

**'MORE HUMAN THAN HUMAN':
ASPECTS OF MONSTROSITY
IN THE FILMS AND NOVELS
IN ENGLISH
OF THE 1980s AND 1990s**

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TESI DOCTORAL

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'More Human than Human':
Aspects of Monstrosity
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UNIVERSITAT AUTONOMA DE BARCELONA,
Bellaterra, 1996.

He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself
does not become a monster. And when you gaze long
into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My warmest thanks to all the people who have helped me along the road:

- * My supervisor at the UAB, Dr. Andrew Monnickendam, and my supervisor at the University of Stirling, Scotland, Prof. David Punter, for their patient listening and support, and for their many suggestions.
- * The foundation "La Caixa" and the British Council, for having generously funded my research at Stirling in the academic year 1994-95, with my special thanks to Montserrat Pau, Angels Cabau and Josep Liso. My thanks also to the UAB for the leave of absence that allowed me to complete my research at Stirling.
- * My department colleagues Dr. Felicity Hand, Narcís Vilar, Nuria Augé and Esther Pujolràs for many hours of very stimulating conversation and friendship, and Dr. Guillermina Cenoz for having helped me to see, as usual, things I could not see.
- * My husband Jordi Sesé, for his unwavering emotional (and technical!) support. My brother Jordi Martín, for having shared his films magazines with me.
- * My patient proof-readers Alan Reeves, Michael Kennedy and Dr. Felicity Hand. My special thanks to Alan Reeves for his suggestions.
- * My friends Mercè López and Gonzalo García del Río for their generosity. Thanks for the many hours spent discussing monsters with me, for your suggestions and your help to both; my special thanks to Gonzalo for his permanent intellectual companionship despite the geographical distance and to Mercè for being the best of all flatmates.
- * My friends at the Spanish Fidonet areas of Science Fiction and Cinema, especially Angel Ariquistain, Rafa Lategui and Sebastià Font for all their generous help in guiding me in fields I did not know and for their willingness to engage in very stimulating discussion.
- * My friends Màrius Bosch, Dr. Lois Rudnick, Meli Bryce, Helena Martín and Atima Srivastava for wanting to listen to my endless lecturing about monsters, and for asking important questions.
- * My 2nd year students in the academic year 1993-94, who endured my version of *Frankenstein* with the utmost patience; my special thanks to Jrene Muzás and to Raúl Reyes for their suggestions. Also my 3rd year students in the academic year 1992-93 who asked questions I am still trying to answer.
- * Dr. Jane Gaines and Dr. Glennis Stephenson for their suggestions about primary sources I could use.

This dissertation is dedicated to them.

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INTRODUCTION

Defining the Monster in the 1980s and 1990s

J.1. *Why Study Monsters?*

'More Human than Human' is the motto of the Tyrell Corporation, the company which manufactures perfect reproductions of human beings - called 'replicants' - in Ridley Scott's classic science-fiction film *Blade Runner* (1982). I have chosen Tyrell's motto as the title for the present dissertation because this film was the starting point of my work. Why, I wondered when seeing the film for the first time more than ten years ago, is the hero Deckard so villainous and the villain Roy so heroic? Why, instead of being horrific like his most direct ancestor - Frankenstein's monster - is the monstrous Roy handsome and sensitive? Indeed, why must he be exterminated since, far from being an abject, horrific monster, he is a superman? How is this attractive monster comparable to the horrific monsters of other films and novels produced in the 1980s and 1990s? Those questions are the seeds from which this dissertation grew. In addition, I felt also challenged by Tyrell's motto to consider the question of whether the monster, far from being the representation of the subhuman, was, in fact, an expression of humankind's struggle to leave behind our innate capacity to do evil, and also, of our aspiration - with its ensuing anxieties - to be one day superhuman, that is to say, more than human and less monstrously evil than we are now. It seemed to me then, and it still seems to me now, that answering those questions is a worthwhile undertaking.

The subtitle of this dissertation is "Aspects of Monstrosity in the Films and Novels in English of the 1980s and 1990s". The phrase "aspects of monstrosity" indicates that this is not a

classificatory study of contemporary monstrosity made on the basis of the monsters that can be found in films and novels, but a study of the cultural circumstances (in the widest sense) that shape the figure of the monster in our days. I have consequently disregarded both an approach limited by the notion of genre in fiction and a division of my dissertation in chapters devoted each to a particular kind of monster, since neither would be adequate to prove my theses. The two main theses I prove in this study of the monster are: first, that monstrosity is a fluid cultural construction in a constant state of change, permeating important areas of contemporary culture in which it occupies not a marginal but a central position. Second, that contemporary monsters cannot be satisfactorily accounted for simply by means of their description and classification within the domain of a particular genre, such as horror or science fiction: it is necessary to consider the monster as a ubiquitous figure present in different cultural manifestations, rather than as a figure shaped by a particular genre. The monster offers an excellent vantage point from which the notion of genre itself can be questioned, and from which the links between our primitive selves and our current cultural manifestations can be also explored.

My approach to monstrosity is inclusive rather than exclusive. This means that this is not a dissertation which deals only with horrific, hostile non-human creatures - the most basic notion of the monster - but with the monster in most of the many senses of the word. The entries for the word 'monster' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Webster Dictionary* actually provide a rather long list of meanings, of all them habitually used without much reflection on how they are linked. According to the 1989 edition of the *OED*, a monster is, firstly, an unnatural prodigy or marvel, which indicates the potential of the monster to fascinate - a point I discuss in Chapter 1. Secondly, the monster is an animal, vegetal or human being born with malformations, that is to say, an abnormality, also called a 'natural monster' or a 'freak of nature' to differentiate it from the imaginary monsters; thirdly, a monster is an imaginary animal of bizarre features, such as the mythical Sphinx; fourthly, a monster is also a creature of huge dimensions but of no other anatomical abnormal particularity. Lastly, and most importantly, a monster is also a person of

inhuman cruelty. The *Webster Dictionary* adds to this list the definition of monster as a creature or person of extraordinary ugliness, which repels but does not necessarily horrify. In addition, it must be noted that 'monster' can also mean an artist of outstanding reputation, in the sense of an artistic prodigy, and that the collocation 'a monster of ...' allows the construction of phrases as curious as "a monster of virtue" (Fiedler, 1973: 75) and "a monster of [the] fear of sexuality" (Carter, 1990: 49). Even the phrase 'a monster of beauty' could be eventually coined, if it has not been coined yet.

On the basis of those definitions I have set out to test the validity of a comprehensive definition of the monster. throughout this dissertation I will maintain and prove that a monster is any non-human creature or human being of extraordinary, abnormal physical or psychological qualities. By extraordinary and abnormal I mean whatever exceeds the norm, either in a positive or a negative sense. Thus, according to my comprehensive definition, which avoids the usual problem of whether human and non-human monsters have any common feature at all, the following could be regarded as monsters: a horrific, hostile, non-human creature such as the extraterrestrial monster of Ridley Scott's *Alien*; a beautiful, non-human, angelic creature such as the jellyfish aliens of James Cameron's *The Abyss*; a physically attractive but psychologically abnormal, evil man such as Pat Bateman, the hero of Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*; a grotesque, evil freak such as Arturo, the limbless Seal Boy in Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love*; an attractive, erotic - by no means evil - freak such as the winged woman Fevers in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and a beautiful, good, prodigious person such as the metamorphic Anyanwu in Olivia Butler's *Wild Seed*. These and the rest of the monsters I have analysed in this dissertation attest to the variety of contemporary monstrosity, proving that only a generic definition that contemplates the idea of the monster as an extraordinary creature in its amplest sense can account for the apparently heterogeneous reality of monstrosity in the 1980s and 1990s, as represented in the films and novels under discussion.

Plato regarded the study of monstrosity as a "pretty enough" pastime leading nowhere. He

considered the interpretations of the centaurs, chimeras, gorgons, pegasus and other "countless and strange monsters" in which some of his contemporaries were engaged simply an "artificial and tedious business" (*Phaedrus*, 229D ff. in Hume, 1984: xvi). In Plato's view, studying monsters is a pointless enterprise, that should only be undertaken, if at all, once man knows himself. "It seems absurd to me", Plato argues, "that, as long as I am in ignorance of myself, I should concern myself with extraneous matters" (*ibid.*: xvi). In contrast, Katherine Hume (*ibid.*: xvi) notes that "since Freud, we feel that one can know oneself only if one recognises the monsters inhabiting the fastness of the unconscious", an idea that serves partly to justify why this dissertation has been written. The monsters, especially the monsters of fiction (included those of myth), are not figures that lead an existence separate from humankind. They are creations of humankind's imagination arising from the depths of the collective and the personal unconscious which can be said to be simultaneously Freudian and Jungian constructs. Jung himself saw an analogy between man's own psyche and the worldview in which the monsters occupy such an important place:

How else could it have occurred to man to divide the cosmos, on the analogy of day and night, summer and winter, into a bright day-world and a dark night-world peopled with fabulous monsters, unless he had the prototype of such a division in himself, in the polarity between the conscious and the invisible and unknowable unconscious? (Jung, 1959: 101)

The monsters are thus a Freudian index not only of the personality of the individual novelists and filmmakers whose work I am considering, but also a Jungian index of the collective anxieties of the readers and audiences to whom their work is addressed. This is why studying the monster is not a gratuitous investment of time and energies in extraneous matters, as Plato claimed, but a way of approaching the underside of human life along a route still largely unexplored.

However, I would not like to justify why studying monsters is useful on the sole basis of psychology or psychoanalysis. I understand that Plato's injunction to know oneself also implies knowing one's own place within the surrounding historical and cultural context. Thus, if the monster is, as I claim, a reflection of the inner self of humankind - hence the interest in its study - the monster must be also a sign not only of the collective transhistorical unconscious but also of the

collective historical unconscious, which is informed by specific historical and cultural factors. Thus, I have devoted most of this dissertation to discussing the monster's positioning at a crossroads between the primitive, mythical (pre-historic in the sense of lacking a sense of history) substratum of culture and the postmodern strong self-awareness of historicity. The monster, my thesis is, is not determined once and for all by the archetypes of the collective unconscious or the Freudian id; on the contrary, it evolves constantly, being especially sensitive to changes brought about by social, historical and cultural forces. From the perspective of postmodernity, we tend to see mainly the master narrative of the history of culture, the Freudian narratives of the individual unconscious and the Jungian narratives of the collective unconscious, but we are frequently oblivious that there are other paths worth exploring. The positioning of the monster at a crossroads between postmodern high culture, contemporary popular culture and primitive myth allows us to find other links with our present, our past and even our future that fall beyond the scope of psychoanalysis, demanding a much larger, anthropological, approach.

J.2. Primary Sources

The choice of primary sources, films and novels, has been conditioned by my inclusive approach to monstrosity and by the dates that delimit the period under study, the years between 1979 and 1995. The final selection of films and novels has been determined in principle by their availability and by my wish to cover as many instances of monstrosity as possible. Also - perhaps - by my initial fear that there were too few primary sources on the topic I had chosen, a fear that turned out to be absolutely unfounded, as can be seen by checking the lists of films and novels. The difference between the number of novels and the number of films is easy to justify: films are much more accessible because there is more easily available information about them; in addition, it must be noted that they offer an additional advantage over novels: they can be studied in a much shorter length of time because of their own limited duration. Comparatively, it is much easier to build a basic knowledge of film than of the novel: in fact, one can become an amateur expert in film history just by sitting regularly in front of the television set, TV guide in hand. Many of the films

that have turned out to be fundamental in my research have actually reached me - rather than I have reached them - through television; evidently I have kept my video-tape recorder constantly at work in search of new material. In most cases, ignoring many of the films that came to me in this way would have been, simply, negligent, though this does not mean that I have studied all of them indiscriminately. Novels, though, do not find their way so easily into researchers' living-rooms and have required other strategies of research, involving many visits to libraries and bookshops and also many hours of conversation with friends and colleagues, spent in trying to hunt down any useful reference to novels about monsters.

Since there are no specific references in any guide about whether a certain novel or a film deals with monsters, this means that I have found the relevant primary sources often on a trial by error basis. A good memory and an ability for reading between the lines of plot summaries have been indispensable. The *Variety Movie Guide* of the years 1992 and 1995 edited by Derek Elley, together with the British film magazines *Premiere* and *Empire* and the Spanish *Fotogramas*, have been my constant companions in the last three years. I have avoided using any of the many specific guides for genre film, since the *Variety* guide covers the field of the medium and the high-budget film of any genre very well. It was not my aim to enter the territory of the low-budget film, nor to focus on obscure, little circulated films, in which specific genre guides abound, because it was my intention to study the monster of well-known, popular films. The films have all been traced with the indirect help of the film programmers of British and Spanish TV and the staff of the diverse local video-clubs I have been visiting, and with the more direct recommendations of friends, who have lent me, on occasions, material from their own video collections. The fact that it has been relatively easy to locate the films has reinforced my impression that the monster is not at the margins of culture but at its very centre.

The novels have been traced with greater difficulty. Friends and colleagues helped me to find a considerable number of mainstream novels. I was forced to read many blurbs and many books before choosing others myself, for the simple reason that there are no good guides to

contemporary literary fiction with specific information about the plots of mainstream novels. In contrast, I could consult a few very useful guides to contemporary genre fiction (fantasy, horror and science fiction) including Cawthorn and Moorcock's *Fantasy: The 100 Best Books* (1988), Jones and Newman's *Horror 100 Best Books* (1988), Pringle's *Modern Fantasy: The 100 Best Books* (1988) and Sullivan's *The Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural* (1986). These were very appropriate introductions to whole exciting worlds of which I knew virtually nothing. Obviously, the choice of a number of novels has been decided by the choice of the corresponding screen adaptation. Some novels published before 1979 have been included, such as Brian Aldiss' *Frankenstein Unbound* (1973), Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), because it is my opinion that their recent respective screen adaptations make them part of the 1980s and 1990s. In any case, despite the considerable number of screen adaptations I have considered, this is not a dissertation about the monster in screen adaptations. In fact, I have analysed some novels without analysing their screen versions, whereas not all the original novels on which the films are based have been analysed.

Although it is customary for films and novels to be analysed independently, since they are clearly different narrative media, in this dissertation no distinction has been made between films and novels, to which I often refer collectively as 'texts'. This is due to several reasons. One is that the high number of screen adaptations is transforming novels into part of composite, multimedia texts. For many who enjoy the screen version before reading the novel, the original novel may even occupy a secondary place in their view of the multimedia text formed by both. Another reason is the fact that I am not interested in analysing the diverse narrative techniques of films and novels, but in comparing their subjects, plots and the main motifs regarding the monster that are most often employed. These can be perfectly compared across the gulf separating the literary from the aural-visual, as my dissertation proves. The images of monstrosity that linger in the mind of the viewer and the reader after having seen a film or having read a novel are of special interest

for me. In this sense, I am following Keith Cohen's conclusions about the similar effects that films and novels have in the memory of those who enjoy them:

Though the filmic image is *there* before the eyes, it soon disappears and eventually, blended with personal associations and connotations, occupies the same domain as the literary image: the memory. Thus, the syntagmatic process of perception may be more immediate in the cinema, but the paradigmatic process of mental linkage and recollection is the same for both cinema and the novel. (Cohen, 1979: 90)

As far as this dissertation is concerned, films and novels are treated as cultural artefacts capable of generating significant images of monstrosity that form part of the collective cultural memory of the last fifteen years. Yet, even though I have purposefully mixed filmic and literary images of monstrosity, I have used a different type - *Erie ten points* rather than *Arial eleven points*, the type employed in the main body of the text - for the titles of films (and also TV series) so as to avoid possible misreadings and also the cumbersome specification of the type of narrative to which each text belongs.

The language of all the films and novels is English, and their nationality either British or American, though I have not followed a strict, exclusive criteria as far as nationality is concerned. Thus, the list of primary sources includes novels by Irish authors such as Christy Brown, John Banville or Patrick McCabe, together with novels by a South African writer (J.M. Coetzee), a Canadian (William Gibson), an Australian (Thomas Keneally) and even a Vietnamese (Le Ly Hayslip). Arguably, the nationality of a novel is conditioned basically by the nationality of its author and the language s/he uses - though, obviously, the influence of writers of other nationalities, the place where the author lives and other circumstances may also shape the content of his or her work. For instance, how should Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's Ark* be classified, taking into account that Keneally is an Australian who lives in California and that he wrote this novel at the instigation of a Polish immigrant to the USA who had a story to tell but did not know how? How can we determine the national culture to which this novel belongs, if at all? The nationality of a film is, however, even more problematic. A film such as *Death and the Maiden*, directed by a Pole who lives in France (Roman Polanski), written by a Chilean (Ariel Dorfman) who based the screenplay on his

own play, originally in Spanish, financed by Channel Four and a French producer, and played by British and American actors speaking English cannot be really classified as a product of any one nationality. In fact it is even difficult to say whether this film is either European or American.

Whether a film is American or British is technically established by the nationality of the studio that finances it, so that a film directed by a Briton working in Hollywood is regarded as an American film, despite the British cultural connotations the director may have infused into his or her work. This is why on occasions I have used the label Anglo-Saxon (which I have preferred to Anglo-American) to define the cultural products I am dealing with, even though I am aware that this label is not wholly satisfactory. In any case, only exceptionally have I considered films of other nationalities than British and American, such as Luc Besson's *Léon*, nominally a French film despite the fact that its original language is English. Although the temptation has been very strong, I have finally decided not to refer to the monster of Japanese 'anime' (animated fantasy films based on comics) or 'manga' (comics), on the grounds that their original language is not English, even though, arguably, Japanese monsters are now as popular in the Western world as their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. I have also ignored comics in general and video-games, even those based on films or novels that I analyse, for this is a vast territory I am not yet prepared to tackle; I look forward, though, to correcting this situation, for this is research that would complement best my own. The same can be said about the use of the monster in advertising and in children's fiction.

J.3. Dating the Monster: 1979 - 1995

J.3.1. The Historical and Cultural Context: The USA and the UK

As for the period under discussion, the initial date, 1979, corresponds to the release of Ridley Scott's *Alien*, a film introducing an elegant, nightmarish outer-space horrific monster which was acclaimed by audiences and critics and which is now about to reappear in the fourth film of the series, currently in production. *Alien* bridged the gap between the popular monster film of the 1950s - with films such as Jack Arnold's *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), a direct precursor of Scott's

film - and the more stylish, neo-Gothic, postmodernist fantasy film of the 1980s and 1990s. The period under discussion concluded in 1995 with the release of Stephen Frears' screen adaptation of Valerie Martin's *Mary Reilly*, a retelling of R.L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* from the point of view of a new character: Mary, Jekyll's maid. Frears' film has closed the cycle of revisions of the three main nineteenth British Gothic texts about monstrosity started by Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and followed by Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, but must also be inscribed within the cycle started by Scott himself, involving original films and adaptations of novels about monstrosity made by prestige film directors working with large budgets. Although the dates 1979 and 1995 refer to the release of two films, they should be understood as the dates that determine the whole cultural panorama of monstrosity rather than just those that determine the most recent cycle of the representation of the monster in film¹.

Historically, the period 1979 to 1995 is marked by the conservative revolution of the Reagan government in the USA and the Thatcher government in the UK and its aftermath. Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, Ronald Reagan one year later; they formed a unique Anglo-American alliance based on their personal affinities, their defence of economic liberalism, their disregard of Europe and a deep nostalgia for an ideal time - basically the 1950s - when the world leadership of the USA and the UK was not disputed so fiercely as it was in the 1980s. The monster was never far from the imagination of these leaders and of those who commented on their personalities: Reagan's unfortunate definition of the now extinct USSR as an 'empire of evil' found an enormous resonance in the media, while jocular references to Thatcher as 'she-who-must-be-obeyed', in reference to H. Rider Haggard's Victorian monstrous heroine Ayesha in *She* (1887), were not rare (Karlin, 1991: xiv). James Donald notes that a number of writers, among whom he mentions Sarah Benton, Laura Mulvey and Jacqueline Rose in the UK and Michael Rogin in the USA, turned to "images of the monstrous in trying to explain the dynamics and appeal of Thatcherism and Reaganism" (1989: 235). The influence of Reaganism

¹More detailed information about this cycle can be found in Chapter 2, which discusses it in depth.

in the construction of the spectacular masculine body of the monstrous hero of recent Hollywood films has been researched by Susan Jeffords (1994), while Leslie Friedman and others have analysed in *British Film and Thatcherism* how "in a truly paradoxical manner, the intense and unwavering hatred of Margaret Thatcher provided the spark necessary to force Britain's best visual artists to new creative heights and, in so doing, to ignite a moribund industry" (Friedman, 1993: xix), which, needless to say, has also produced its share of monsters.

Because of the cost of World War II for the UK and because of the progressive loss of its colonial power, the UK was relegated to a secondary position behind the USA from the 1950s onwards. Thatcher tried to recover part of the lost leadership by turning her back on Europe and looking up to America, expecting that the Americanization of the UK and her own alliance with Reagan could actually return the UK to its former imperial splendour. Leonard Quart, an American scholar, argues that Thatcher's reorientation of her country benefited it greatly:

British society became Americanized: much more efficient, hedonistic, cash-obsessed, and competitive. It was now dominated by a driven New Class, one utterly removed from the more moribund, communally oriented working class and the complacently paternalistic upper-class cultures that traditionally dominated British life. (1993: 21)

The benefits of Britain's Americanization were not, however, as conspicuous for all. "Heartland", a song written in 1987 by Matt Johnson, leader of the pop band *The The*, for their influential record *Infected*, described Britain in an unmistakably critical tone as the 51st state of the USA. Certainly, looking up to Reagan's America entailed a loss of national cultural identity discernible in many spheres of culture, among them the horror film. In his accomplished study of the British horror film, *Hammer and After*, Peter Hutchings argues that while both *The Company of Wolves* and *Hellraiser*, the two most popular British films about monstrosity of the 1980s,

are in many ways impressive, it is significant, however, that neither attempts to engage in any meaningful sense with a specifically British reality. Unlike, say, Hammer horror, which did very much locate itself in relation to nationally specific issues and anxieties, these recent British horrors look elsewhere for their effects and meanings. (1993: 186)

Though 'elsewhere' in these two films is the space of myth and of Gothic, in fact, a great number of British filmmakers and writers have looked elsewhere - that is to say, to America - for ways of finding audiences beyond the narrow market of the British cultural industry. Neil Jordan, John Badham, Ridley Scott, Tony Scott, Stephen Frears, Alan Parker, have lent their talents to the much more powerful US film industry, though many of them have later returned to Britain in search of more respect for their personal artistic views than Hollywood is prepared to grant them. At any rate, many genre and mainstream British writers of fiction, such as Martin Amis, openly acknowledge the influence of American culture, despite Britain's generalised anti-Americanism. Clive Barker himself, the British novelist and filmmaker who directed *Hellraiser*, now lives in Los Angeles and can be said to be in the process of becoming an American author. Does this mean that British fiction (both films and novels) is nothing but a territory colonised by American culture and that the new process of cultural colonisation has reversed the original cultural dependence of the American colonies on Britain? To a certain extent, and especially as far as film is concerned, it is true that sharing the language has turned out to be a hazard rather than a benefit for the survival of British culture in a world dominated by American culture. Yet in the field of the novel it can be said that the differences are more marked and that there is a brand of typically introspective Gothic British fiction, exemplified by mainstream writers such as Ian McEwan, which is certainly less influenced by the culture coming from across the Atlantic. Nevertheless, it is more and more difficult to ascertain *a priori* whether a novel comes from a British or an American pen, especially in the field of genre fiction. British horror novelist Ramsay Campbell stated¹ that there are specific differences between American and British fantasy novelists beyond the point of where the stories are located, but when pressed to name those differences, he acknowledged that it is increasingly difficult to notice them because British authors tend to imitate their colleagues from across the Atlantic.

¹In conversation with me in June 1995 during the Second International Conference of the Gothic Association held at Stirling University.

J.3.2. Money, Morality, Belief and the Monster

Alan MacFarlane argues that the root of evil as it is understood now is money. According to him, "money', which is a short-hand way of saying capitalist relations, market values, trade and exchange, ushers in a world of moral confusion" (MacFarlane, 1985: 71), in which the distinctions between good and evil are blurred. In my view, money, that is to say, the capitalist system of power, is conditioning a pessimistic, dystopian, technophobic view of the world which serves as background for the contemporary monster; at the same time, it can be said that the contemporary monster is also a product of capitalism's constant search for profitable novelty. The liberal capitalism espoused by Reagan's America and Thatcher's Britain is, precisely, the main cause of the anxieties nourishing the figure of the monster today. The individuals feel threatened by a system that seems to have reached a state of endless self-perpetuation - an impression possibly accentuated by the quick conversion of the former communist block into consumerism - and in which the privileges of today may be suddenly obliterated by an unexpected change in the market. Even though capitalism is preaching the imminent arrival of utopia, especially because of the constant advances in science and technology, there is a distinct impression that capitalism is leading us to a dystopian world in which technoscience and democratic politics are not to be trusted. Culture, which had seemed until a few decades ago, the repository of the most important values of civilization, is seen now as nothing but an extension of capitalism. Fewer and fewer believe now that culture can really repress the barbarian in us, far less terminate him or her for good.

How has the Anglo-Saxon world come to this situation and why is the presence of the monster so conspicuous now? In my view, the period 1979 - 1995 has its roots in 1945, a year that marked the beginning of the Cold War, a war that is not really over, despite the conversion of the ex-communist countries to capitalist democracy, since the threat of nuclear wipe-out has not been really averted. 1945 exposed to the light a fact that has not been fully accepted by Anglo-Saxon - specifically by American - culture yet: the discovery of the Nazi extermination camps and the

dropping of the American nuclear bombs on Japan proved that the monstrous capacity to do evil on a scale never contemplated before is shared by democratic and undemocratic systems of power. Stalin's bloody rule of the USSR and Mao's no less repressive dictatorship in communist China may have convinced many Western supporters of democracy and capitalism that the evil monster was a nightmare raised by the sleep of democracy, rather than by the sleep of reason as the legend in one of Goya's most famous engravings reads. However, from the 1960s onwards, that is to say, from the years when postmodernist culture was consolidated up till the present, there is an awareness, as Fredric Jameson notes, "that this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror" (1991: 5).

America also leads the world in the construction of the monster, which means that America's own growing unease in the face of the reality of Vietnam, Watergate, Irangate, the Gulf War and other events must necessarily be reflected in the atmosphere that the contemporary monster breathes. This is, no doubt, the case. Most narratives about monstrosity reflect the ambivalence that the average citizen feels for power in general and more concretely for power in capitalism and democracy. Justified paranoia, the persecution of the innocent for economic or political reasons, the creeping intrusion of barbarism into everyday life, the impossibility of explaining neuroses and psychoses, the nostalgia for a morally stable world, the resistance to play the role of hero/ine as heroism leads nowhere, the incapacity to believe in good and the overwhelming presence of evil, the catharsis that only leads to deeper despair, the fear of losing one's own privileges are the aspects most often repeated in the films and novels I consider in the current dissertation.

The period 1979 to 1995 also corresponds to a new religious and moral cycle still in the making. The number of citizens of the Anglo-Saxon and the Western world who regard themselves as atheist or agnostic liberals has been growing steadily, but so has the number of

fanatical believers. Fundamentalism and sectarianism - Christian or not - are the two main threats to the utopian wish to see tolerance reign one day. The re-emergence of strong religious belief, not only in Khomeini's Iran but also in Pat Buchanan's USA, the land of the TV preachers, is part of this nostalgic desire for an idealised pre-1960s world in which liberalism and moral relativism did not play such a conspicuous role. Yet, liberals and fundamentalists alike face the threat of the rise of violence in the Anglo-Saxon and the whole Western world, which is caused mainly by the effects of liberal capitalism: this increases the differences between the rich and the poor, undermining the utopian dream of the socialist welfare state in Europe and the utopian dream of a classless America, but also simply, human solidarity. Nobody can really explain why the contemporary world seems simultaneously the best and the worst of all possible worlds; nobody can envisage an alternative to the strict moral systems of the past or absolute moral relativism. In this atmosphere it is not strange that the monster reigns in contemporary culture. The monster represents evil and the intolerable - but also the little scope left for subversion and rebellion under capitalism, and, what is more important, the wish to escape towards mythical territories which are not conditioned by the dire realities of the immediate present.

It is also important to note that while for the Western world and especially for the Anglo-Saxon world, the monster is a sign of moral instability and decadence, it needn't be always so. In Japan, where, as I have noted, the monster is an even more popular figure than in the West, the monster is regarded as a safety valve for the anxieties felt by the average citizen under the rule of capitalist democracy. Frederik Schodt observes that, unlike what is the case in the USA,

Japan's constitution forbids war; guns are strictly controlled; and the national crime rate, including that of sex crimes, is extremely low. Moreover, during the years that sales of comics in Japan soared, the crime rate was actually dropping. When a young boy in Tokyo reads a lurid action comic, it is far more difficult for him to associate it with his surrounding environment than it would be for a child in New York or Detroit. (Schodt, 1986: 132)

Why should this be so? It is my belief that the Japanese have achieved a greater social and moral cohesion than the USA precisely because they have drawn tighter lines demarcating the sphere of

the fictional and the sphere of the real and because they have limited the interaction of the individual with both. Japan is, notoriously, a conservative, hierarchical patriarchy which leaves much less scope for individualism than the more democratic societies of the West. Presumably, the powerlessness of the average Japanese citizen is compensated with the constant daydreaming of 'manga' about powerful, metamorphic monsters engaged in endless battles for world domination, or for the sake of avoiding the impending, fatal destruction of Japan in the hands of a sinister arch-villain, who usually represents the excesses of militaristic technoscience. In contrast, the average Western citizen is brought up in a culture that, far from being really democratic and solidary, actually prizes instant gratification and the individualistic quest for power (euphemistically called 'success'), beyond moral values. The risk that this culture assumes is that the power craved by the individual might be of a negative nature, that is to say, that the individual might crave not the simple power to succeed but the power to do evil. The many texts in which the evil monster is destroyed serve the purpose of teaching that the quest for individual power must be moderated - that the American dream must not lead to nightmare - but for those who feel absolutely disempowered because of their sex, race, class, physical appearance or age, and for those who seek a shortcut towards power, tired of waiting for a chance that never comes, exerting monstrous, evil power is a temptation not always avoided, hence the rise of violence in recent years.

Even though in this dissertation I am analysing fiction, in fact, the monster also occupies a very important space in the version of reality given by the media. Arguably, the news is another form of postmodernist narrative in which fiction and fact mingle, hence the difficulties of average Western citizens to distinguish between the moral ambiguities of fiction and those of the media, that is to say, to tell apart the real and the fictional monster. Noël Carroll separates both by discriminating between natural horror, the horror elicited by real life events or situations, and art-horror, "a cross-art, cross-media genre whose existence is already recognized in ordinary language" (Carroll, 1990: 12). Attractive as Carroll's terminology is, it cannot be totally accurate.

The problem is that it is unclear whether we apply the 'art horror' or the 'natural horror' format when watching or reading news about the monsters of reality. The category of the real and the fictional inevitably merge, what is more, the media plays with both as if they were part of the same cultural continuum. Thus, in an article published in *The Sunday Times* dealing with the trial of Piero Pacciani, an Italian peasant accused of having murdered a number of young couples, the journalist writes that this man is "accused of being 'Il mostro', the legendary monster of Florence, a serial killer who murdered and mutilated young men and women with as much savagery as the cannibalistic demon of *The Silence of the Lambs*" (Kennedy, 1994). Apart from basing the whole article on the alleged similarities between Paciani's and Hannibal Lecter's gruesome acts, the journalist reports the attendance of Thomas Harris, the American novelist who wrote *The Silence of the Lambs*, to Paciani's trial. Harris, rumoured to be writing a book on Paciani, was in fact then at work on the sequel to his own novel; presumably, and paradoxically, Hannibal Lecter's third public appearance may be thus tinged with Harris' observations on Paciani. Curiously enough, in 1994, when Paciani's trial started (he was finally acquitted almost two years later for lack of evidence) many Italians flocked to the cinemas to enjoy the film hit of the year: Roberto Benigni's comedy *Il Mostro*, a satire centred on the tribulations of an innocent citizen mistaken for a serial killer.

Why this attraction for the monster of fiction and this fictionalization of the monster of reality? In a culture dominated primarily by the loss of faith in religion, democratic politics and high art as solutions for the problems of the contemporary world, a primitive attraction for the monster of fiction is one of the few elements that allow the citizens of the Western democracies to exercise their need to believe. The monster of reality is, in comparison, strangely elusive: the evil human being is usually acquitted, like Paciani, for lack of evidence; the freak is hidden out of sight. The monster of fiction is, comparatively, more real and seems to be in touch with a transcendent, supernatural reality far above the banality of everyday evil, and also far from the outmoded morality preached by the main religions.

As J.R.R. Tolkien writes, "the monsters do not depart, whether the gods go or come"

(1983a: 22). This does mean, however, that the gods go or come without regret or nostalgia. The sceptical, ironic attitude towards religious belief held by many in the 1980s and 1990s hardly masks a need to believe in something, to seek transcendence. The cultural omnipresence of the monster signifies a nostalgia for belief, if only for belief in the existence of monsters, and reflects a problematic flaw in the apparent cultural sophistication of postmodernity. The monster lies at the crossroads between our primitive collective cultural inheritance and our own sense of advanced modernity, of postmodernity. Anthropology has revealed much about the mechanisms that rule belief, myth and religion in primitive societies but we are still at a loss to explain how the primitive substratum survives in modern Western societies as it indeed does. Since the exposure to belief in the monster in postmodern narratives, ranging from films, novels, television series, cartoons, video-games to news in the media is brief - bounded by how long our enjoyment of a given cultural product lasts - the monster of postmodernist fiction has the advantage of allowing the postmodernist consumer of culture to dissociate him or herself from the more primitive unconscious needs fulfilled by belief: the enjoyment of the dreadful pleasures of monstrosity is not precluded by more essential issues, as it occupies a secondary position in people's lives, mainly as entertainment. There is no doubt a great difference between the overwhelming influence of the belief in the monsters of hell in the everyday lives of Middle Age peasants, for instance, and the less prominent position occupied by belief in the monsters of outer space in the life of the citizens of Western societies in the late twentieth century. Fictional monstrosity alleviates the boredom of absolute, banal disbelief: its presence does not require from late twentieth-century consumers of culture the willing suspension of disbelief but the wish to indulge in belief. And this is something that capitalism has learned to exploit most aptly.

J.4. Gothic Postmodernist Fiction

"Fantasy", Katherine Hume writes (op. cit.: 21), "is any departure from consensus reality, an impulse native to literature and manifested in innumerable variations, from monster to metaphor". It can be thus argued that all the primary sources analysed in this dissertation are

works of fantasy understood in its amplest sense, that is to say, not as a genre but as a fictional mode opposed to realism - and also that all the monsters are in a sense metaphors. Some of the texts that I have selected (mainly those dealing with the evil, human monster) are realistic, though they can be said to be part of two main sub-genres which could be labelled (loosely and rather irreverently), respectively, the 'psycho confessional' (novels dealing with crime from the perspective of the psychotic criminal) and 'cops and psychos' (novels and films narrating a plot of police persecution of a psychotic criminal). Other texts can be classified as magic realism - the novels by Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson and Salman Rushdie would fall under this heading - whereas many others can be classified under the heading of different genres, mainly science fiction, horror or fantasy (in the narrow sense of genre). I have not dealt with detective fiction or crime fiction because they deal too narrowly with the monster (the evil criminal), focusing mainly on the person who hunts him or her. However, I have not respected the barriers between the different genres, nor those between the so-called mainstream (or literary realism) and so-called genre fiction (either non-literary realism or fantasy). In some chapters, though, the perspective is rather that of genre: Chapter 6, for instance, deals with science-fiction texts. Not even in this case, however, are particular genre labels a more important than the particular subjects of the texts in question.

The current definition of genre is more consistent with the marketing strategies of the publishing houses and the film distributors than with the actual content of the works in question, which seldom respect the formulas said (wrongly) to define genre fiction. Thus, it has been my priority to show that the analysis of a certain cultural construct, such as monstrosity, which is present in (so-called) genre fiction and in (so-called) mainstream fiction, sheds more light about the cultural reality of a certain period than a narrow analysis based on the rather inconsistent notion of genre or on the differences between genre and the mainstream. The notion of genre is, in fact, extremely vague and is not really useful to accurately describe the works I am dealing with, nor, arguably, any novel or film. Each of them could be said, in fact, a genre in itself. Take, for instance, the cases of Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park*, Tim Powers' *The Stress of her Regard*, Tim

Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* and Alan Parker's *Angel Heart*. Since *Jurassic Park* deals with an imaginary situation - the recreation of dinosaurs out of DNA found in fossils - it is, arguably a science-fiction film. However, the expected futuristic settings are missing and the location is a tropical island rather than outer space; in fact, Crichton claims that his novel is not science-fiction at all, but rather a (political) denunciation of the possible negative effects of scientific research being carried out right now. Powers' novel *The Stress of her Regard* is a fine Gothic thriller set in the early nineteenth century; it includes among its cast of characters the Romantic poets Shelley, Byron and Keats so that it could be regarded as a postmodernist mainstream novel in the same vein as Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*, which is halfway between realism and fantasy. However, Powers' novel is also a vampire novel - though it has little or nothing in common with others of the same 'sub-genre' such as *Interview with the Vampire* and Suzy McKee Chamas' *The Vampire Tapestry*, except for the presence of the vampire. Tim Burton's film is so idiosyncratic that no label seem appropriate at all to define it, except 'Burtonesque'. *Edward Scissorhands* is fantasy in the same imprecise way in which fairy tales are fantasy, but, despite its recalling a fairy tale, this film is too critical of the real America behind the scenes to be regarded as fantasy in the same sense as, for instance, Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. *Angel Heart* presents similar problems as far its genre is regarded: it is a classic detective film, made in imitation of 1940s 'film noir', but it is also a horror film belonging to the sub-genre of the possession film popularised in the 1970s. As can be seen, rather than speak about genres it is preferable to speak of postmodernist fiction, in the sense of contemporary films and novels that disregard purposely all genre labels. The obvious difficulty in writing from this point of view is that striking the adequate tone has been a constant difficulty: it has been my constant worry that readers specialised in any of the 'genres' I deal with might find my choice of primary sources limited, whereas those familiar mainly with literary fiction might find their reading hampered by my many references to horror, science-fiction and fantasy texts they may be not familiar with. I have done my best to assume that I am writing for both types of readers, but I am aware of the difficulties my choice entails.

The label I prefer to classify the texts I am dealing with is Gothic postmodernist fiction. This is not meant to be an exclusive category only suitable for texts that fulfil a number of specifications, nor is it meant to describe a genre indigenous to the 1980s and 1990s. Practically without any exception, all the primary sources considered in this dissertation are at the crossroads between the legacy left by Gothic fiction and the emergence of postmodernism. George Haggerty (1989: 20) notes that "the great challenge to the Gothic writer was the paradox between the subjective world of dreamlike experience and the public objective world of the novel". If we replace the word novel by novel and film, Haggerty's statement fits perfectly the position of the authors of all the texts I have selected. They are not realistic portraits of the 1980s and 1990s to which both author and audience can objectively refer but *subjective representations of that reality*, born and bred in the cultural space between individual, subjective consciousness and the collective unconscious. They articulate, thus, the private and the public, the daydream and the myth and can be said to be, consequently, Gothic.

Norman Denzin (1991: vii) defines postmodernism as the sum total of the following terms:

... a nostalgic, conservative longing for the past, coupled with an erasure of the boundaries between the past and the present; an intense preoccupation with the real and its representations; a pornography of the visible; the commodification of sexuality and desire; intense emotional experiences shaped by anxiety, alienation, resentment, and a detachment from others. (Denzin, 1991: vii)

It could be argued that the re-emergence of Gothic is part of the nostalgia for the past typical of postmodernism. Furthermore, that the postmodernist nostalgia for the past was originally invented by the Gothic return to the barbaric Middle Ages. The other characteristics that Denzin lists could be, arguably, also attributed to Gothic, together with the most conspicuous common link between Gothic and postmodernism: the mixture of motifs derived from high culture and popular culture. "Post-Modernism", Jim Collins remarks (1989: 13) "is most productively understood not just as a transitional reaction against Modernism, but as the culmination of the ongoing proliferation of popular narrative that began nearly two centuries ago", that is to say, when Gothic fiction first

emerged. I would add to this brief list of the similarities between Gothic and postmodernist fiction the degree of self-consciousness, and in many cases the open self-parody, assumed by writers and filmmakers. The very first Gothic text, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), can be alternatively read as a straightforward horror story or as a tongue-in-cheek parody of eighteenth century medievalism; likewise, many of the contemporary Gothic postmodernist texts contain self-parodic elements and a playful sense of humour seldom appreciated.

Gothic postmodernist texts challenge the formal, elitist approach of criticism to contemporary culture. Writing about 1980s films, Steve Connor (1989: 178) notes that "postmodernist films may evoke the complexities of high theory but this is at odds with the apparent accessibility and box-office success of such impeccably postmodernist films as *Blade Runner*". The popular, in the sense of that which attracts a large audience, and the 'serious', that which is worthy of consideration according to scholars, are "categories are both overlapping and historically variable" (Ashley, 1989: 2). Gothic postmodernist texts force, thus, scholars to redefine the boundaries between the low and the high, the popular and the elite, and the criteria that define these boundaries. They should also invite scholars and critics to discussing why, despite the fact that the concepts of Gothic and postmodernism are frequently mentioned in reviews published in periodicals addressed to the general public, there is not yet a formal study of their links yet, nor an awareness at the level of the general public of the evident links between eighteenth-century Gothic and twentieth-century postmodern Gothic.

J.5. Popular Culture: A Definition

Since a very high percentage of the primary sources of this dissertation could be regarded not only as Gothic postmodernist but also as popular culture, I would like to reflect on what is meant by the word 'popular'. Fredric Jameson asserts that

the "popular" as such no longer exists, except under very specific and marginalized conditions (internal and external pockets of so-called underdevelopment within the capitalist world system); the commodity production of contemporary or industrial mass culture has nothing whatsoever to do, and nothing in common, with forms of

popular or folk art. (1990: 15)

Rosemary Jackson further argues that the main mode of popular culture, fantasy, "is severed from its roots in carnivalesque art: it is no longer a communal form" (Jackson, 1981: 16). What is more, she denies that fantasy or Gothic may be countercultural or transgressive at all, as popular culture is often implied to be. For her, fantasies are frequently used "to re-confirm institutional order by supplying a vicarious fulfilment of desire and neutralizing an urge towards transgression" (ibid.: 72). In contrast, Jonathan Coe (1994: 8) has recently contended that what "passes for "high" culture ... - the literary novel, the serious play, the art movie - has grown terminally inert and listless; popular culture is where it's all... There is no reason to see this as a cause either for lament or celebration: it is simply a fact that we have to recognise." The question of what the popular is, is, thus, given totally opposite answers: while Jameson denies the existence of the popular, Coe announces the death of high culture and the triumph of the extra-canonical, that is, of the popular.

Both are right. Speaking about popular culture and high culture means speaking about different, even complementary, systems of marketing culture and not only about the social origins and the educational level of those who create or consume culture. Even though Jameson's and Jackson's claims that the popular does not exist within capitalism could be refuted with evidence about the creation of different street fashions, pop music currents, graffiti art and so on, it is easy to see that, even when culture is seen to be truly popular, capitalism plays an important role in its decontextualisation from its original social milieu. On the other hand, it must be taken into account that what is called popular in fiction - which is mainly what is not canonical - is frequently created by people of the same social and educational background as those who create so-called high culture: the artists who write fantasy, horror, science fiction, romances, detective novels and other modes of so-called genre fiction are mostly middle-class and have university degrees; this is also the case for most filmmakers who produce so-called commercial films. However, middle-class or working-class, with or without university degrees, today's consumers of culture are notoriously omnivorous and so cannot be easily divided along class or education lines.

Coe's claim that "popular culture is where it's all" does not mean that a cultural revolution has been won by the common people but that the common people have lost their belief in the authority of the critics to determine what is best. Subjectivism and critical relativism are the main tenets of most consumers of culture today. It is often argued that high culture enjoys a very healthy life today as the success of the exhibition of work by artists such as Van Gogh or the sales of opera CDs prove, but this is not an indisputable truth. As everybody knows, mass success is not a proof of quality, though this does not mean that success necessarily connotes a lack of quality. What really marks the boundaries between the popular and the elite is not only the intrinsic intention of the artist to attract or repel a large mass of public, but the publicity that each cultural product receives. Elite cultural products may become popular if they are shown on television; the popular may remain elite - a matter of reduced fandom - if it is not visible on the media. This is why, on the whole, more people see films than read novels: films are conspicuous by virtue of the high amounts of money invested in advertising them, while novels receive virtually no advertising. Indeed, it could be claimed that a screen adaptation is the best advertising a novel can receive.

To return to the main issue under discussion, monstrosity, it must be noted that the monster does not always belong to the realm of so-called popular culture, or genre fiction. Stephen King is the most popular novelist dealing with the monster but he is also the one who receives most publicity. The work of Angela Carter and Salman Rushdie is regarded as part of mainstream culture, but it is also popular by virtue of its remarkable sales figures, which maybe are justified because their work is closer to fantasy than to realistic literary fiction. So-called popular writers like Tim Powers or Dan Simmons, who write non-realistic fiction, are in fact less popular - less well known - than Carter or Rushdie, though for Powers' and Simmons' loyal fans Carter or Rushdie may be perfectly unknown. In film, the question is still more problematic, for the artistic film seems to be about to disappear altogether. Film *is* popular culture because of its system of distribution, aiming at large audiences as the only means to recoup the huge amounts of money invested by the studios. It could be also argued that the distinctions between the popular and the elite are

maintained above all by the business interests that condition contemporary culture, interests which also condition scholars themselves, directly or indirectly.

I would agree with Harriet Hawkins' observation that

It is not the artistic tradition but the academic tradition that has erected barriers between 'high art' and popular genres even as it has erected barricades between art and life. The artistic tradition (popular as well as exalted) tends to break all such barriers down, even as in the last analysis it is the artists (popular as well as exalted) who create the extra-generic, extra-curricular, extra-temporal and international canons of art. (Hawkins, 1990: 113)

Yet, as Northrop Frye notes, "we should be careful not to idealize [the popular] as a virtuous resistance to elitism" (1976: 27). In fact, the ambiguous elitist position of the university regarding the popular or genre fiction (which is certainly being slowly modified) is not informed by clear critical or artistic tenets designed to defend high art from the onslaughts of the popular, but by a generalised confusion about the role of culture in business, or rather the role of business in culture. That is to say, the real differences between the popular/genre and the elite/mainstream are jointly marked by the university and by those who market culture. The former tends to neglect to a great extent how 'culture as show business' works, in its pursuit of a sound definition of aesthetics and in its exploration of the ideological interface between the book and the world; the latter, tend to ignore what scholars say, except when it comes to marketing the cultural products that the university endorses or produces itself (Martín: 1995). Umberto Eco argues that the contemporary tendency to discriminate between high culture and culture as show business - which is what the popular really means now - is in fact an anachronism which ignores "decades and decades of cultural anthropology" (1987: 152). Eco notes that we still speak of culture mainly with reference to high culture, that is to say, to the artistic manifestations said to be 'serious':

In other words, the premise is that show business is amusement, faintly culpable, whereas a lecture, a Beethoven symphony, a philosophical discussion are boring experiences (and therefore "serious"). The son who gets a bad grade at school is strictly forbidden by his parent to go to a rock concert, but may attend a cultural event (which, on the contrary, will supposedly be good for him). (ibid.: 152)

The idea that the popular and high art are demarcated by sound critical principles rather than by the vague concept of 'seriousness' is also analysed by Lawrence Levine in his study *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. According to Levine the general public was excluded from cultural spaces that have been common in democratic America until the end of the nineteenth century, including opera and Shakespeare's plays, by the social and economic elites seeking a confirmation of their privileged status. When the trend to exclude low-paying customers from cultural acts was contested with violent riots (the earliest was the Astor Place riot of 1849 in New York) the response of the social elites, Levine writes

was a tripartite one: to retreat into their own private spaces whenever possible; to transform public spaces by rules, systems of taste, and canons of behavior of their own choosing; and, finally, to convert the strangers so that their modes of behavior and cultural predilections emulated those of the elites - an urge that ... always remained shrouded in ambivalence. (1988: 77)

Presumably, the establishment of a canon by the university was part of this much wider social trend not only in the USA but in the UK, where the growth in literacy and the emergence of a flood of publications for working-class readers spurred the desire of the cultural elites to redraw the blurred boundaries between them and the mass. The situation now is that while, thanks to the popularization of some aspects of high culture via media such as television, radio, CDs, video and so on, it is not so easy to keep the social spheres so separated, hence the mixture of the elite and the popular - or rather non-elite - in the production and the consumption of culture. Ironically, while high (or mainstream) culture is available practically for anybody, the criticism of high culture produced by the university appears to be still more elitist to the average consumer of culture than the cultural products it deals with.

It could be argued that since the 1960s scholars have been expanding the scope of their interests and that many of them are producing work on the so-called popular, which should may be better defined as the extra-canonical. This is certainly true, but this does not mean that fantasy in its widest meaning - that of non-realistic fiction - has found a secure place in the university. In

1984 Ann Swinfen gave her book on post-war fantasy the title of *In Defence of Fantasy* and found it necessary to claim that

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of undertaking a serious critical study of the fantasy novel results from the attitude of the majority of contemporary critics - an attitude which suggests that the so-called 'realist' mode of writing is somehow more profound, more morally committed, more involved with 'real' human concerns than a mode of writing which employs the marvellous. The contention of this defence of fantasy is that this is far from being the case. (1984: 10)

Swinfen falls, nonetheless, in the temptation of using the word 'serious' to qualify her own work as a password for the admittance of her study in the cultural domain safeguarded by the university. Nevertheless, Swinfen's may have been an exaggerated claim conditioned by her attempts at self-defence, for, writing in the same year 1984, Christopher Pawling speaks of "a growth of interest in popular fiction over the last few years" in the university (1984: 1), though he adds that "one could not claim that it has been established in schools or colleges as a central component of literary studies" (*ibid.*: 1) Eight years later, matters seem to have changed much, to judge by Brian Attebery's claim that the proliferation of work on fantasy "indicates a growing academic interest in a body of literature that deliberately violates the generic conventions of realism, conventions that not too long ago were generally used as defining criteria for great or serious fiction" (1992: 1). Yet he also remarks that this interest has not led to a re-evaluation of the canon, from which fantasy is still excluded. The situation could be thus summarised as one of a progressive opening of the university towards non-realistic fiction and towards extra-canonical realistic fiction produced by minorities, though the canon for fiction still remains largely a list of realistic novels; magical realism, such as that practised by Salman Rushdie, seems to have secured a footing in the canon, but, so far, few are prepared to consider a multi-genre canon, or to dispense with the idea of genre or 'seriousness' at all, a situation which is, naturally, leading to the formation of genre canons inside or outside the university.

This leads me back to the criterion I have followed to choose the films and novels and to justifying the positioning of my work regarding the canon and the popular. When studying

contemporary culture the researcher embarks on an exciting journey through poorly charted territory, still relatively unaffected by the academic process of canonisation. The criterion I have followed in the choice of films and novels has been to ignore the question of genre and the popular (except in this introduction), and to consider mainly texts with a minimum quality, inevitably according to my own subjective judgement; this has been done in combination with what I have judged to be a generalized consensus about their success, based on box-office figures for films and the familiarity of the readers that have been willing to inform me with the names and titles of the novels - criteria I certainly acknowledge to be also arguably subjective. The mixture of genres and the inclusion of many mainstream novels and films should be enough to indicate that I do not support the idea that there should be separate canons for the different genres, though this does not mean I am against critical evaluation. Despite this I have avoided the critical evaluation of the films and novels, considering that their very inclusion in the list of primary sources would be enough to suggest that their are valid.

Arguably, not all the films and novels I have selected would be unanimously regarded as quality artwork. One of the issues most often invoked to mark the differences between high art (or mainstream) and the popular is, precisely, that the popular is sub-art or not art at all. Hence, some critics and scholars working on popular culture tend to leave evaluation aside and to claim as Roger B. Rollin does that "the only possible functions of the teacher and serious student of *Popular Culture* are *description* and *interpretation* - 'illumination', in short" (Ashley, 1989: 18). Description because the territory is very vast, interpretation because studying "the interface between a work's aesthetic form and the desires and anxieties of its audience" is worthwhile" (ibid.: 18). This is, indeed, a dissertation in which description and interpretation have been given a priority over evaluation but this does not mean that I have accepted Rollin's rather bizarre dictum that

... no serious student of popular Culture can lose time, money, or energy by tuning in on *Rhoda*, paying to see *Jaws*, or skimming through Harold Robbins's latest opus. Because for such students these activities are called "research," and whether they entail pleasure or pain is immaterial... Questions of aesthetic value are irrelevant to such practical matters. (ibid.: 18)

Precisely, my point is that argumentation of this sort is used to maintain the artificial distance between the popular/genre and high/mainstream art, and to prevent the pressing need for the reformulation of a new aesthetics for contemporary art that does away with the barriers between realism and fantasy and with those between the mainstream and the popular - maybe even with the need to consider fiction from the limited point of view of aesthetics. Why assume that realistic, artistic, 'serious' fiction is the only fictional mode - genre, perhaps? - worth studying when other non-realistic novels and films may be artistically less 'serious' - though that is debatable - but are culturally more significant, more influential, more essential in shaping the world around us?

As far as the issue that this dissertation discusses is concerned, namely monstrosity, my conclusion is that 'literary' fiction deals with the extraordinary, monstrous human psychology of excess, while 'genre', science fiction, horror and fantasy mainly, invents landscapes of excess where monstrosity is the norm. Yet my experience of reading the novels and seeing the films has taught me other lessons concerning the differences between the candidates for canonisation and the cultural products that could only aspire to canonisation if the very idea of the canon is altered. First, Rollin's alleged waste of time, money and energy risked by the researcher of so-called popular culture is not conditioned by the cultural product itself but by the researcher's own attitude - a good researcher is one who can see that "even the most banal of narratives may help to shed light on the material reality which lies behind the ostensibly unified conflict-free world of ideology" (Pawling, op. cit.: 12). Second, there are no clear criteria to account for the dramatic shift of taste happened in the last two decades. James B. Twitchell contends that "what most costumers want ... is, almost by definition, what a generation ago would have been labelled common, unwashed, scumular, barbaric or *vulgar*" (1992: 2), yet matters are not so simple. James Kavanagh's definition of *Alien* as "an aesthetically effective mass-cultural production" (1990: 73) rather than vulgarity serves to characterize most of the films and many of the novels I have considered. Third, my personal experience of the novels and the films has corroborated my initial impression that the quality of so-called mainstream or literary fiction and that of genre fiction is perfectly comparable: it

is by no means true that popular genre fiction is formula as many contend. In fact, one can detect an enthusiasm in the best science fiction, horror and fantasy - connoted by the sheer length of the novels, the cohesion of their complex plots, the panoramic description of their imaginary universes - which is certainly missing in the mainstream, more narrowly centred on the exploration of the psychology of one or a number of characters. My assumption is that not prejudice, but simply a lack of information - and perhaps the rather ugly design of most covers of genre novels ! - is what prevents the work of Dan Simmons, Clive Barker, Terry Pratchett, Tim Powers, just to name a few fantasy writers, from being ranked together (or even above) those of Jeannette Winterson, John Banville, Peter Ackroyd or Ian McEwan.

This lack of information is a consequence of how the business of culture is run:

It is still the case that many newspapers, journals and magazines will only review hardback books. This is true both in Britain and in America. The only 'serious' books are those which appear in hard covers first, whether they are fiction or non-fiction, and are destined for a 'serious' readership via the universities, the libraries or fairly rich book buyers in the West End of London; all other publishing is, by inference, populist or simply trivial. (Worpole, 1984: 8)

Thus, while most university researchers get their information about contemporary culture from 'serious' publications reviewing only 'serious' books, the readers of genre fiction - published usually in paperback, hence invisible for the 'serious' reviewers - seek other means of communication, frequently much more active and participative than those bonding the readers of 'serious' fiction. Science fiction and fantasy fans, especially, enjoy "countless self-publicized fanzines and regular conventions where readers, writers and others meet and mingle" (LeFanu, 1988:121). The world of serious literature and the world of fandom are separated in fact by a rather wide gulf, and also by a rather perceptible mutual distrust, most patent not only in the reviews and the congresses but also in the literary prizes awarded to the best in each field.

Asked once in an interview what prize she coveted most, the American fantasy novelist Ursula K. LeGuin promptly answered the Nobel prize. When the journalist reminded her that the Nobel prize was not awarded to genre fiction writers, LeGuin wryly replied that she would settle for

the Nobel prize for peace rather than literature. Yet, this unjustifiable exclusion of genre fiction from the highest literary award does not mean that genre fiction writers feel envious or jealous of the world of the Booker prize winner, to mention one of the most important literary distinctions apart from the Nobel. The criteria to award the Booker to the best novel of the year in Britain is, in the words of Martin Goff, the prize administrator, that the book be "a well-written book with good narrative power, 3-D characters, a good use of English ... and then something else that turns a book from being a jolly good novel into a prizewinning one" (Donald, 1994: 13). Alan Taylor, one of the judges, puts it more succinctly: "I think the most important criterion is, would you still want to read this book in 25 years?" (ibid.: 13), which is, of course, a very subjective standard. An unstated criterion is that the book must not be fantasy fiction (or genre fiction of any kind) which automatically excludes many of the most popular British writers - from P.D. James to Terry Pratchett, passing through Ken Follett or Joanna Trollope. No wonder, then, that there is a widespread feeling of antagonism between the booksellers who rely on the Booker to do business and the judges, who are increasingly narrowing the range of good fiction that can opt for the Booker (Lees, 1994a).

Brian Aldiss, one of the few fantasy British writers to enjoy a rare ubiquity in the world of culture, sees the Booker with different eyes. Commenting on the year when Iris Murdoch won the prize with *The Sea, the Sea*, he says:

"Having seen what are supposedly the big fish in the big pond, at the Booker Prize dinner, I thought what an awful giveaway mainstream literature was... There was such an air of weariness and uninterest in what went on, and I thought the speeches were very poor. The reservations of the judges, concerning the winners, I felt were an awful let-down - enthusiasm is a valuable quality. You couldn't help comparing it with the Hugo awards, which maybe you've always looked down on simply because they're part of the science-fiction family, or whatever you call it - the tribe. But if you go to the Hugo ceremony, everyone's read the novels, and they're saying, you know, my God, if X doesn't win this year, I'll shoot myself. The partisanship is tremendous. It may be misdirected, but it's *there*, and I did feel, after the Booker Prize, that we in science-fiction really have the edge in a lot of ways." (Platt, 1986: 78)

In general, fantasy writers are not as assured of their own position as Aldiss is, and seem to feel a

certain uneasiness regarding the world of mainstream literature, possibly because, unlike what is usually believed, most creators of so-called popular culture actually come from the same social and educational background as those who produce mainstream or literary fiction. Piers Anthony, a science-fiction writer of outstanding reputation as a pure entertainer, is perhaps especially honest when he confesses to his interviewer Charles Platt that

"... I may be one of the most commercial writers you'll interview, in the sense that I write the cheap stuff that sells big. By training - I have a degree in creative writing - by education - I was born in England, my parents each graduated from Oxford University, and I have the background, the literary background, and what am I doing? Light entertainment... I regret it in the intellectual sense that I wish I could have done a piece of such quality that I would get an award from the Nobel committee, but the compensation for this is money, and I'll *fake* the money! ..." (ibid.: 223)

More perplexed by his own position seemed the late Philip K. Dick, a cult American science-fiction writer, who told Platt about the difficulties of being stranded between two diametrically opposed cultural worlds:

"I was in a curious position [as a student at Berkeley]. I had read science fiction since I was twelve years old, and was really addicted. I just loved it. I also was reading what the Berkeley intellectual community was reading. For example, Proust or Joyce. So I occupied two worlds right there which normally did not intersect. Then, working in the retail store, the people I knew were TV salesmen, and repairmen; they considered me peculiar for reading at *all*... I managed to become universally despised wherever I went." (ibid.: 148)

However, Stephen King is the one fantasy writer interviewed by Platt who summarises best the ambitions of the popular writer to found a new territory that bridges the gaps between the so-called high and the so-called low:

"I always liked that kind of fiction [popular fantasy fiction], and that's what I always wanted to write. There ought to be a middle ground, where you can do it with some nobility, instead of either a) being a schlockmeister or b) saying 'Hey everybody's just *saying* that I'm only a popular writer. They don't understand how sensitive my soul is.' There ought to be a place in the middle where you can say, 'I'm trying to do the best I can with what I've got, and create things that are at least as honest as what any craftsman would make.'" (ibid.: 265)

Nevertheless, I should like to insist once more on the idea that the consumption and the

production of culture - even the critical reputation of novelists and filmmakers - are conditioned by the networks that market and distribute culture rather than by the reviewers and the scholar-critics. The millions of books King has sold despite the scholars' notorious lack of enthusiasm for his work are a clear indication of this inescapable reality. I do not mean that it is *because* of this lack of scholarly interest that King is a best-selling writer but that the paths of the scholar and the popular writer seem, simply, not to cross except accidentally. In fact, one wonders what would happen to King's very high reputation among his countless readers around the world if suddenly scholar-critics agreed that King was the twentieth-century Charles Dickens and a flourishing academic industry based on King's work flooded the academic market. What seems indisputable is that the labels put onto the work of a writer or a filmmaker are more damaging for those who produce work initially marketed as popular fiction. Once a genre writer, always a genre writer, the axiom seems to be. Thus, Josephine Saxton, a writer whose early work was labelled by publishers and critics alike as science fiction complained in 1991 that

I have a novel going the rounds of the publishers at this time which has been rejected twelve times on the grounds that the editors do not know how to *handle* it. Genre labelling by publishers is restrictive, damaging and patronising to the reading public, about whom I am convinced publishers know nothing, although they do know how to manipulate them. It is applicable only for narrow parameters, for the story which is tailor-made by a skilled hack to a specific demand. (1991: 214)

This does not mean that there is not a way out of this unfair ghettoization. The work of J.G. Ballard started moving from the science-fiction section - where still his books can be found - to the mainstream section in British bookshops about ten years ago, when it was seen that his novels escape easy labelling. Ian Banks has opted for another solution: two parallel careers, one in the mainstream and another in science fiction as Ian M. Banks - and as far as I have been able to assess, the Spanish readers of his science-fiction novels, which are highly appreciated, ignore all about the 'other' Ian Banks: they have not even been told that he exists. It is, thus, necessary to conclude with Ken Worpole, that "we have to be wary of definitions of popular literature which simply look at genres and themes. The processes of publishing and distribution count as much

towards making certain kinds of literature 'popular'" (op. cit.: 92).

Writing about the state of literature in 1979 Gerald Graff maintained that "the real "avant-garde" is advanced capitalism, with its built-in need to destroy all vestiges of tradition, all orthodox ideologies, all continuous and stable forms of reality in order to stimulate higher levels of consumption" (1979: 8). Arguably, the influence of the market is more direct on film, especially on the Hollywood blockbuster, the big-budget film aimed at a mass audience. The relative cheapness of book publishing in comparison to filmmaking is precisely the reason why novelists may indulge in experimentation to an extent that filmmakers simply cannot afford. However, where Graff is totally wrong is in the supposition that capitalism is not interested in continuity and that it advances as a great Juggernaut towards an anarchic cultural future. In fact, the opposite is the case. It is true that capitalism thrives on novelty but it does not thrive on the destruction of tradition. Rather, it invents or reinvents its own traditions on the basis of elements that were once new, hence financially attractive. Writing about films, Thomas Schatz, who has investigated in depth the world of the new Hollywood and of the Hollywood blockbuster, argues that

Movies are not produced in creative or cultural isolation, nor are they consumed that way. Individual movies may affect each one of us powerfully and somewhat differently, but essentially they are all generated by a collective production system which honors certain narrative traditions (or conventions) in designing for a mass market. (Schatz, 1981: 7)

The same could be said about novels to a certain extent. It could be even argued that the avant-garde has been destroyed by capitalism and replaced by the constant - rather bungling - search for the best-selling novel and the successful blockbuster. Unlike what is usually assumed, publishing houses do not know very well how to manufacture best-sellers, nor are Hollywood studios so good at marketing blockbusters as one might think. Writing about the USA, James Twitchell notes that "publishers estimate one bestseller in every 100 books, while studios need one blockbuster every twenty films" (op. cit.: 144), yet this does not mean that best-sellers and blockbusters always work, as Hollywood knows well. What is more, the world of the best-seller and

the film hit are more omnivorous than one might think: Jane Austen is currently a best-selling novelist thanks to Ang Lee and Emma Thompson's Oscar-award winner *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), whereas Renny Harlin is rumoured to have sunk one of the highest budgets ever spent by Hollywood with the ship of his ill-fated pirate film *Cutthroat Island* (1995), a product designed to please all but which has finally pleased fewer people than Austen.

Capitalism is, as I see it, a system that sells artistic originality while being at heart traditional and conservative. It cares more for keeping the collaborative machine of production and distribution working smoothly than for the contents of what it sells, as most film-goers are currently realising. In film, distinguishing between the popular and the mainstream makes no sense, except for the programmers of film festivals specialised in the alternative to Hollywood films. All films are geared at being popular, otherwise they are regarded as failures. This means, as many are now bitterly claiming, that Hollywood has quite forgotten how to make films because of the interest of studio executives in the accountant's balance sheet. Yet, I should say that the artistic balance sheet is neither better nor worse than it has always been - what has changed are the tastes of the younger audiences, as has always happened.

What is nevertheless clearly perceptible is the growing interest for the fantastic shown by most Hollywood studios. The top-grossing films of all times are fantasy films, what is more, fantasy films in which the monster plays a prominent role; the list includes among others the *Star Wars* trilogy, the *Terminator* diptych, *Jurassic Park* and *Batman*. What is more, among the twenty-five best-selling novels of the 1980s in the USA (Twitchell, op. cit.: 72 - 73) seven are by Stephen King; needless to say, all deal with monsters and have been adapted for the screen. The proliferation of monstrosity in the 1980s and 1990s film is, precisely, an indicator of how Hollywood works: there is a nostalgic return to the past with the remaking or the imitation of films that were popular and presented a good ratio investment-profits in the 1930s and 1950s, coupled with, on the one hand, ever-increasing budgets spent on sensational special effects and, on the other hand, the production of as many sequels as possible of films about monstrosity that became expected or

unexpected box-office hits. The problem is that Hollywood exhausts its models faster and faster because it overexploits them, so that an habitual film-goer has the impression that everything has been done before, when in fact in the last fifteen years there have been countless innovations, especially in the narratives dealing with monstrosity.

The situation is also different in film as far as the university is considered. Films were only regarded a proper academic subject from the 1960s onwards when French critics and scholars led the way in the study of the art-house films then being produced by the *Nouvelle Vague* French directors. Unlike Hollywood's commercial films, art-house films lent themselves more easily to the application of theory to their readings, hence their popularity among scholars. However, a fundamental mistake was then made: the director was attributed practically the same status as the literary author and, so, the fundamental fact that the cinema is a collaborative process sustained by business interests was practically ignored for decades. In any case, as can be seen, Hollywood filmmakers had worked for sixty years with their backs to the academic world, concerning themselves with a narrative media that was understood to be, simply, business and, what is more, popular entertainment without artistic pretensions. This means that, still now, when films studies are being developed in universities around the world, there is very little interaction between Hollywood and the scholars. Film theory has gone to the cinema in the last decades, as the title of the collection of essays published by Jim Collins, Hillary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins (1993) says, and is now closely following what is happening in Hollywood. There are even learned studies of B-series horror films originally intended to be plain fun for a Saturday night claiming (wrongly) that they are valuable for artistic reasons (Searing, 1986). But Hollywood seems to care only for its own Academy, still valuing the reputation of its artists for the box-office receipts of their last film and the Oscars it won. Paradoxically, unlike mainstream and popular books, which can be found usually in the same bookshops and libraries, studio films (the equivalent of the popular book, though they are in fact the mainstream films) do not share the same networks of distribution with the independent art-house films. Even though films are now more accessible than ever thanks to

videotapes, in fact it is much easier for a member of the general public to locate any novel (literary or popular) in a good library or a second-hand book shop than an independent film, usually confined to film archives run by governmental institutions or to university archives habitually used only by researchers.

To sum up, the popular is neither what the 'people' create, nor what they consume. The popular is created mainly by the middle classes and consumed by all, except by those who specifically want to distinguish themselves from the 'mass', within any social class. From the point of view of the scholars, the popular is what is at the margins of the canon (that is, mainly 'genre' fiction) despite reaching a large public, which seemingly should be a proof of its forming part of culture to a much larger extent than that which reaches only an elite because of its alleged aesthetic merits. What is not realistic or has no avowed artistic pretensions is genre and popular, hence excluded from the canon - at least for the time being, as the canon obviously changes - though, in fact, many non-realistic films and novels have a much higher aesthetic quality than many realistic, so-called artistic, candidates for canonisation. In fact, it could be said that the canon is limited to a particular 'genre', that of literary realistic fiction (or in the case of film, artistic, realistic film) and that, to a certain extent, demanding that the canon expands to encompass other 'genres' makes no sense, especially as those other 'genres' also have more or less official canons, formed on other grounds than pure aesthetics. It could also be argued that a proficient *connoisseur* of, for instance, science fiction, is as elitist and anti-populist as a defender of the literary canon such as Harold Bloom - though the authority of the former is not acknowledged by the university. From the point of view of those who market culture, the 'popular' is, on the one hand, what makes a profit by attracting a large audience (which might, paradoxically, include high or mainstream art) and, on the other hand, what is tailored and labelled as popular (or genre) even though it might fail to attract an audience at all. The monster can be found in all these ranges of culture, so that, by virtue of its cultural ubiquity it can be said that the monster is a 'popular' figure, that is to say, a figure fascinating many across cultural boundaries. I regard, thus, this long discussion of the meaning of

the popular not as an off-topic digression but as essential preliminary reflection on the position of the monster in contemporary culture. The following dissertation thoroughly depends on this preliminary formulation of this definition of the popular, which will be presupposed throughout.

J.6. *Secondary Sources*

The secondary sources I have consulted are of many types. The main hindrance I have had to face is the scarcity of bibliography that deals directly with the figure of the monster. For this reason and because I have been working from a multidisciplinary standpoint, the bibliography includes not only works on literature and film but also works on other artistic manifestations such as comics, painting and photography, together with works covering a wide range of disciplines: psychology, ethics, politics, religion, anthropology, mythology, gender studies and, obviously, the theory of contemporary culture. Since this is a dissertation about the recent past that includes even the last three years, which are the years I have spent working on it, the bibliography also includes the press articles that came to my hands in this period. This may not be regarded as proper academic research, but researching on contemporary culture also involves gauging the news for information about what is happening right now, which in the case of my dissertation was absolutely necessary. I have avoided using specific bibliography on particular novels and films with a few exceptions - mainly *Alien* and *Blade Runner* - because I am not particularly interested in discussing individual texts in depth but in determining how they fit within the general panorama of contemporary monstrosity.

There are few works that deal directly with the monster and, of those, most refer to the monster as a figure of the past, more or less remote. The essays that deal with the contemporary monster do so frequently in an indirect way: there is, thus, a considerable number of books on horror fiction but not on the monster *per se* in contemporary culture, and much less across genre barriers or across the dividing line between novels and films. My research has, consequently, consisted not of assembling direct evidence from the secondary sources dealing with the monster to support my theses, but of assembling indirect evidence gathered by unearthing a subliminal

discourse on monstrosity implied in all the secondary sources but acknowledged by very few. The monster is seemingly often taken for granted, as if it were a fixture of culture in its anthropological sense that does not deserve further attention - possibly because it is associated with simplistic primitive pleasures rooted in childhood rather than with the sophisticated postmodernist enjoyment of art and its theoretical discussion.

The main texts on monstrosity in other cultural areas than contemporary fiction that I have read are Claude Kappler's *Monstres, Démons et Merveilles à la Fin du Moyen Age* (1980), John Block Friedman's *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (1981), Robert Bogdan's *Freak Show* (1988), Leslie Fiedler's *Freaks* (1978), Gilbert Lascaut's *Le Monstre dans l'Art Occidental* (1973), and Marie-Hélène Huet's *Monstrous Imagination* (1993). The books by Kappler and Friedman deal, as can be seen from their titles, with periods rather remote from the one under discussion in this dissertation but are fundamental to an understanding of the background from which the contemporary monster emerges. Their main objective is to provide extensive information about the social and cultural forces shaping the representation of the monster in medieval visual and literary art. Bogdan's and Fiedler's respective studies of the figure of the freak perfectly complement the books by Kappler and Friedman by indirectly highlighting the fact that monstrosity still plays a very important role in social life, especially as concerns the way we see each other's bodies. In contrast, Lascaut's and Huet's books study the representation of the monster in the arts from ancient Greece to our days. Lascaut's is a profound study of the monster as an aesthetic problem, as its subtitle indicates, which discusses not only the ubiquity of the monster in all cultural manifestations throughout the ages but also the alleged validity and convenience of a Cartesian, rational classification of the monsters over a less structured (or structuralist) approach which may take into account that irrationality is the monster's breeding ground. Huet's essay analyses from a feminist point of view mainly the consequences of the idea, initially sustained by the Greeks, that the role of the feminine imagination could explain why the monsters were born in real life and in the life of the imagination. Huet puts special emphasis on the discussion of how Romanticism -

specifically *Frankenstein* - attributes for the first time to the father the capacity to create monsters and what this important shift means for the entrance of the monster into the centre of culture.

As I have noted, very few books deal jointly with films and novels. Furthermore, there seems to be a peculiar imbalance between the numbers of books on genre film, which are considerable, and the number of books on genre novels, which are not so many. This is possibly due to the fact that fantasy films occupy a much less marginal position in film studies than fantasy novels in literary studies. In any case, tracking the monster has often been a matter of following its footprints in works dealing with genre (mainly horror and science fiction), though, even in them, the discourse on the monster is frequently uneven and elusive. Jack Sullivan's excellent guide to horror fiction, *The Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural*, covers a vast field with its six hundred entries on individual writers, filmmakers, books and films, and its fifty long essays on subjects ranging from Romanticism to the pulps, yet none of them is devoted to the word 'monster', despite the abundant references to many individual monsters throughout the book. Sullivan's guide can, nonetheless, quench anybody's thirst for information about the evolution of fiction (films and novels, but also comics, short story, drama and even television) produced in the last two hundred years in which the monster appears. Carlos Clarens' *Horror Movies* (1968) and S.S. Prawer's *Caligari Children* (1980) provide useful insights into the development of horror film since the beginning of film itself, proving that the monster was and still is one of the first and most solid attractions offered by the film screen. David Skal's *The Monster Show* (1990) is one of the few monographs to include the word 'monster' in its title, though it is not, either, a book on monstrosity but on the evolution of the horror film until the late 1980s. Like Clarens', Skal's accomplished book, can be said to be a thorough, well researched study of the horror film addressed to demanding horror *aficionados*, rather than to scholars. Despite Skal's claim that *The Monster Show* is a cultural history of horror, as its subtitle indicates, his book deals only incidentally with the monster in twentieth-century literature, focusing exclusively on film.

There are other secondary sources dealing with the horror film from the point of view of

genre that provide interesting insights into the nature of the contemporary monster. Andrew Tudor's *Monsters and Mad Scientists* (1989), which, curiously bears almost the same subtitle as Skal's book - *A Cultural History of the Horror Movie* - discusses monstrosity also indirectly on the basis of a classification of horror films into different categories along a chronological, or diachronic, axis and also along a synchronic axis. Thus, Tudor distributes horror films into a number of main historical periods; the content of the films is then described according to the function of the monster in each. There is, however, no overall discussion of the monster in itself. Tudor insists specifically on the idea of genre, rather than on the idea of monstrosity, just as Skal does, which poses an important problem: the many science-fiction films in which a horrific monster appears force both to make exceptions to their own rule that genre is fundamental to an understanding of monstrosity and to accepting that different genres may be mixed in the same text. Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990) is based on the same principle: Carroll's quite detailed classification of monsters - which, nonetheless, only covers horrific non-human monsters - is made to fit in within a general theory of horror, which discusses, mainly what Carroll calls the paradoxes of the heart, namely, why we enjoy horror and how we can be horrified by a monster that we know to be just an imaginary creature.

The books on horror films by Carol Clover, Vera Dika and Barbara Creed are characterized by their being feminist studies of the genre of horror which aim at exposing the patriarchal strategies allegedly followed by horror filmmakers. Clover's *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (1993) and Dika's *Games of Terror* (1990) discuss gender roles in contemporary horror films, with special emphasis on how women are sadistically victimized in them. As far as I know, Dika's is the first, or one of the first, monographs printed by a university press to deal with a sub-genre within the horror film, the 'stalker' or 'slasher', a low-budget film which narrates the exploits of a bloodthirsty serial killer. Clover's followed no doubt in the wake of Dika's work. However, it cannot be said that these books spring from a genuine interest in expanding the field of scholarly knowledge by embracing the so-far neglected area of the horror film. Clearly, they

have been written with the aim of condemning from a feminist point of view the representation of women in those films and are, thus, aimed at a very different public from the other studies of the horror film I have mentioned. Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993) is similar to Dika's and Clover's books in that it focuses exclusively on film, though Creed covers a much more extensive field, using psychoanalysis - as it is often done now in film studies following the pioneering 1970s work of the *Screen* group - to interpret the construction of feminine monstrosity in contemporary film.

There is not quite an exact equivalent in literary studies of the monographs on horror film I have mentioned, though the notion of genre is also relevant in the discussion of the fantasy novel. However, the genre whose study is now receiving increasingly attention in the academia is not horror but Gothic. In fact, what is being discussed is to what extent Gothic can be defined as a genre - most scholars are answering that this is not the case - and whether horror fiction, and even science fiction, are not in fact modes of the Gothic. The study of Gothic complements, nevertheless, that of the monster in horror film, for the main contribution of Gothic to the history of monstrosity is the popularisation of the human moral monster, that is to say, of the villain. Thus, while the work on the horrific monster of film tends to focus on the non-human monster - the horrific creature - or on the dehumanised human monster, those who work on Gothic tend to focus on the psychology of the evil, human monster.

One of the most accomplished introductions to Gothic fiction is David Punter's *The Literature of Terror* (1980), which provides a detailed account of the evolution of Gothic, and the notion of terror in fiction, from 1765 - the date of the publication of Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* - to the late 1970s¹. Punter's book must be acknowledged as one of the main inspirations behind the present dissertation, especially as far as the idea of the continuity of Gothic as an alternative to the continuity of realism is concerned. The other main sources that have reinforced this aspect of my work are Elizabeth MacAndrew's *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (1979), because

¹A second edition covering not only the period covered by the original edition - 1765 to 1980 - but also the last fifteen years was published in January 1996 by Longman.

of its very thorough analysis of the villain of eighteenth Gothic fiction, and Victor Sage's *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition* (1988), especially because of its account of the relationship between religious belief and the representation of the evil villain in Gothic fiction.

Among the other secondary sources I have consulted, Anne Baring and Jules Cashford's *The Myth of the Goddess* (1993) is the one that has exerted the greatest influence on the present dissertation. In principle, a study of the evolution of the figure of the goddess and its progressive loss under the patriarchal system instituted in the Iron Age might not seem to be directly related to the topic of monstrosity. However, thanks to their account of the demonisation of the goddess in Babylon and her subsequent transformation into a monster by the Semites and the Aryan patriarchies, I could finally grasp the meaning of the contemporary monster, which, in my opinion, is a sign of the problematic decadence of patriarchal values. These are being now questioned by women and men for the first time in almost four thousand years. Baring and Cashford's book is an excellent example not only of how to apply Jungian psychology to the study of myth and religion but also of how to produce humanist discourse that avoids the pitfalls of radical androphobic feminism and of misogynistic scholarship (see Chapter 7). Their fascinating account of the rise and the fall of the goddess functions as a rebuttal of the excesses of patriarchy but also as a reminder of the need to find a better balance between men and women in the near future.

The book that most resembles this dissertation is Marina Warner's *Six Myths of our Times: Managing Monsters* (1994), a collection of six lectures that Warner wrote when she was invited by the BBC to deliver the prestigious Reith Lectures in 1994. Even though I had not heard about Warner's book when I started working on this dissertation, it turned out that she had already discussed monstrosity under different aspects - including among others gender roles, childhood, and colonialism - from a socio-cultural point of view, as I intended to do, rather than from the point of view of genre. Nonetheless, there the similarities end, for I have used only a small number of the primary and secondary sources that she uses and also because our conclusions are very different, mainly because she writes from an unambiguous feminist point of view, taking myth

rather than the Gothic as her starting point. Interestingly, Warner makes no reference to the monster in her introduction to the lectures. Instead, she claims that when asked to deliver the lectures, which should deal with society and culture, she decided to "build on my interest in fairy tales, legends, myths and the way they interpenetrate and influence our lives" (1994a: xi). Presumably, the realization that these are narratives about monsters came later but is not specifically stressed at any point in the lectures.

This dissertation shares with most of the secondary sources I have mentioned in this section an interest in approaching the monster from a multidisciplinary, socio-cultural point of view, though it differs from them in other important aspects. My contribution to the existing bibliography on the monster is based mainly on my addressing the topic of monstrosity itself, rather than that of monster in a particular genre, and on my focusing simultaneously on novels and films dealing with the monster, which had not been previously done. This study of monstrosity also aims at describing the links between aspects of monstrosity so far considered separately, such as the nature of the human and the non-human monster, and at exploring the connections between aspects of reality and their representation through the monster.

J.7. Theoretical Framework and Organization

The theoretical framework I have used in this dissertation is utterly eclectic. I have purposefully avoided following any particular interpretative theory so as to feel free to tackle my subject from as many angles as possible. However, throughout my study of monstrosity I constantly refer to the concept of 'representation', which must be justified at this point. It is not my supposition that the monster is a symbol belonging to a discourse on reality that is fully articulated and agreed on by those who write novels or make films now. In fact, I prefer viewing the monster rather as a 'symptom' that indicates the tensions present in cultural forces operating in the period under discussion. Problematic aspects of reality - the ones on which each chapter of this dissertation is based - which cannot be solved by other means (by means of rational thinking) are projected onto the monster in a constant search for stability. Important issues such as power,

ethics, gender, the status of childhood are given fictional representation in more or less typical plots in which the monster occupies a central position as a symptom of the problems associated to those issues. There is no overt, conscious control over those representations; it is my aim to interpret them throughout this dissertation and also to prove that there is a rather consistent discourse constantly in the making at a cultural level that could be regarded as the postmodernist equivalent of primitive mythmaking.

The second question that arises in regard to how the fictional monster and reality interact is whether the texts in which the monster appears compensate for a problematic reality, in a direct or inverse relation, or whether they mirror reality, exaggerating or magnifying the issues that are the object of the representations I analyse. There is, in fact, no single answer for this question. I interpret the monster mainly as a wish-fulfilment fantasy created to compensate for the shortcomings of reality in many different ways. Sometimes this bears a direct relation to reality: the individual film-goer or novel reader may vicariously experience the hero/ine's sense of triumph over the monster and read it as an allegory of a situation that will eventually take place in real life. Inversely, the total or relative defeat of the hero/ine by the monster offers the comfort of exposing problematic situations that cannot be dealt with directly in real life: for instance, as I argue in Chapter 6, dystopian, technophobic science fiction is helping audiences to process their fear of the privileges attached to individuality, which are threatened by the pressures that capitalism puts on them. The Pyrrhic victory of the (often monstrous) hero/ine of his/her defeat compensates for the daily impression of powerlessness felt by the average citizen Western because it comforts him or her with the idea that, at least, the monstrosity of the current systems of power of real life is exposed.

The texts I analyse in this dissertation can be said to mirror society but they do so by interposing several mirrors between reality and its representation. It is not a matter of magnifying or exaggerating problems existing in real life but of noting that, like the monster Medusa, some problems cannot be looked at straight in the face: Perseus' reflecting shield is needed for

protection against the monster's petrifying stare. In a sense, my work has consisted of looking at those mirrors - the representations of the problematic issues of reality - and also at reality in order to try to find out how they distort or sharply focus the monsters of reality. Alternatively, and to use a metaphor inspired by one of the primary sources I analyse, this dissertation follows also the method use by Deckard in *Blade Runner* in the famous scene in which he scans with the help of an enlarging device an apparently ordinary photograph of a hotel room, in which he knows that one of the monsters he is tracing is pictured. Deckard's scanner turns the photo into a tri-dimensional representation of the room and locates the 'replicant' Zhora behind a pillar that obscured her presence. My work tries to do the same for the larger picture of contemporary reality.

One main point that I must clarify is the question of whether this is a feminist dissertation. I would like to think that it is a humanist dissertation, that is to say, a work addressed to readers who believe that men and women are, fundamentally, persons - perhaps, as a popular Catalan TV show would put it, human persons of masculine or feminine sex. I personally believe that feminism offers a theoretical framework too biased and too limited (this is a question I discuss in more depth in Chapter 7) but being myself a woman influenced by feminism, it is only honest to acknowledge that many of the ideas in this dissertation are feminist. However, I would like very much to emphasize the point that for me attacking patriarchy is an obligation for everyone - men or women - who believe, as I do, that the systems of oppression must be terminated, and not a fight that concerns only women. Helping men free themselves from patriarchy is, as I see it, the decisive battle that has to be fought if humanism is to be ever conquered. As far as this dissertation is concerned, my opinions have led me to be very critical of androphobic feminist criticism and to disregard to a great extent the much easier path marked by the strong current of feminism in the world of scholarship. The feminist view of the monster is contradictory: on the one hand, feminism rejects the male monster - seen as a sign of patriarchy's monstrous power - but, on the other hand, there is an obvious attraction for the female monster because she is seen as a wish-fulfilment fantasy of power, which is precisely what many male monsters are for men.

Even though I have invoked the names of Freud and Jung at certain points, it cannot be said that this dissertation has a strong psychoanalytical or simply psychological basis. I have avoided using an exclusively psychological approach to the question of how the monsters expose the anxieties of the personal or the collective unconscious. I am more interested, in fact, in establishing the cultural foundations of monstrosity in the period of the 1980s and 1990s than in exploring the connections between the Jungian archetypes or the Freudian id and the concrete instances of contemporary monstrosity. In this dissertation the collective and the personal unconscious have been granted an importance similar but not superior to the role of the systems of power and the systems of distribution of culture in shaping the image of the contemporary monster. Studying the monster is, in my view, useful to gauge not only the state of man's soul but also the state of the social, political and cultural institutions and networks of power that envelope man in a concrete historical period. I must acknowledge, in addition, my own - relative - ignorance of psychology; on the other hand I must note that if this ignorance has not been dispelled, it is because I did not feel that this was the best path to follow in the discussion of monstrosity. It seems to me that the use of Jungian, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis in the critical interpretation of fiction is very productive but tends to neglect an alternative view of humankind based on the idea of myth and ritual and to focus excessively on cultural constructions, such as the family, whose historical development is hardly ever questioned. Why see ourselves as Freud's postmodernist children and not (also) as the rather disoriented city cousins of the tribesman whose world is rooted in myth? My purpose is not to apply a concrete psychoanalytical theory to the monster but clarifying the extent and importance of this still largely ignored field, which encompasses other aspects than the psychology of the contemporary human being.

If there is any major theoretical influence at all in this dissertation, this is exerted no doubt by the work of Michel Foucault. I can by no means claim to be an expert reader of Foucault's work but his description in *Discipline and Punish* of how power reshapes itself as society and history evolves is present throughout my work. Even though, arguably, I am also writing from a Marxist

standpoint - even though I confess to not having read Marx yet - from my own point of view Marx's view of class is subordinated to Foucault's view of power. How power is exerted, who exerts it and who craves for it are the factors that articulate the social and the cultural life, including class, gender relations, race relations, generational relations, and other aspects such as the university and, obviously, politics. In fact, one of the main arguments I am using to define the monster is that the monster is, simultaneously, a figure dreaded because of its immense power and a wish-fulfilment fantasy of empowerment, hence the fear its elicits and also its universal appeal.

I have organised my dissertation in eight chapters, corresponding to eight major aspects discernible in the contemporary representation of monstrosity, which are, in the order of the chapters: the iconography of the monster, how the image of the monster is propagated in contemporary culture, how the monster fits within the contemporary idea of myth, the relationship between the monster and evil, the monster as an image of political power, the monster as a product of the capitalist system, gendered monstrosity, and the child and the monster. The first two chapters are intended to function as introductions to the rest of the dissertation, hence the greater density of the background information about the history of the monster provided in them. Most chapters consists of two main sections whose respective contents are duly explained in the introduction to each chapter.

I have provided detailed information about the films and novels I analyse in two separate appendixes, with the titles of "Bibliography: Primary Sources" and "Filmography". Although this is not usually done, I have written a brief summary of the plots to guide the reader, as it is unrealistic to suppose that the reader may be familiar with all the films and all the novels. The entries for the novels contain information about the screen adaptations based on them, while the entries for the films specify the title of the original novel on which they are based and the Oscar awards or nominations they have received. This dissertation is best approached if the reader browses first through these appendixes. An extra appendix inserted after the "Filmography", with the title of "Appendix 1: Landmarks in the Work of Special Effects Artists" offers extra information about the

aesthetics of the monster in film, complementing Chapter 1¹.

J.8. *The Monster and the Researcher*

Finally, I would like to devote the last section of this introduction to a few remarks about my personal involvement in the topic I have been researching for the last three years. A high percentage of the novels and films I have analysed are geared to eliciting strong emotional responses from readers or viewers and I have not remained immune to them. Questions about why or how I can conduct research on a subject that touches horror so often have been often asked to me, and are, indeed, pertinent to the conclusions I have reached. However, my research has allowed me to tap a well concealed vein as regards monstrosity: reactions to my work in progress have been indeed positive, coming from people both inside and outside the university. Comments have often run along the lines of how fascinating my subject was and how lucky I was to be working on such enjoyable material - which says quite a lot about the contemporary idea of pleasure! Surprisingly (at least to me), nobody has suggested that monstrosity is a trivial subject or inappropriate for a doctoral dissertation. Quite the contrary.

Many people have volunteered suggestions, titles of novels and films and have talked with me or written to me about favourite films and novels dealing with monstrosity. In this sense, and considering the many questions I have been asked about the *Alien* trilogy, I must conclude that the eponymous creature is currently the most popular monster, followed closely by the Terminator. Among the novel readers who have commented on their favourite monsters with me, the names most frequently mentioned have been those of Ender, the protagonist of Orson Scott Card's

¹I have kept the use of footnotes and references for the quotations down to a minimum, using the simplest format available. The dates I have used in the references for the quotations are always that of the edition I am using and not that of the original date of publication. The entry in the "Bibliography: Secondary Sources" contains both. If the edition I am using is a reprint of an earlier edition, I have indicated the date of the reprint between brackets: this is the date I have used in the reference for the quotation. I have not provided a translation for the quotations from the secondary sources in French, relying on the familiarity of my reader with this language. For simplicity's sake I have regarded film directors as the authors of the films I am discussing; yet a phrase such as Ridley Scott's *Alien* should rather indicate that Scott is the head of the team who made the film and not its author, as I regard films as team work. Regarding the punctuation, I would like to remark that I am using single quotation marks for emphasis and double quotation marks for text quoted from a primary or a secondary source.

Ender's Game and Pat Bateman, the protagonist of Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*. Men have been probably more eager than women to discuss their views on monstrosity with me. I find, though, that what puts women off discussing monstrosity is not their lack of interest in the subject but their rejection of a culture of violence they perceive as monstrously masculine. Interestingly enough, female monsters that show women can be also represented as powerful beings, such as Catherine Trammell of *Basic Instinct*, or strong heroines, such as Sarah Connor of *The Terminator*, spurred very stimulating conversations.

Many people have also emphasized the pleasure my research must have meant for me, as if research and pleasure had to be irreconcilable opposites. A few have even told me with a certain defiant envy - I cannot define it otherwise - that I was extraordinarily lucky to have been granted the chance of working on novels and films that I count among my favourites. This is indeed the case, but my dissertation would be unfairly robbed of all its seriousness - yes, I am also using the word - if it were taken as merely a 'fan' book. The pleasure of my research has been derived indeed from the realization of the interest it arose - as for the paradoxical pleasure my material may have given me, my hope is that it is reflected in the seriousness of my intention, as should be the ideal case for all researchers.

The favourable reception that my ongoing research has found is radically different from the difficulties that Andrew Tudor faced when working just a few years ago on his book *Monsters and Mad Scientists*. As he writes in the "Preface" to his book:

The worst thing about writing this book has been admitting to it. Few conversation-stoppers have quite the force of a well-timed 'Well, yes, actually I'm working on horror movies', a response to solicitous inquires that provokes pity and disbelief in about equal proportions. After 10 years or so I can report back to all those who have been concerned about my mental health ('Doesn't it desensitize you?', one genteel lady asked, as if viewing horror movies functioned as a kind of condom of the conscience) that I have no desire to kick kittens, drink blood or disembowel members of the moral majority... (op. cit.: vi)

Nor do I indeed... though I sometimes worry about what the members of the moral majority would say if they saw my private video collection and my library! That worry increased when I saw David

Fincher's *Seven*, in which the screen writer, Andrew Kevin Walker, came up with an ingenious solution to justify how his two heroic policemen track a cultured serial killer fond of quoting Dante and Milton with the blood of his victims: the FBI is said to keep a list of all those who borrow 'dangerous' books from public libraries - obviously not only Dante and Milton (!) but also books on horror, crime, evil and monsters, that is to say, my very own sources. Despite my growing, justified or unjustified, paranoia, the cultural climate must have certainly changed in the last ten years for absolutely nobody has questioned at all the danger of my becoming desensitized thanks to my material - perhaps because they thought that my choice was a sign of my being already desensitized.

The effect on me of the primary sources I have selected has been actually far from desensitizing. In fact, I should say that I am much more sensitive now than I was before I started researching on monstrosity, especially as regards the monsters of reality that can be daily seen on the news. Even Freddy Krueger, the monstrous hero of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, ends up seeming a friendly monster in comparison with the serial killers and the mass murderers on the news, and I mean the ones on the payroll of a government or associated with terrorist groups, rather than the occasional psychotic mass murderers or serial killers. Horror films rarely scare me now because I have learned a few things about the mechanism to control one's emotions when doing research - or am I simply bragging, in imitation of the teenagers who see them to test their endurance? One of my colleagues was genuinely puzzled as to the method I followed to take notes when watching horror films, which has made me think in some depth about the psychological strategies we use to 'enjoy' fear when facing the monster in film¹. Only one text gave me nightmares, Christopher Fowler's novel *Spanky*, though I am completely at a loss to explain

¹A brief anecdote can suffice to explain how difficult it is to keep a tight reign on one's reactions when doing research on horror films (or on any other film that may elicit strong emotions): I was watching *The Thing* (for the third time!), expecting to make detailed notes on the scene of the horrific metamorphosis of the extraterrestrial creature - which is the most difficult scene I have dealt with, in terms of how deeply it affects me. I was on my own and in control of my reactions as the film progressed, but somebody else joined me then to see the scene. The interruption distracted me and I was so disturbed by the images on the screen - despite the fact that I knew them well - that I could not make a note at all. Needless to say, I saw the film - again! - on my own, and I have followed the same strategy with all the other films. Novels do not pose the same problem because, obviously, we read them on our own and in silence.

why, since it is not especially horrific or, at least, not more than other films and novels I have seen and read.

However, despite the strong emotions elicited by the fictional monsters I have come across during my research, or precisely, because of this emotions, I have been and still am much more horrified by the monsters of real life. The war in Bosnia has been raging for the three years during which I have been working on this dissertation, which means that the images of people I regard as monsters - Slobodan Milosevic, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic - have been constantly present in the background. I am sure that, like me, many people have been wondering why this war has happened and why these monsters have committed such appalling atrocities in the midst of civilized Europe. Whatever the fate of Karadzic and Mladic may be if their status as war criminals finally leads to their arrest and trial by The International Court of Justice at the Hague, neither the discovery of the Srebrenica mass graves, nor the images of the massacre in Sarajevo's market made me feel the full horror of the situation as another event. For me, the real measure of the horror of this war and of the monsters behind it became evident when I saw on TV Drazen Erdemovic, the twenty-five-year-old Croatian soldier who, on May 29th 1996, acknowledged before the International Court of Justice having killed hundreds of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica, when he was under the orders of the Bosnian-Serbs in whose army he served. This 'monster', declaring in tears that he had killed his victims because he had been threatened with the death of his wife and child if he did not obey, made me understand much about the meaning of real life monstrosity. Erdemovic, who was handed over to the International Court of Justice by the Serbs in an attempt to spare the bloodthirsty Bosnian-Serb leaders, is to be a key witness in the forthcoming trial of his superiors, Mladic and Karadzic, if it is ever held.

Nevertheless, for me, the blackest date in these last three years was 13th March 1996, when sociopath Thomas Hamilton entered a school in Dunblane, Scotland, and killed sixteen children - aged between five and six - and their schoolmistress before killing himself. The facts were horrific enough to shatter not only the confidence in civilization of most Britons but also that of

many other people around the world, especially because very young children were involved. Yet, what is now known as the 'Slaughter of the Innocents' had a especially poignant emotional effect on me for another reason: Hamilton happened to be a resident of Stirling, the same Scottish town in whose university I had been doing research for my dissertation during the academic year 1994-95. Many sessions with my supervisor, Prof. David Punter, had finished with his jocular injunction to be careful and not come across any 'monsters' on the way home. Now I wonder whether I ever did come across Hamilton on the way home. Needless to say, this grim irony has affected me much more deeply than any film or any novel on the monster I may have seen or read.

At this point, I should clarify that not all the texts - films and novels - I have analysed for this dissertation are horror fiction and that the highest degree of horror may be elicited by texts that are not particularly gory or meant to scare with easy thrills. Horror, as I understand it now, is not an emotion that can be easily provoked in the reader or viewer; in addition, it may take many different forms and even be understood from different angles by different viewers or readers. I have no doubt that *The Thing* is the most terrific text I have dealt with, in the classical sense of being a good suspense horror film, portraying what is, for me, the most repulsive monster ever seen on the screen. But I have been more genuinely moved by other texts which pull horror in different directions: *The Fly*, for instance, is, despite the nauseating transformation of Seth Brundle into a monster a most moving love story - and so are *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and *Candyman*. As far as the representation of psychotic killers is concerned, there is possibly no other film as disturbing as *Henry, Portrait of a Serial Killer*, which is, I must confess, the only film I have expunged from my video collection because I was ashamed that somebody might see it in my home and believe I had enjoyed it. Other films, such as *Seven* and *Kalifornia*, impressed me deeply with a sense of moral horror at the state the world is in, an impression very similar from the one that *Schindler's List* produces. I happened to see this film with a Jewish friend, who was certainly appalled by what she was seeing on the screen, in a cinema full of people who, like the two of us, were in tears

throughout the projection - this is also the effect that horror may produce.

Other films and novels I have analysed are also fascinating mixtures of horror and sentimentalism. Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* and *The Dead Zone* are two amazing tear-jerkers, though this may be hard to believe if we take into account King's reputation as the 'king' of horror. There is also much genuine feeling and moving beauty in the stories narrated in *The Man without a Face*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Blade Runner*, *The Hidden*, *Léon*, *The Abyss*, *Enemy Mine* and even *The Terminator 2* - if one can see it. The monster may also be found in a territory born of the intersection of laughter and horror - black comedies such as *An American Werewolf in London* and *Serial Mom* prove that the monster also has a comic side, as do other films much less horrific such as *Gremlins* or *The Mask*.

The monsters of the novel are different from those of film, mainly because their personalities are better developed, whereas, obviously, their image is more blurred. Horror novels cannot aim at achieving the concentrated effect of films, which are usually seen without interruptions, and offer less superficial portraits of the characters than is often implied by those who dislike them. A friend wondered how I could read books with such ugly, lurid covers by which she meant mostly the paperback edition of the genre novels I had selected - in fact, another dissertation could be written about the artwork employed to market 'genre' novels in contrast to 'mainstream' novels. However, as far as the novels are regarded, I would like to stress the sheer diversity of the monsters in them and the efforts made by novelists in creating imaginary worlds that seduce the reader from the first page. This particular feeling of enjoying a novel so much that one is sorry to finish it has recurred so frequently throughout my reading of the novels I have selected that I would not know which to highlight. Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, Salman Rushdie's *Shame* and Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* are all excellent novels that constantly surprise the reader with their portrait of the monster. Yet, I was especially charmed - this is exactly the word - by the very long novels, averaging between 800 and 900 pages by Robert McCammon (*Swan Song*), Clive Barker (*Imajica*), and Stephen King (*It*), by Dan Simmons' diptych *Hyperion Cantos* and by Terry Pratchett's hilarious *Discworld* series, to which I have become hopelessly

addicted.

Obviously, one of the main theses I defend in this dissertation - namely, that monsters are fascinating rather than simply horrific - is necessarily based on my own fascination for some of these monsters and, in some cases, for the hero/ine who confronts him or her. The most fascinating, fictional human monsters are, in my view, Patrick Bateman the hero of *American Psycho* and Francis Urquhart, the hero of Michael Dobbs' trilogy *House of Cards*, *To Play the King* and *The Final Cut*. Catherine Trammell, the villainous heroine of *Basic Instinct* and Alasdair Gray's heroine in *Poor Things*, Bella Baxter, are two of the most fascinating examples of female monstrosity. Among the odd couples formed by a hero/ine and a monster, no doubt that of Ellen Ripley and the 'alien' monster is the most popular, though the one formed by Clarice Starling and Hannibal Lecter is much more intriguing and captivating. As for the monsters who act together, Mickey and Mallory, the heroes of Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*, form, no doubt, the most subversive association between two evildoers seen on a cinema screen. There is, however, a worrying shortage of marvellous monsters, which are totally outnumbered by the overwhelming presence of evil monsters of horrific or non-horrific physical appearance. Possibly this scarcity is what makes me feel specially fond of the angelic extraterrestrials of *The Abyss*, whose luminous, enchanting appearance seems to me a challenge to those who are seeking new directions in the representation of monstrosity.

If there is any indisputable conclusion to derive from these observations, which should hopefully also serve as an invitation for my reader to enjoy the following pages, is that the monster may be sometimes horrific, but fascinating is always the right adjective for it.

CHAPTER 1

Fascinating Bodies: The New Iconography of Monstrosity

Introduction

The new iconography of monstrosity of the last fifteen years is placed at the end of a long tradition in the representation of the monster in the Western world, the roots of which stretch backwards to prehistoric times. The morphology of the new monsters encompasses in its very wide range motifs derived from myth, religion, high art and popular culture. However, what makes the iconography of the contemporary monster unique are three main factors. First, the multiplication of cultural media which serve as vehicles to circulate and popularise the monster's image, second, the proliferation of icons of monstrosity due to the expansion of the cultural market animated by capitalism and, third, the contemporary artists' wish to explore, on the one hand, the limits of the visualization of the monster (and of monstrous violence) and, on the other hand, their wish to question the conventional association of aesthetic pleasure with beauty.

The first part of this chapter reviews the different stages in the historical development of the representation of monstrosity in visual and narrative media since prehistory. This survey is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of the cultural position of the monster and of its iconographical and literary representation throughout the ages, as this would amply surpass the limits of the chapter and even of the whole dissertation. My intention is rather to underline those aspects that are still relevant for the cultural construction of monstrosity and for the visualization of the monster at the end of the twentieth century, and also those that stress the differences and the similarities between the monster of the past and the monster of the present.

The second part of the chapter discusses the cultural preoccupations reflected by the image of the monster and how they echo each other throughout film and the novel. A section is devoted to gender aspects in the iconography of the contemporary monster for two reasons: first, a preoccupation with the monstrous body (in the sense of the prodigious, spectacular body) as an object of desire is central to an understanding of the position of the monster within capitalist postmodernism. Second, the body of the monster - designed to be enjoyed as an spectacle - has much in common with that of the hero: both have become the site for the discussion of the limits of acceptable masculinity at a time when the decadence of patriarchy under the pressure of feminism is forcing men to reconsider their own representation. The second subsection presents an alternative classification of monsters according to the response their image elicits from readers or viewers rather than according to their physical appearance. The nature of the postmodernist monster, often represented as a plastic, protean body of deceiving appearance, expresses on the one hand, the ludic pleasure for transformation typical of a culture such as ours, which values the ability to endlessly change one's public image and, on the other hand, anxieties about the limits of our capacity to recognise the monsters of reality and to survive in a constantly changing cultural environment. The last subsection deals with the rising threshold of the graphic depiction of violence and horror, as the ability to inflict physical and mental harm seems a more reliable mark of the monster than its unstable bodily appearance. My argumentation proves that, against what is usually believed because of the greater attention usually attracted by films, the strategies to visualize the monster and the violence it causes are similar in film and the novel. The interaction between the monsters of film and the monster of the novel is a subject explored in more depth in Chapter 2.

1.1. *Monstrous Imagery: The Sources of the New Iconography of Monstrosity*

1.1.1. *Monsters of Myth: The Monstrous Goddess and the Heroic Hunter*

The most crucial juncture in the history of the evolution of the images of monstrosity is the passage from the stage in which the monsters are images emanating from the fears caused by the creatures of the natural world to the stage in which they become images springing from the depths of the collective (or personal) unconscious. In this second stage the images of monstrosity may be manipulated through myth, religion and art to signify a horrifying power that must be opposed. There is no doubt that images of monsters have accompanied humankind since the beginning of times and that their origin lies buried in the enigmatic remains of the psychology of prehistoric man still present in our collective unconscious. Monsters must have first emerged from the description of wild beasts, magnified by a bragging hunter, or by a terrified survivor of the encounter with the deadly beast, in order to impress an audience sitting around a fire guarding them from the presence of the same predatory beasts in the dark. This would explain why monsters have been and are still typically imagined as horrific creatures of enormous size provided with all the weaponry used by predators: powerful claws, big mouths with huge fangs, great bodily strength and a notorious capacity to hunt by stealth and bring sudden death upon their victims.

Other factors may be the origin of the monstrous images that have evolved with prehistoric man into history. The images of monstrosity provoking reactions ranging from fear to wonder may have arisen from the mistaken perception of animals seen in the dark (maybe just heard and imagined on the basis on the stories heard), the unexpected discovery of hitherto unknown animal species, rare prodigies of nature stranded in isolated evolutionary pockets which have since become extinct, the products of hallucinations or madness, and even childhood fears recalled by adult storytellers interested in bullying unruly children into submission. Nature also offered primitive man another form of monstrosity: that of misshapen animals born with genetic defects and that of monstrous humans, also genetically defective. The bodies of these human beings, recalling the

shape of a particular animal, may have been often believed to be the unnatural offspring of the miscegenation between women and animals, a motif basic in the misogynistic myths of the Western world and perhaps also the origin of the traditional association of a tribe with a totemic animal in other parts of the world.

The human capacity to visualize what is being narrated (orally or through the written word) and to further visualize in daydreams and dreams new images based on the perception of the natural environment, on stories once heard, images once seen, and on personal or collective unconscious anxieties, is the key to understanding how the monster comes to life in the human imagination. Nightmares may hold the final clue as to how and why the natural monster became an image full of connotations, a symbol on occasions, used in myths and other types of folk narratives, such as fairy tales, to process deep concerns of the human soul. However, even though the actual psychological mechanisms used by the monster-maker of the past and that of the present may be the same, what has been radically altered since the rise of individualism is the way in which those mechanisms have been foregrounded, especially in the post-Freud era.

The sources of inspiration for the prehistoric story-teller and myth maker, may have been the same that inspired Mary Shelley and R.L. Stevenson to produce lasting myths for our times: both writers attributed their writing of, respectively, *Frankenstein* (1818) and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), to striking images of monstrosity derived from their nightmares. Yet both did so in an effort to understand how and why they had conceived such monsters, as if there were a primary difference between producing fiction and producing fictional monsters, or as if producing their monsters was something that had to be accounted for before an imaginary tribunal composed of stern judges making a decision on the moral soundness of the monster-maker. In fact, far from being perversions or bizarre deviations from the normal created by abnormal human minds, the monsters are part of how humans have always visualized and still visualize the world. Yet, the self-conscious dissociation of man after the rise of rationalism from the images of monstrosity he has always created and the defamiliarisation with a religious and mythical world

that was familiar until barely two centuries ago, are essential elements to understand why despite the popularity and ubiquity of the contemporary images of monstrosity most tend to take them for granted as by-products of the human imagination.

Monsters acquired a mythical status when the prehistoric bragging hunter was elevated to the category of heroic hunter in archaic myth and later transformed into the heroic warrior of classical myth. The wild beast slowly evolved into a symbol of chaotic power that the hero had to defeat in order to ensure his own survival and that of the ordered universe he represented. According to Edith Porada, prehistoric societies started representing evil powers - that is to say, their own fears of pain, sorrow and death - as monsters in order to create the illusion that these could be manipulated. "Gradually" she writes, "a system appears to have been built up in which certain figures represented evil beings while others were devised which were shown to conquer or, at least to control, evil forces." (1987: 1). In the early Indo-European narratives (oral, but also sometimes illustrated by drawings on rocks) the image of both the monster and the hero was, in principle, conditioned by the geography, climate and fauna of each respective region. This would explain the varied iconography of monstrosity and also the diverse evil powers attributed to each particular monster, in short, the close interdependence between a natural region and its myths. Yet the basic narrative of conflict, confrontation and death of the monster at the hero's hands and the slow evolution of the combat for survival into a combat in which issues of cosmological magnitude were at stake was the same for all Indo-European cultures and their descendants until our days (Porada, *ibid.*).

The Indo-European worldview was 'masculine', as opposed to the 'feminine' universe of the agriculturist devoted to the Great Mother Earth since the Paleolithic age. It was shaped by the tragic view of life as an endless struggle for survival in which hunting and war were primary activities (Baring and Cashford, 1993). This lifestyle typical of nomadic tribes of hunters was engendered by, and engendered itself, patriarchal societies which worshipped sky gods, the embodiments of lightning, thunder, fire and air. Their rhythm of life was marked by the sun and not

by the moon as happened in matriarchal societies. These were based on the idea that just as the moon's four phases include three days of darkness, life's three phases (childhood, adulthood, old age) has a fourth phase, death. In these matriarchal cultures the goddess was the incarnation of the Earth's archetypically female power to give life and also to recycle it by receiving the dead back into her own body. The moon as a symbol of regeneration and the waters from which life originated - the same waters that flow in childbirth - became the main symbols of a goddess under whose rule darkness and light, death and life, were a continuum. In many archaic representations of the goddess she is accompanied by a son-lover whom she has engendered on her own, and whose ritual sacrifice, followed by the goddess' descent to the underworld to retrieve him from death, ensures the repetition of the seasons: winter (the death of the son-lover) leads to spring (his return) and to the renewal of the 'male' power to fertilise Earth and woman in sacred marriage. There are no heroes and no monsters in this idyllic matriarchal universe which, according to the archaeological evidence found in this century, seems to have occupied the Middle East and, above all, the lands of Old Europe (Central Europe and the Balkans, mainly) from 7,000 BC onwards, until patriarchal tribes coming from central Asia and the deserts of north Africa destroyed it about 3,500 BC.

In contrast, for the nomadic tribes - Indo-European and also Semitic - the Earth was a harsh mistress that denied her fruits to the men living in the deserts of northern Africa and the steppes of central Asia. A new mythology in which the hero was identified with the sun, emerging victorious at dawn from the nightly combat with the powers of darkness identified with evil, chaos and the 'feminine', that is to say, with the monster, was developed in the Bronze Age (3250-1250 BC). This accompanied the Indo-European (Aryans) and Semitic invasion and destruction of the matriarchal agriculturist societies of Old Europe and the Middle East, respectively. This new mythology may have sprung from the dissociation of man and Earth typical of nomadic tribes devoted to hunting and later to cattle raising, but the virulence of its misogyny strongly suggests a component of rebellion against the matriarchy of the goddess in which the son-lover is only a

secondary figure. During the Iron Age (1250 BC until the birth of Christ) these invaders succeeded in establishing the basis for the replacing of the worship of the goddess by new patriarchal mythologies, such as Greek polytheism or Hebrew monotheism. In the former the goddess was hidden behind the images of the many goddesses subordinated to the patriarchal Zeus; in the latter, the cult of the Earth goddess became the cult of the much less powerful Virgin Mary. There are enough signs of popular resistance throughout the ages against the total loss of the prehistoric goddess to suggest that patriarchy was actually forced to accommodate the goddess within its system, being incapable of totally erasing her figure.

According to Anne Baring and Jules Cashford (op. cit.: 273-298) the goddess was first represented as a monster within a typical mythical narrative of confrontation with a hero in the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish*. This epic was written when the Semitic Amorite Hammurabian dynasty came to power in Babylon by right of conquest, around 1750 BC, and later became the main inspiration behind the mythology framing the three main monotheistic religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. The original epic had been forgotten though, and only its discovery in 1848 among the ruins of Asurbanipal's once famed library allowed for the reconstruction of the links between archaic Semitic myths and the religions descending from them. The myth in which the fierce divine hero Marduk slays the ferocious sea serpent Tiamat has been variously interpreted. For some it is a symbolic rendering of the rise of the new Semitic dynasty and the fall of the conquered Babylon; for others, it is a myth derived from an annual ritual in which the hero would represent the force of the spring conquering the flooding waters of the Mesopotamian Tigris and Euphrates and in which the son-lover would thus usurp the powers of the regenerating Earth represented by the waters. However, as Baring and Cashford put it, not only can all the combats between heroes and dragons in subsequent myths and literature be traced back to this epic but also "the violent image of conquest in the *Enuma Elish* set the paradigm of the Iron Age as one of conflicts between the older mythology of the mother goddess and the new myths of the Aryan and Semitic father gods" (ibid: 275).

The *Enuma Elish* reverses the mythology of the earlier era by replacing the 'mother goddess who generates creation as part of herself by a god who 'makes' creation as something separate from himself' (ibid: 273). This Babylonian epic narrates a myth that recalls some episodes in the Greek myth of creation, which actually fuses Indo-European motifs with aspects derived from the older Babylonian myth. The similarities are most marked especially as far as the confrontation between the younger and the older generation of gods is concerned. The god Apsu (the waters of heaven) and the goddess Tiamat (the waters of the sea) are originally a single unit which the onset of Creation splits in two halves, one masculine, the other feminine. As husband and wife, Apsu and Tiamat originate several generations of young gods, but Apsu becomes restless and breaks the rules of the sacred marriage by deciding to kill their offspring, against his wife's claims that destroying what has been created makes no sense. Eventually, a son or grandson, Ea, foils Apsu's plans, kills the father god and plans Tiamat's defeat, for which he and his wife Damkina engender the monstrous hero Marduk (he has four eyes, four ears and spouts fire) to be their champion. Proving his innate mastery of the natural elements of the sky - winds, thunder and lightning - Marduk is crowned new king of the gods, while his uncle Anu causes Tiamat to become pregnant by sending evil winds that stir her waters.

The birth of a monstrous brood of sea serpents, among them her son and new consort, Kingu, the owner of the tablets of the law, ensues. However, all are soon exterminated by the mighty Marduk, who takes Kingu's tablets of the law becoming thus the legitimate patriarchal lawgiver. He also splits the goddess' carcass into two parts, of which one half becomes heaven and the other earth. Not satisfied yet with this refashioning of original creation, Marduk produces mankind out of Kingu's blood and institutes a new solar calendar, becoming the ruler of the sun and also of the moon. The image of the life-giving goddess is thus degraded by the new patriarchal ruler and she is literally transformed into a monster, represented as either a sea serpent or dragon, only capable of begetting monsters. The water or sea serpent, formerly used as a phallic symbol of the goddess' parthenogenetic power to engender life on her own, becomes in

this new mythology a symbol of the power of the monstrous goddess to cause death. The son-lover is split into two: the 'masculine' hero Marduk who can dissociate himself from Earth and slay her if necessary in order to soar beyond the pull of Earth's matter, and the 'feminine' demon (Kingu) rejected by the hero because he cannot divorce himself from his incestuous mother nor submit to the new law of the patriarchal gods, a point that makes him the ancestor of the serpent of Paradise and of Satan.

Traces of Tiamat's life and death are to be found in Greek mythology, and from it they reverberate down to Christianity. Hesiod's *Theogony* (eighth century BC) narrates how the original couple of god and goddess, Ouranus (heaven) and Gaia (earth), beget not only the Titans but also an assorted number of monsters, the Cyclops and the Giants, all of whom are mainly embodiments of the natural elements. Yet another group of apocryphal legends narrates how Gaia, the Earth goddess, breeds a son (Pontus, the sea wave) by herself, a son who becomes her lover. This incestuous liaison between the Earth goddess and her son-lover in their Greek incarnation is, once more, the origin of a brood of monsters divided in different generations, among whom Cetus, the gigantic sea serpent killed by Perseus and herself the mother of the three Gorgons (including Medusa, another of Perseus' victims), can be found.

Cetus has much in common with Tiamat and becomes later an image that evolves beyond its Greek context, appearing in later Christian iconography as simply the sea monster or 'cetos'. 'Cetos' is the Greek word for 'whale', hence the root of the word cetacean, used to describe a class of sea mammals, but it is also the word used in the Bible to name the giant fish that swallows Jonah, presumably an incarnation of the Babylonian Tiamat. As John Boardman (1987: 84) notes, the form, personality, identity and function of the 'cetos' change much from one representation to the other but its diverse images have answered "the iconographic needs of other artists called upon to express visually some otherworldly denizen of the deep, to act in myth, or to threaten gods, heroes, men, or, at the last trump, a selection of mankind," for two millennia and for cultures as diverse as the Celtic and the Hindu, among many others. In time, Tiamat was

transformed through the intermediate stage of her 'cetos' image into the source for the dragon killed in Christian imagery either by the archangel St. Michael or by St. George. The latter is a saint whose legend was actually born of the adaptation for Christianity of the myth of the hero's combat with the monster, specifically of the myth narrating Perseus' confrontation with the sea serpent Cetus that threatened Andromeda's life. The Earth goddess as a dragon symbolizing wisdom is a familiar figure in the mythology of the Far East, but she has certainly also inspired the many imaginary monsters populating the seas and feared by seafarers even at the time when Columbus set sail to America. Later, when the exploration of the Earth proved there were no such monsters, Tiamat abandoned the territory of myth and legend to survive in fiction, where she can still be found, as I will show later in this chapter.

The monster slain by the hero in Greek myths is usually unique and seems to exist exclusively "to offer potential heroes the occasion to prove their heroic mettle" (Blanckenhagen, 1987: 85). The solitary monsters of myth and the imaginary tribes of monsters that later become the bases for the Plinian races (see section 1.1.2.) share a great proximity with their geographical environment. The land (or the sea if that is the case) engenders its own particular kind of monster as in the archaic myths, an idea that stresses the connection between mother Earth and her monstrous children. In Greek myth, the monsters are found at specific geographical locations: thus, Thebes is threatened by its enigmatic guardian the Sphinx, whereas Odysseus encounters among others the monsters Scylla and Charybdis guarding a strait he must cross in his voyage. In any case, it is also important to remember that the monsters of Greek myth may also be the hero's counterparts in another sense: the hero is born of the union of a god or a goddess with a mortal, that is to say, he represents humanity reaching for immortality; in contrast, the monster may be born from the unnatural union of woman and animal and it represents the degradation of humankind. The Cretan Minotaur, born to King Minos' wife Pasiphaé and a bull (an animal that had symbolized the power of the goddess' son-lover to renew life in ancient Cretan religion) is the best known instance.

Apart from being an occasion to prove the hero's mettle, the monsters also represent a conundrum for the hero, an enigma that has to be deciphered in order to be destroyed, something which becomes literal in the case of Oedipus' killing of the Sphinx. The monster posits a challenge that hinders the way of the hero towards his ultimate goal, usually fame, though the hero's combat with the monster is hardly ever the main adventure. In fact, the monsters seemingly act as signposts that mark the hero's way towards fame and immortality. In some cases, it seems that the function of the monster is also to remind the hero of the power of the gods to punish mortals and gods alike with the loss of their natural body: the Gorgon Medusa slain by Perseus was in fact a beautiful demi-goddess who was tragically transformed into a monster because she had had sex with the god Poseidon disobeying Athena's injunction.

It is important to notice that the main heroes of Greek myth - Theseus, Jason, Herakles, Odysseus, Perseus - cannot succeed with the sole help of their masculine cunning and courage: they need further aid from the deeper instinctual levels of the psyche characteristically personified as female, incarnated in the figures of heroines such as Medea, Ariadne, Circe (Baring and Cashford, op. cit.: 294) or in those of the goddesses that protect the heroes, frequently Athena or Aphrodite. From this point of view, the Greek hero appears to be a new incarnation of the goddess' son-lover, although the relationship is split now into two: the hero enjoys the protection of a surrogate 'mother' (a goddess subordinated to the father god Zeus) and the company of the human woman who is his (often betrayed) bride. At any rate, the heroes of Greek myth have little in common with the wave of Anglo-Saxon superheroes that appear at the beginning of the twentieth century. In contrast to the wandering heroes involved in many encounters with monsters and in many affairs with women of Greek myth, twentieth-century heroes tend to be more chaste - even sexually dubious like Superman - and are often haunted by the image of a succession of villainous archenemies in relationships that often seem homoerotic. Women play in the new myths an even more secondary role, more similar to Andromeda's - literally the reward Perseus receives for killing Cetus - than to Athena's or Ariadne's. The contemporary superheroes are popular

incarnations of the Nietzschean superman and symbols of imperialistic and nationalistic power rather than men with a tragic sense of fate. The monsters are still now the heroes' *raison d'être* but the gods have been replaced by a Manichaeian morality very far from the Greek idea of fate.

The monsters of myth and the idea of monstrosity per se were of no interest for the Greek philosophers, yet natural monsters, that is to say, genetically defective animals and humans, attracted the attention of Aristotle. In his treatise *The Generation of Animals* (fourth century BC) Aristotle describes natural monsters or 'terata' as the result of accidents occurred in the process of generation. In his misogynistic view, woman was but a vessel in which man's seed reproduced itself, so that any failure to replicate the father's image from the birth of daughters to that of 'terata' had to be attributed to the mother. The idea that women only contributed the womb to the process of forming a new human being persisted for centuries and so did the attribution to the mother of the child's possible defects. Empedocles blamed woman's unbound imagination and her inability to control the emotions awakened by the sight of impressive images for the birth of the monstrous child; in his view, the 'terata' reproduced undesirable images that had impressed the mother's weak imagination and had thus erased the genetic contribution of the father (Huet, op. cit.: 1- 5).

Even though men like Aristotle were not fond of studying the monsters of myth, in fact the misogyny of the Greek mythological explanation for the birth of the monster was replicated, as can be seen, by no less misogynistic proto-scientific theories about the causes of abnormal births of monstrous babies. The origin of imaginary and natural monsters had been attributed to woman by men who had kept for themselves either the role of the mythical monster slayer or that of the scientist. Courage, intelligence and reason defined as 'masculine' attributes were thus aligned against the chaotic, even evil, female monstrous power to create life. This situation was to erase from the collective memory the existence of the Earth goddess and to lay the foundations for an association between monstrosity and woman that is beginning to be contested only recently.

1.1.2. The Mythical Monster of Literature and the Plinian Races

The transition of the monster of Greek myth to later cultures begins with the dissociation of Greek mythology from its religious context, a process that, according to Richard Buxton (1994: 51), became definitively fixed in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (9 AD). Buxton stresses the fact that mythical images including those of monsters were transmitted in Greece through the oral retelling of the myths but that they were also ubiquitous in coins, pottery, paintings, sculpture and architectural decoration representing scenes from the myths. The myths were, thus, from the beginning a source of endless inspiration for artists in both the literary field (in oral and later written form) and the visual arts (first religious, later profane). Paradoxically, the early presence of the monster of Greek myth in the arts eased its passage into the domain of 'pure' art once Greek religion was lost.

In fact, the image of the monster can only be understood as the product of a constant interaction between language and images, the sacred and the profane. In order to understand how the monster evolves from myth and religion into art it is essential to stress the significant difference between the decontextualised myth as it appears in the arts of the cultures that borrow it from Greece - and for which the myth lacks a sacred dimension - and the myth as it was in the context of Greek religion. In its passage from religion to the art of other cultures the myth is literally profaned, made unfit for belief, and the monster is partly or totally deprived of its original mythological, ritualistic and religious meaning. The myths narrating the confrontations of heroes and monsters persist in the culture of the Western world first, because they refer back to archetypes emanating from the collective unconscious - which evolves with history - and, second, because the imaginary monster is perceived as the interface between art and belief, and also, in psychological terms, between the conscious and the unconscious. Linked or not to a particular religious cult, the enigmatic iconography of the monsters appears to *mean something*, something rooted in a transcendent reality beyond art that the contemplation of the artistic object may help reach. Gilbert Lascaut (1973: 20 - 21) speaks of 'm forms' in reference to the monsters of religious art that combine appealing aesthetic values with an intriguing dimension that inspires awe and a

religious sense. These must be distinguished from the natural monsters or 'terata', who attract the morbid gaze of the onlooker, and from the monsters at the margins of religious art, whose function is to please the eye (mental or physical) with the evidence of the richness of the human imagination.

Since the monster's body as represented in religious art - the 'm forms' - can signify the existence of a supernatural world beyond the natural world and beyond the world of pure aesthetic values, it is obvious that the monster has an enormous potential within religious iconography. This is not confined to polytheistic religions grounded on myth: Christianity itself did not miss the productive association of the monster with the Devil. Before the enigmatic image of the gargoyle decorating a Gothic cathedral or a painting of St. Michael slaying the dragon that represents Satan, the believer and the non-believer alike are meant to feel wonder in the double sense of aesthetic admiration for the horrific and of psychological uncertainty in the face of the monstrous. The monster of religious art challenges the believer to consider what ultimate intention may move a divine creator capable of creating monsters; the non-believer is indirectly invited to consider why the existence of the supernatural domain where the monsters thrive, Hell, seems more perceptible for Christianity than that of Heaven.

Yet not only the imaginary monster of pagan or Christian iconography connotes the existence of a supernatural world. In fact, the imaginary monster came to share part of its cultural domain with the natural monster. The 'terata', which were for the Greeks nothing but accidents of natural generation, later became portents for the Romans, prodigies that showed in a mysterious way the gods' intentions. The Romans' 'monstra' are messages from the gods that both admonish mortals ('monere', the Latin root of the word monster means 'to warn') and that are worth showing ('monstrare' means in Latin 'showing') for the sense of awe and wonder they inspire. From this point of view, the apparent exploitation of the 'monstra' in the American freak show of the nineteenth century appears to be a belated profane version of the Roman sacred view of the prodigy. The spectator of the freak show satisfied his or her curiosity but also indulged in

experiencing the fear of the unknown in the presence of human beings whose bodies had been seemingly shaped not by sheer accident but by God's strange designs. The fear of what cannot be understood, which informs man's attitude towards the natural and the imaginary monster, is no doubt the fear of an enigmatic dimension of life outside normality only glimpsed through the body of the monster.

Apart from influential ideas about the mythical monster and the natural monster, Greco-Roman antiquity also legated to the Middle Ages the notion of the Plinian races. On the basis of Homer, Ctesias (early fifth century BC), Megasthenes (fourth century BC), and the apocryphal "Letter of Alexander to Aristotle on the Wonders of India", the Roman Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) included in his *Natural History* an exhaustive description of the imaginary monstrous races believed to populate faraway regions of the Earth. In the ethnocentric panorama of ancient Greece, the other races - the 'barbarians' - were imagined as different species of monsters shaped by the particular geographical environment where they lived, returning to the old idea of the Earth as a breeder of monsters. The tales of travellers professing to have seen these strange races, passed off as genuine accounts of the reality of the world, were, however, soon parodied by writers such as the Greek Lucian of Samosata (125 - 192 AD) whose fantasies *True History* and *Icaromenipus* were the first to narrate the encounters of space voyagers with alien races populating the moon. Lucian de Samosata's work, a fantasy populated by monsters outside the domain of myth, has been hailed as the ancestor of contemporary science fiction, though its influence was only felt from 1634 onwards when it was translated into English, anticipating the vogue for imaginary space voyages such as those of the French writer Cyrano de Bergerac (1657, *Voyage dans la Lune*).

The original races described by Pliny grew in number throughout the Middle Ages as more and more bizarre traits were ascribed to them, thanks to, rather than despite, the tales of travellers. The Plinian races can be seen in numerous illustrations of medieval books and in many medieval maps, populating the abundant patches of 'terra incognita' and the unexplored margins of the

Earth. Curiously enough, the Plinian races persisted in the geographical imagination of medieval man even when actual encounters with non-white races had taken place. Travellers - pilgrims, Crusaders, tradesmen - wrote abundantly about what they saw but either because they feared to contradict the authority of venerated texts or for other reasons, the illusion that the people they met were actually members of the strange races persisted even against the grain of the evidence provided by their own eyes. Like the horrific sea monsters, the Plinian races survived the first wave of imperialist conquest of other lands inaugurated by Columbus in 1492 and continued to be a fundamental part of the worldview of most people until the eighteenth century when they definitively passed into the domain of fiction and were no longer literally believed in. John Friedman (*op. cit.*: 24) justifies this state of matters with an argument that could also satisfactorily explain the appeal of science fiction today and the popular belief in the actual existence of alien races:

First, there appears to have been a psychological need for the Plinian peoples. Their appeal to medieval men was based on such factors as fantasy, escapism, delight in the exercise of the imagination, and - very important - fear of the unknown. If the monstrous races had not existed, it is likely that people would have created them¹

Friedman suggests in addition that some of the races could be based on the wrong identification of actual ethnic groups such as some African aboriginals, yet on the whole it can be said that medieval travellers seem to have behaved remarkably like modern tourists, who only see what the Michelin guide read at home lets them see. Claude Kappler (*op. cit.*: 115) ironically quips that "la rencontre avec les monstres reste une pierre de touche de l'authenticité d'une expérience de voyage: qui n'a pas vu de monstres n'a pas voyagé!" This could explain why man's first voyage to the moon in 1969 was such a disappointing event for many, and why so many people still believe

¹Friedman also includes in his book a complete - and certainly amusing - description of the Plinian races (pp. 9-21). Among others, Friedman mentions the Amyctyrae ("unsociable"), a race which "has a lower lip - or sometimes an upper - that protrudes so far that it can serve as an umbrella against the sun" (*ibid.*: 9), the Astomi ("mouthless") who live in India, are hairy all over and live by smell, eating nothing, the Cynocephali or "dog-head" who also live in India and communicate by barking, the Panotii ("all-ears"), whose ears reach to their feet and serve as blankets, the Pygmies, and the Sciopods ("shadow-foot") of India who are one-legged and "spend their days lying on their backs protecting their heads from the sun with a single great foot" (*ibid.*: 18).

it never took place: there were no monsters to be seen on the TV screen.

Ironically, the contemporary descendants of the Plinian races imagined by countless science-fiction writers following the example set by Jules Verne's (1828 - 1905) and H.G. Wells' (1866 - 1946) pioneering scientific romances may have pre-empted the need for space travel. Since the alien monsters are seemingly not to be found anywhere in the Solar System, humankind seems resigned to discovering them in fiction, though this does not mean that belief in them has been completely lost. Novels and films often explain the inevitably outlandish morphology of the extraterrestrial races on the basis of fanciful pseudoscientific Darwinian theories about the influence of the environment in the evolution of the extraterrestrial races, which seems to be but an updated version of the old idea justifying the anatomy of the Plinian monsters on the basis of their natural environment. The many testimonies of UFO sightings and of abductions by extraterrestrials, together with scientists' serious search for intelligent life elsewhere in the universe, prove that the Plinian races have not been fully integrated into the domain of fiction and that they still inform an important part of mankind's living imagination within the current mythical and scientific paradigms.

A preoccupation that emerged in relation to the Plinian races after the rise of Christianity was what place they had to be allocated within God's creation. St. Augustine (sixth century AD) devoted Book 16 of *The City of God* to arguing that far from being accidents of nature, as Aristotle proposed, or failures of God's power to control his creations, the natural monsters and the monstrous races could only be part of God's enigmatic plan of creation and should be respected for that reason. Unlike the Greeks and the Romans, who practised infanticide in order to eliminate the 'terata', Christians abhor such practice, which forced medieval theologians to consider why monstrous children were born at all, how they fit within the master plan of God's creation and whether they owned a soul that could be worthy of salvation. The theological reflection on monstrous children was extrapolated to the monstrous races: St. Augustine concluded that both were human and worthy of salvation, a 'normal abnormality' of which only God could know the

intention. This sympathetic attitude and the evangelical interest in their spiritual welfare was challenged by a second negative point of view: "rather than merely manifesting the variety of the Creation, the monstrous races were seen as cursed and degenerate, a warning to other men against pride and disobedience" (Friedman, op.cit.: 88). Homiletic writers such as Paulinus of Nola associated the black Ethiopians - originally one of the Plinian races - with sin, explaining that the Ethiopians "were burned black not by the sun but by vices and sin" (ibid: 65). The image of the monstrous human Other started connoting, thus, not simply difference but inferiority deserving only condemnation, a point essential to an understanding of the tensions between racist colonialism and the evangelical message preached by those missionaries who were the faithful followers of St. Augustine's humane view of the other races.

1.1.3. *The Demonization of the Monster in Christianity*

As I have already argued, the monstrous goddess Tiamat is the foundation on which the development of the iconography of monstrosity used by Judaism and later Christianity lies. She generated *The Old Testament's* images of monstrosity as the 'cetos': Jonah's whale, but also Leviathan and Behemoth derive from her. In *The New Testament*, Tiamat's image as a dragon is taken by John in the book of *Revelation* (circa 70 AD) and interpreted as the Beast defeated by St. Michael. The Beast, an incarnation of Satan or the Devil, is according to the *Apocrypha*, a fallen angel who dared disobey God (the version later followed by Milton) or, alternatively, one of the Nephilim - a race of angels - punished by God for having had sexual intercourse with women. I have already noted that the Devil seems to be the Christian incarnation of the old goddess' son-lover, a version of masculinity fallen because it cannot reject the materialism embodied by the mother goddess. The darkness, chaos and evil associated with night and the goddess become the domain of the masculine Devil and she is degraded to the point of becoming a secondary product of God's creation of man, Eve, born not of the clay with which Adam is fashioned by the father god, but from Adam's rib.

The Devil enters Judaism from Mazdaism, a religion developed by Zoroaster (sixth century BC) in Persia. Zoroaster preached a view of the universe based on the eternal confrontation between the twin opposite principles of light (represented by Ahura Mazda) and darkness (Ahriman). According to Zoroaster's religion, the final victory of Ahura Mazda over the reign of darkness could only be secured with the believer's unconditional support of the principle of good. Zoroaster's teachings, which were available to the Jews exiled in Babylon through his book *Avesta*, can be said to fit in neatly within the much older Semitic Babylonian myths about the deposition of the goddess. Ahura Mazda would represent the patriarchal Aryan-Semitic sky god, whereas Ahriman might well be the goddess, associated by patriarchy with darkness and evil. However, Ahriman is not said to be specifically female. In fact, the figure it inspires within Judaism, Satan ('the adversary'), is understood to be masculine. As I see it, this is one of the most intriguing points in the patriarchal construction of evil: even though evil is initially identified with femaleness in figures such as Tiamat, a parallel trend seems to run by which evil is identified with maleness or with a form of deviant masculinity more or less closely associated to femininity. Logic dictates that Satan should be female in Christianity, which lacks a female powerful entity; yet Satan is unmistakably male despite his association with women, beginning with Eve herself. It seems to me that the pull of the archaic myth of the heroic hunter's combat with the beast - a myth of which the confrontation between Marduk and Tiamat derives - resurfaced in the crucial process of the construction of Satan. God's eternal adversary could only be envisaged by the patriarchal culture that created him as a similarly powerful - male - deity of darkness.

The myth of the fall of man narrated in *The Old Testament* explains how evil first appeared. Yet, in this myth the Devil has not yet taken the shape of the apocalyptic Beast. In fact, there is no mention in *Genesis* of the Devil, but simply of the serpent, understood to be Satan himself only when Satan played a more prominent part in *The New Testament*. The serpent is, however, the symbol of the fallen goddess' own 'phallus', the symbol of her independence to create life on her own, rather than a masculine phallus. Eve, whose name means the 'mother of all

living', is herself a degraded version of the Earth goddess deprived of her power to give life; Eve is so far from the goddess herself that she even fails to recognise the serpent as her natural ally. Eve's temptation and the sin she commits when disobeying and tempting Adam to eat the forbidden fruit are the excuse patriarchy used to prompt the final surrender of the goddess. The patriarchal sky God initially separated the oblivious Eve (the goddess) from her power to create, symbolized by the serpent; when the serpent attempted a reunion, which must liberate both from God's rule and must also persuade Adam to abandon the domain of his own father, God reacts by punishing Eve with her total subordination to Adam. Adam himself is punished for having sided with woman (or the goddess) rather than with God; Adam's resentment of God's rejection is ultimately, the reason why misogyny arises: his fear of not deserving God's love leads him and the patriarchy he represents to hate woman. The Earth mother and the human mother who represents her are consequently degraded to the level of matter: interestingly, both 'mother' and 'matter' derive from the same Latin word, 'mater'. The serpent sentenced by God to crawl on its belly and to be the eternal enemy of woman's sons signifies woman's earthly nature, which is incapable of rising spiritually above the Earth's material world. When the serpent is finally associated with Satan, it comes to signify man's unmanly (or feminine) side: that attached to materialism and woman, which is incapable of soaring far from the earth's material grip - also from women's - towards the spiritual domain of the patriarchal sky god.

From the thirteenth century onwards, the cultural climate of Europe was invaded by the demons imported from the East possibly by the Crusaders and by a generalisation of the presence of Satan, who had actually played a rather minor role in the construction of Christianity. The Devil and Hell are actually elements that enter first Judaism and then Christianity via the popular imagination rather than from the sacred scriptures, despite the influence of Mazdaism. Before the Middle Ages, the imaginary monsters, including the Plinian races, were, basically, prodigies which had a place in nature, no matter how bizarre they may seem to us. The Plinian races shared a cultural space with the 'terata', as I have shown, and also with the fabulous beasts

of the medieval bestiaries, which were rather fanciful representations of the animals seen by the medieval travellers. Gothic cathedrals were also rich with the imagery of all kinds of monsters represented in sculptures, painting and stained-glass windows. Yet, in the late Middle Ages, the Devil, Claude Kappler writes (op.cit.: 254) was marked as a monster, while "le monstre se fait diabolique aussi souvent que possible et la vie s'imprègne d'un monstreux-diabolique omniprésent qui s'impose par une sorte d'évidence." The representations of the Devil as a monster proliferated while woman and the Devil converged once again in this demonisation of life around the fifteenth century, a period of renewed misogyny.

The enduring cult of the Virgin Mary compensated somehow for the loss of the old goddess but after a period in which the cult of Mary was particularly strong (the twelfth and thirteenth centuries), the Church launched a formidable attack against women, centred on the figure of the witch, which was later complemented by the Protestant rejection of the worship of the Virgin Mary. Two Dominican priests, Sprenger (himself a devoted admirer of the Virgin Mary) and Kraemer were empowered by the Pope to set up a commission of enquiry into witchcraft, from which the classical handbook of the Inquisition, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, emerged in 1487, going through nineteen editions in three hundred years, as long as the Inquisition survived. The witch was probably an independent, eccentric, wise or simply unpopular woman said to derive her alleged supernatural powers from sexual intercourse with the Devil. The Virgin Mary was, in contrast, a figure too close to the goddess for the comfort of those who exclusively venerated the patriarchal father god. The attack against both figures is somehow complementary: Catholics and Protestants alike feared the witch because she appeared to have been empowered by her contact with a male supernatural entity; the Protestants denied the status of the Virgin Mary as a woman who had been granted the power to make her son divine by God and reduced her to the level of ordinary womanhood. The point in both cases was to reject the powerful woman regardless of whether her power was evil, as in the witch's case, or good, as in the Virgin's, and to distinguish between two male sources of power: one superior, God's, because it does not need woman; the

other inferior, Satan's, because it uses woman's willing collaboration to lead men astray, away from God's spiritual dominion.

Several main trends converge in the medieval and late medieval representation of the Devil. In medieval art the Devil was often represented as the apocalyptic Beast: red eyes, a red mouth with huge fangs and tongue, fur or scales varying in coloration from green to black, horns, bat wings unlike the bird wings of the angels, a long tail, a forked tongue, cloven feet and always a muscular body that seems sometimes reptilian and sometimes human. However, representations of the Devil as the apocalyptic Beast are mixed with representations of him as the serpent or the dragon derived from Tiamat, especially whenever the Devil is represented as St. Michael's victim. Another typical image of the Devil is that associated with the image of the Greek god Pan and with the image of the satyr; the representation of the Devil as a horned satyr, half-human half-goat, is perhaps the Devil's most popular image. However, the images are extremely mixed. In an exhibition of Italian Renaissance and Baroque images of angels, I came across an image of St. Michael killing a beast, or Devil, which was a typical horned satyr from the waist up and a two-legged sea serpent (if that is conceivable) from the waist down.

Yet, since Satan is above all, the tempter, and since woman has been traditionally seen as a temptress because of Eve's sin, the image of woman has been demonised and woman has come to represent the monstrosity associated in the late Middle Ages with the Devil. In the misogynistic view of the late Middle Ages woman and the Devil share an uncanny ability to metamorphose that is used to seduce and trap men into sin and damnation (Kappler, op. cit.: 119). Both the metamorphic qualities of the late medieval Devil and the early medieval iconography of the apocalyptic Beast have been inherited by the shape-shifting monsters of the twentieth century, though it can also be said that the passion for transformation attributed to the evil seductress survives in the late twentieth-century universe of the female film star and the female top-model. Seduction has ceased being a demonic pursuit, we live now in a hedonistic world in which everybody - male or female - is expected to constantly transform his or her image

so as to result attractive. Yet the figure of the demonic woman has not been completely lost. Her last popular incarnation was the 1920s and 1930s screen vamp, herself the immediate heiress of the demonic woman of Victorian Decadence. The screen vamp still endures though she is now a figure positioned halfway between the misogynistic representation of women and the wish-fulfilment fantasies of women themselves. Even though the Devil may have receded to the background as belief ebbs, the image of the powerful woman is still given demonic undertones in the late twentieth century. Nonetheless, the witch and the femme fatale are no longer derided images of woman: in fact, some women are using these demonic or pseudo-demonic images to gain popularity or to subvert the patriarchal disempowerment of women.

The split of woman between the demonic temptress and the virginal angel - the witch and Mary, Eve and Dante's Beatrice - shows that extreme misogyny and its counterpart, exacerbated idealism, actually refer to man's split psyche rather than to woman's reality. The myth of Faustus, especially in Christopher Marlowe's version (1604), makes temptation and damnation an issue between two males, Faustus and Mephistopheles, in which woman plays a minor role. The serpent that tempted Eve, Faustus says, "may be saved, but not Faustus" (V, ii, 40). Faustus, the man beyond salvation is tempted not so much by the Devil as by his own lust for knowledge and also by his lust for Helen of Troy's silent beauty, her silence being a sign that woman has become simply an empty icon in man's confrontation with himself. In fact, by rebelling against the fact that choosing knowledge means choosing damnation, Faustus follows the path taken by the serpent, that is to say, by the goddess, against the patriarchal God's overzealous monopoly of wisdom. Man's real adversary turns out to be God himself and not the Devil Mephistopheles, who can only tempt those men already tempted by their own aspirations to surpass God's wisdom.

Apart from the iconography of monstrosity of religious art, the representation of the 'terata' and the Plinian races, the centuries between the birth of Christ and the emergence of the modern world legate to the twentieth-century other images of monstrosity, mainly derived from literature and painting. The pagan world of the Nordic sagas and Christianity become fused in the Old

English epic *Beowulf* (eight century AD) in which the ancient goddess and her son-lover reappear as the evil monster Grendel and his mother. The exaltation of the heroic monster slayer is replaced in *Beowulf* by a grimmer worldview, as the hero gains with his exploits an uncertain glory that leaves a bitter aftertaste - a motif constantly exploited in recent fiction. The epic world of the Nordic sagas is also behind the work that made fantasy literature respectable in the twentieth century, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954 - 55), and behind the many novels derived from the popularisation of Tolkien's work in the 1960s, especially the 'sword and sorcery' subgenre.

Beowulf itself inspired John Gardner to write his novel *Grendel* (1972), which, as its title indicates, retells the epic from the point of view of the ferocious monster. He is presented as a victim of a cruel world molded by his unstoppable, instinctive urge to kill and by men's brutal idea of heroism. Instead of poetry exalting the values of the patriarchal warrior, *Grendel* offers a reflection on the meaning of cruelty, suggesting that the real monster is not the predator hunted down by the warrior, but the warrior thirsting for fame and glory. Thus, in *Grendel* Gardner reverses the traditional values of epic poetry, questioning hero worship in patriarchal societies and denouncing with this allegory the false sense of heroism exploited by the American government in Vietnam. In a sense, Gardner's novel is the first epic narrative to openly side with the monster after Milton's unconscious support of the Devil's party in *Paradise Lost*, as Blake saw it. Yet, unlike Milton's Satan, Gardner's Grendel has no moral grandeur whatsoever, he is a thinking predator who elicits sympathy and disgust in equal measure. Gardner can be said to return thus to the archaic world of the myth of the hunter after thousands of years of having listened to the same narrative of the victorious confrontation of the hero with the monster. His novel discloses that the hero always won because the monster had been silenced.

This survey of the demonisation of the monster cannot be complete without a reference to the text about Christian Hell that has inspired most illustrators: Dante's *Inferno*, the most popular section of his *Divine Comedy* (1304- 1321). The fact that Dante's description of Purgatory and Heaven have ceased inspiring artists whereas his description of Hell still does - as, for instance, in

David Fincher's film *Seven* (1995) in which the psychopathic monster is a fervent reader of Dante's *Inferno* - is in itself a telling comment on the immense appeal that the idea of a monstrous domain populated by evil demons has for the human imagination. In comparison, the iconography of Heaven, despite the many images of angels produced by artists throughout the centuries and despite their current vogue in the USA, appears to be tinged by a certain banality, perhaps a bland sentimentality, that seems to prevent it from carrying as much forceful meaning as that of Hell.

Even today, one of the most important sources of inspiration for contemporary iconographers of Hell and the monster is the work of Hieronimus Bosch (1450-1516). His carnivalesque, already ironic use of the monster and his bizarre view of Hell and its monsters of dislocated anatomy have found their most genuine inheritors in the work of surrealist painters such as Salvador Dalí. However, unlike Dalí, who portrays the monster as an almost pathological extension of the artist's soul within a Romantic tradition, Bosch belongs to a different artistic paradigm in which the artists' monster cannot be properly read as a product of his personal psychology but as an image that carries a transpersonal significance grounded on religion and on its links with all the previous iconography of monstrosity. Since we are no longer familiar with the iconography of Christian Hell, we now see in Bosch's monsters mainly signs of the artist's enigmatic personality. However, our iconographical blindness should not obscure the fact that Bosch's main intention was not to portray the monsters of his own soul but monsters that could be 'recognised' by all his contemporaries as those of Christian Hell.

1.1.4. *The Humanisation of the Monster: From Caliban to the Gothic Villain*

The Tempest (1611-12), one of Shakespeare's last plays, includes in its cast of characters the monster Caliban and the spirit Ariel. To a certain extent, *The Tempest* can be read as yet another version of the deposition of the archaic Earth goddess and her son-lover by a patriarchal god: the death of the witch Sycorax leaves her heir Caliban, the offspring of her liaison with a devil, unprotected before the arrival of the magician Prospero, who takes possession of Caliban's island

and enslaves both him and the spirit Ariel. Prospero attributes to Sycorax the power to control the moon (V, i, 269-271) and although Caliban does not go so far, he tells Stephano and Trinculo how his mother had taught him to worship the moon (II, ii, 137). The implication is that the power of the woman-witch is linked to that of the Earth goddess and her nocturnal domain and that Caliban is not fit to enter Prospero's less materialistic, more spiritual domain of masculine wisdom because he is too close to the subversive model of feminine wisdom represented by his mother. Actually, the many references to Caliban's materialism, his incapacity to rise above his native earth and the fact that he might be the son of earth and the sea (half-fish, half-man, as Trinculo describes him, (II, ii, 24)) put Caliban in the long tradition of monstrous sons of the forgotten goddess Tiamat. Caliban can be said to be a monster not only because he is said to be misshapen but also because by alienating Prospero's initial moderate sympathy with the obscure episode of Miranda's attempted rape, he misses the chance to find a surrogate father that can guide him in the domain of sanctioned masculinity.

Despite his constant shape-shifting and his non-human nature, nobody regards Ariel as a monster. This is due, first, to the fact that Ariel belongs to the implicitly masculine world of the spirit - hence his bearing an angel's name - while Caliban appears to be a monstrous emanation of the feminine domain of matter. Second, what distinguishes Ariel from Caliban is an issue of capital importance in the myth of the fall of man, namely, obedience: Ariel, who has refused to carry out the witch's orders, has been deprived of his freedom by Sycorax, but is later released by Prospero to be finally rewarded with his regained freedom for being a good, loyal servant to the magician. In contrast, Caliban, who is faithful to his mother's teachings and memories and refuses to obey the magician, is punished with the loss of his domain and with slavery, especially after the episode in which he tries to organize a blundering coup d'état against Prospero's tyranny. Ariel's reward and Caliban's punishment suggest that the same quality of loyalty can be read differently by the patriarchal god represented by the magician Prospero; Prospero's patriarchal rule rather than the extraordinary nature of Ariel and Caliban ultimately determines who the monster is.

The few indications in the text about Caliban's physical appearance are confusing enough so as to have been diversely interpreted in each staging of the play. Prospero describes Caliban as "a freckled whelp, hag-born - not honoured with / a human shape" (I.ii, 281-82). In any case, despite Prospero's disgust, the feelings that this grotesque monster awaken are diverse and range from the compassion felt by Miranda, the only woman in the cast, to the mockery with which the others receive him, especially Trinculo and Stephano. Be that as it may, he is not a horrific monster that elicits fear from the onlooker. To further complicate the visualization of Caliban's body as Shakespeare conceived it, Miranda refers to him as a member of a "vile race" (I, ii, 358), which leads us to the matter of how Caliban is related to the Plinian races and, by extension, to colonialism.

At a given point, Gonzalo narrates to Alonso his encounter with Prospero and his daughter, whom he takes for members of some fabulous race of islanders; to reinforce his argument he tells Alonso about the increasing number of reports brought by travellers proving the actual existence of strange races, such as that of the men whose heads stand in their breast (III, iii, 48), that is to say, the Blemmyae, one of the Plinian races. Even though Shakespeare wrote at a time when the exploration of the globe was well under way, the belief in the Plinian races was still strong and *The Tempest* is not the only play by Shakespeare in which they are alluded to. Othello's tales about his own encounter with the strange races are so fascinating for Desdemona that she cannot help falling in love with this experienced, seasoned traveller (*Othello*, I, iii, 128-170). Among others, Othello has met the Plinian Anthropophagi or Cannibals, whom Columbus thought to have discovered in the native inhabitants of the central islands of America, placed on a sea he called Caribbean. This denomination suggests that Caliban's name is but a metathesis of the word Cannibal, from which Caribbean derives.

This interpretation has led critics to identify Caliban with the native Americans dispossessed of their lands by the colonialists, despite the implausibility that the paths of the Algerian Sycorax and the Neapolitan Prospero would cross in an Atlantic and not a Mediterranean

island. Yet, in the 1960s and 1970s Caliban was in a certain sense vindicated as a symbol of the oppression of coloured people by their white masters under colonial rule and was often played by actors of races other than white. The paradox of this reading of Caliban is that it totally reverses the disempowered position of Caliban under Prospero's imperialistic rule. Caliban, the monster designed to set off Miranda's purity and, hence, to elicit contempt from the audience, has received little by little more and more sympathy, finally becoming a symbol of colonialist oppression.

The identification of Caliban with the Caribbean has not been, of course, the only interpretation of Caliban's physical appearance since the seventeenth century.¹ He was then seen mainly as a monster in the moral sense of the word: a savage of grotesque physical appearance inspired only by vice and opposing the beneficial forces of civilization represented by Prospero. The eighteenth century saw Caliban as a kind of fallen noble savage at a point when the Plinian races were giving way to the idealised noble savage of the Enlightenment; accordingly, more emphasis was put on Caliban's potential virtues on the grounds of his final acknowledgement of the mistake committed in trying to depose Prospero. During the Romantic period *The Tempest* was re-examined by some from the point of view of the monster - perhaps because of the influence of Milton's *Paradise Lost* - and Prospero was first interpreted as Caliban's unfair oppressor, a view still popular today. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Caliban was often represented as the Darwinian missing link, bespeaking fears of involution and miscegenation. Later there came, as I have noted, Caliban's identification with the native Americans conquered by white Europeans.

However, one of the most recent representations of Caliban - in Peter Greenaway's beautiful film *Prospero's Books* (1991) - presents the monster as a beautiful dancing satyr (fully human except for the tiny horns sprouting from his head) in a role played by dancer Michael Clark. Unlike all the other characters, this naked, supple, elegant Caliban cannot seemingly cease touching the ground as he moves, which recalls, once more, his association with matter, his mother and the

¹I am following here Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan's (1991) account of the evolution the image of Caliban.

feminine. Shakespeare's enigmatic monster is nonetheless used by Greenaway to challenge traditional ideas about monstrosity, within a line followed by many other contemporary artists. Caliban, the precursor of the "countless beauty-loving monsters including the Hunch-back of Notre Dame and the Phantom of the Opera as well as the Creature from the Black Lagoon and Kong" (Hawkins, op. cit.: 122), becomes in Greenaway's film a narcissistic monster himself: rather than Miranda (whose name means the one to be admired, or looked at), Caliban is the one who fascinates the spectator's gaze.

Following perhaps the trend set by John Gardner's *Grendel*, a recent novel has also given the monster Caliban a voice. Tad Williams' *Caliban's Hour* (1994) retakes Shakespeare's story twenty years later. It narrates how Caliban traces Prospero and Miranda to their native Italy where he finally confronts her - Prospero is already dead - to tell her his view of the past events involving both and to exact revenge for his ill-treatment with her death. This Caliban is not born a monster, neither physically nor morally, but is made one by Prospero and his daughter. Williams completely reverses the episode of Miranda's attempted rape to transform it into a turning point in Caliban's life: not Miranda but Caliban is the one who loses his innocence when, disgusted by her own attraction towards him, she falsely accuses him of having raped her. Prospero's rejection and the severe beating to which he subjects his servant are the actual reasons why the hitherto happy Caliban becomes a moral and physical monster. Yet his monstrosity does not prevent Miranda's daughter, Giulietta, who has secretly watched the interview between her mother and the visitor, from choosing to elope with him rather than accept the marriage of convenience arranged by her parents. To Giulietta, Caliban's island is a promise of freedom; to Caliban, the chance to possess her body and soul are enough satisfaction for the suffering that Prospero and Miranda caused him.

Williams' novel supposes, thus, that Caliban is finally empowered to populate his island with his and Giulietta's children. In this way he can finally satisfy a desire first arisen with his innocent admiration of Miranda's beauty. Both in Shakespeare's play and in Williams' novel

Caliban's grotesque anatomy encloses in fact a human soul that rebels against the prohibition to enjoy beauty and to reproduce himself, though it has taken almost four hundred years to respond with sympathy to Caliban's demand for love. Two centuries after the first performance of *The Tempest*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) still made a similar point about the injunction put on the nameless monster by his master Victor Frankenstein. Frankenstein awakens the monster's desire for revenge which leads to tragedy not only with his neglect but also with the destruction of the monstrous mate that he is fashioning for his Adam, an act that by which Frankenstein denies his monster the right to reproduce himself in the same way that Prospero denies Caliban's.

The monster's tragedy in Milton *Paradise Lost* (1667), a text which greatly influenced Mary Shelley's novel, is of quite a different sign. Unlike Caliban and Frankenstein's creature, Satan has been born an angel (Lucifer) and not a horrific monster. His tragedy is, therefore, the loss of his status as an angel and not simply his being a monster. Far from being a creature closely linked to matter as Caliban is, Milton's Lucifer is forced to enter for the first time the domain of matter and monstrosity (Chaos or Hell) as a punishment for having disobeyed the masculine, patriarchal rule of God. The horror of the angel robbed of his beauty is a narcissistic type of horror, which shows that man has finally severed the ties binding him to the Earth goddess to enter a new patriarchal paradigm in which two types of masculinity - one evil and disloyal to God, the other good and loyal - are confronted. However, the goddess still survives in Milton's epic as Sin, Satan's own daughter-lover, sprung armed from his own head as Athena sprang from Zeus'. Sin is Eve's monstrous counterpart, for both are born of fathers who create them directly or indirectly in their own image. Yet if Eve is a degraded image of the goddess, Sin is even more degraded. The couple formed by the goddess and her son becomes in Milton's epic the incestuous couple formed by Satan and her daughter; she is, like Tiamat and Gaia, the mother of a brood of monsters, but, unlike her predecessors, Sin plays but a minor role in the confrontation of materialistic with spiritual masculinity. In short, all traces of female power have been finally swept away; what is more, the distance mediating between the male monster and the subordinated female monster allows Milton

to redefine the characteristics traditionally attributed to the Devil. The abjection associated with the female monster gives way, thus, to the aesthetics of the sublime associated with the male monster.

When Satan awakes in Hell signs of his former angelic morphology are still visible - he is winged, armoured and magnificently huge, a veritable titan (*Book 1*, 193-209). Yet his scarred face, faded cheeks, darkened brows and cruel eyes (*Book 1*, 587-612) are no longer those of an angel. They announce the physiognomy of many later Gothic villains, themselves the inspiration for the Byronic hero. Milton's Satan is, with this mixture of imposing and horrific anatomical traits a sublime monster, no longer simply the awe-inspiring apocalyptic beast of medieval iconography, but an enigmatic icon which signifies the survival of the human soul inside the body of the fallen sinner. The human soul concealed in Caliban's freakish body can be glimpsed but momentarily: it is a common soul, moved by desire and selfishness. Yet, the human soul concealed in Satan's titanic body is itself titanic, that is to say, it shows that evil is not banal and petty like Caliban's actions but a genuine match for God's powers. As *Paradise Lost* advances, Satan's personality loses much of its initial rebellious majesty, yet, the impression he produces in *Book 1* lingers on, inviting Milton's reader to consider whether the evil monster can possibly be more alluring than the loyal angels.

Although ideas about the sublime have been mostly likened to the feeling of awe inspired by impressive natural landscapes - the Gothic novel made an extensive use of such motif - since *Paradise Lost* the monster itself is also a source of the sublime, sometimes in conjunction with its environment, sometimes on its own. Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) provided the ideological foundation on which the Gothic novel's visualizing strategies lay and may also be useful to define the sublime monster. In Burke's own words:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the 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; that is, it is productive of the

strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure. (1990:36).

When the ideas about the sublime enter the novel through the Gothic romance, the sublime monster inherited from Milton also enters this literary genre. The fertile union of the novel and the aesthetics of the sublime give birth to a new type of human moral monster, the villain, a figure that still endures in our days and that has somehow displaced the supernatural monsters and the Devil himself. The villain had been already seen on the Jacobean stage in plays such as John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613) but the Gothic novel gives him a moral dimension missing in Jacobean drama. The Gothic villain is a type of monster who does not need an impressive anatomy to manifest his monstrosity: this is innate, inner, human, a moral corruption of the soul that can be glimpsed only through the villain's facial features and the expression of his eyes. What makes him sublime is not, hence, his physical appearance but the enigmatic presence of evil in his soul, for he is not a fallen sinner tempted by an external agent but a person who carries evil in him. With the Gothic novel, the ancient Beast of the hunter myths has finally become a human monster, even more monstrous by virtue of his being a (fallen) human being.

It is important to notice that the imagery of moral monstrosity and the iconography of death of the Gothic novel also marks the final stage of the transition of the monster from religious literature to profane fiction. Victor Sage argues that one of the most important sources of images of horror in the Protestant world dates from the sixteenth century: John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, published in Mary Tudor's reign, led the way in linking Catholicism to the atrocities committed against the Protestants in the popular imagination. Sage further argues that this association of Catholicism with horrific images of violence persisted with the reprinting in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries of Reformation works produced in the sixteenth century, and of other dissenting works produced in the seventeenth century. These reprintings conditioned the availability of popular images in the horror tradition and later provided, nineteenth-century writers with their materials (op. cit.: xvii). Yet, to what extent was the dislike of Catholicism one of the major

driving forces behind the rise of the Gothic novel? According to Sage's hypothesis,

... the rise and currency of literary Gothic is strongly related to the growth of the campaign for Catholic Emancipation from the 1770s onward until the first stage ends temporarily with the Emancipation Act of 1829; but further, that continuance of the horror novel is equally, if not more strongly, related to the subsequent struggles, doctrinal and political, which flared up between Catholic and Protestant throughout the course of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. (ibid.: 28)

This means that the religious imagery used by the Gothic novel is based on a quite radical rejection of Catholicism and of the iconography associated with it. The villain, as happens in Anne Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797) and in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), is frequently a Catholic and still today Catholic iconography is found in many horror films and novels. However, as I see it, even though Gothic fiction depends to a great extent on religious belief - that is to say, it elicits a stronger impression from the reader if s/he is a believer - the Gothic novel also plants the first seeds for the trivialization of belief. This is in part due to the fact that the villain assumes more importance, which means that purely religious issues are displaced to the background while the exploration of the psychology of evil is pushed to the foreground. It cannot be said, on the other hand, that Catholicism is explored in depth in the works of Radcliffe or Lewis, so that it is more accurate to say that the religious imagery appearing in Gothic has become an aesthetic marker for the moral monster, the villain. In any case, a certain aversion against Catholicism - and perhaps against all forms of religious belief regarded as fanatical by average Protestants, raging from Islam fundamentalism to certain sects - still informs the contemporary view of horror and the monster. However, it can be said that the horrific imagery associated to religion rather than the serious discussion of religious tenets is what still attracts the attention of contemporary novelists and film makers.

According to Robert Miles (1993: 51) the visual discourse of the Gothic novel is gendered. He distinguishes between male Gothic and female Gothic. The former is visually dominated by reverie, in which woman appears as a monster of artifice, and which "presuppose a masculine subject dazzled by actual, or self-produced stimuli with a tendency to an eroticization figured

through the female body." In contrast "the aesthetics of the sublime presuppose a female subject-position disciplined through a male presence," a paradoxical willingness on the subject's side to enjoy the superiority of the object. In my own view, it is more appropriate to replace Miles' problematic use of terms such as "female subject-position" by definitions of the sublime and the monster that connote above all, positions of power and powerlessness, likely to be adopted by both men and women. Since the eighteenth century the function of the sublime monster in fiction - no longer a source only of wonder but also of fear - is not simply to provide an excuse to prove the hero's courage and intelligence but to invite readers and audiences to consider the meaning of power, and, above all, of the power to cause death. The sublime monster of the Gothic novel - be it a demonic or evil woman or man, or a non-human being - always puts the onlooker in a position of powerlessness, disciplined by the powerful body of the monster. This is a strategy that is still profusely used today in contemporary Gothic, both film and novel. The gaze of the film-goer on the screen or of the reader's mental eye is ultimately controlled by the artist who uses the monster to determine when we can look and when we cannot, and we submit, on condition that when we are allowed to look the artist has promised to show us the sublime. This is why the monster is invariably associated to a type of narrative derived from Gothic in which suspense - the tension between being or not being allowed to look and the fear of seeing - is essential.

1.1.5. *Romantic Monsters and Decadence: From Frankenstein to Salomé*

The Gothic novel appears at a point when the scientific impulse of the Enlightenment and the imperialist expansion of the European nations have totally destroyed the myth of the Plinian races. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the natural monster has become the object of the new science of teratology, founded by Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772-1844) and his son Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, who coined the word in 1830 (Huet, op. cit.: 108). However, this rationalisation of the body of the natural monster as a scientific object coincides with Mary Shelley's Romantic reflection in her novel *Frankenstein* about patriarchal science's capacity to

engender monsters. Victor Frankenstein's odyssey can be read from many perspectives, but one of the most obvious is that man's usurpation of woman's power to create life can only engender monsters - the god that took over the goddess' power to give life and attributed to her the origin of monsters is thus punished with the horror of his own monstrous creation. Despite the many subsequent interpretations of the image of Frankenstein's monster (reviewed in more detail in Chapter 2), Mary Shelley originally described a creature that is made monstrous by a defective combination of originally beautiful anatomical features. This implies that science (the ultimate knowledge of all the elements) may be enough to create life but not to create beauty: another kind of power - possibly artistic intuition or simply the rules of natural reproduction - is necessary to understand the mechanism of life.

Taking as a cue Milton's Satan and the Gothic villain, the Romantics stressed the uniqueness and humanity of the individualised sublime monster, bringing to the foreground the monster's understanding of his own soul, as Mary Shelley did in her novel. The Byronic hero also contributed to the aesthetic of monstrosity by inspiring John Polidori to create the figure of the literary vampire - his tale "The Vampire" (1819) is apparently based on Byron himself - that haunts English nineteenth-century Gothic literature down to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). The Byronic hero, an ambiguous type of man best described as the 'homme fatale', gradually becomes the 'femme fatale' of late nineteenth century Decadence. Mario Praz (1978 :27) places the birth of this alternative aesthetics of the fascinating monster in the nineteenth century's view of "Horror as a source of delight and beauty" which "ended by reacting on men's actual conception of beauty itself. The Horrid, from being a category of the Beautiful, ended by becoming one of its essential elements, and the 'beautifully horrid' passed by insensible degrees into the 'horribly beautiful.'" The 'horribly beautiful' was assimilated to woman by degrees until the misogynistic representation of women as monsters by the Decadent artists exposed to what extent this aesthetic category had become a sexist tool to fight the New Woman's budding demands of autonomy. While the suffragettes struggled for woman's right to the vote, first rate and second rate male painters were

representing women in postures that suggested that women were unable to stand on their own feet (Dijkstra, 1986), or as horrific monsters. The nymphs with broken backs, the airy weightless women, the sleeping damsels or the dead brides together with the female monsters, mainly vampires (often reinforcing the image of woman in relation to the serpent) and mythological castrating menaces such as Judith and Salomé, were ubiquitous in the art of the end of the century. The monstrous women painted by men like Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1896), Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901), Gustave Moreau (1826-1898), Edvard Munch (1863-1944) and a long list of minor artists signify man's misogynistic horror for woman's power as an independent person capable of feeling desire.

These images may have justified the male onlooker's impression that women are the cause of men's problems, but seen from a female perspective the monstrous women reveal a very different truth: man's inability to cope with the excessive repression of sexuality in the Victorian period is what produced these images of loathsome desire - misogyny then and now can be said to be the result of man's inability to understand his own sexuality. From this perspective, what is truly monstrous is not woman, but man's persistence in seeing woman for what she is not, that is to say, for the monster he sees inside himself when he considers his own sexuality. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) dramatize man's fall into an awareness of his own monstrosity: bodily decadence is the price to pay for the enslavement to vice, caused in its turn by an abnormal, repressed sexuality. Both Jekyll and Gray seek a method - science, magic - to indulge in vice, that is to say, in contact with women through sex, while still keeping their respectable façade. In Stevenson's story this dissociation of the respectable man and the monster inside - the sexual man - is so radical that no woman appears in the text at all, as if her mere presence were enough to dismantle the bachelor Jekyll's pretence of respectability. As I see it, the Decadent artists, Stevenson, Gray, and to a certain extent Stoker, set unwittingly the foundations for an important, radical reversal in the representation of gendered monstrosity: the misogynistic representation of women as monsters

started giving way a century ago to a new representation of men by men as monsters beyond salvation, which may have been ultimately derived from women's representation of the Byronic hero, in characters such as Victor Frankenstein, Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester. This degradation of the Byronic hero into the fallen monster signified the beginning of the decadence of the patriarchal model. The process is still under way and has reached a critical moment in the 1980s and 1990s, when many men are trying to find a middle way between the demands of feminism and those of outmoded patriarchal masculinism.

Not only literature and painting contributed to the production of images of monstrosity for the nineteenth century. Book illustration was also an important source of monstrous iconography, including the work of artists as different as William Blake (1757-1827) and Sir John Tenniel. Blake understood his work as the interaction of the word and the image and produced in his engravings a way of visualizing the text that went far beyond the idea of illustration. His drawings illustrating passages from the Bible - among them some the *Revelation* of St. John - contain appealing images of monstrosity which are, obviously, within a tradition completely different from that to which Tenniel belongs. Tenniel, whose best known work were the drawings he produced to illustrate Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), was one of the most outstanding artists working in the field of children's literature, a field that because of its richness - especially as far as the creation of the new iconography of the monster in the 1980s and 1990s is concerned - deserves by itself a separate study. Other nineteenth-century artists such as the Swiss painter Henri Füssli (1741-1825), a close associate of Blake's, and the French engraver Gustav Doré (1833-1883) who produced splendid illustrations for Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Dante's *Inferno* and the *Bible* occupy outstanding places in the story of the iconographical representation of the monster.