Street* 1-5 (1984-1989) and *Freddy's Dead:*

The Final Nightmare (1991). Craven's farewell to the series is situated in our reality far from the Elm Street setting in *New Nightmare* (1994).

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